

# **Happiness & Success at School**

## **A Magnificent Synergy**

Answering parents' questions about the surprising links between happiness and high performance in the classroom. How positive feelings and individual attention nurture success in the early grades, in high school and college, and for all of life.

Based on the 50-year experience of the Living Wisdom Schools

STORIES • SCIENCE • METHODS • RESULTS

George Beinhorn

Copyright © 20018 Living Wisdom School of Palo Alto

All rights reserved.

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

ISBN: 9798410702560

Photos © 2018 by Kshama Kellogg, George Beinhorn, Heather Lussier Benitez

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any other information storage and retrieval system, without the written permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

# CONTENTS

1. Introduction.....	1
2. What Do You Want for Your Child?.....	3

## **Happiness & Success in the Real World**

3. Happiness and Success at Google .....	9
4. Ancient Secrets of Happiness And Success .....	11
5. Happiness and Success at Harvard.....	13
6. Happiness and Success at Stanford and MIT .....	15
7. Happiness and Success in Math Class .....	19
8. Happiness and Success in the History of Education.....	23
9. Happiness, Success and the 5 Stages of a Child's Development .....	25
10. Happiness & Success: the Love Plant Approach .....	31
11. Happiness, Success, and Academic Achievement.....	37
12. Happiness, Success, and Education for Life: Grades Tell the Story .....	41
13. Bill Aris's Truth: Happiness and Success in Sports & the Military.....	45
14. How to Improve Schools Using Coaching Principles .....	55
15. Sir Ken Robinson on Creativity at School .....	59
16. Happiness, Success, and Feelings: a Brief Photo Essay .....	63

## **The Science of Happiness & Success**

17. Happiness, Success, & the Science of Positive Feelings.....	69
18. Happiness, Success, and the "Social Brain" .....	73
19. Two Kinds of Feelings .....	77

20. How Raw Emotions Interfere with Learning .....	79
21. It's Time We Started Raising Organic Children.....	83
22. The Super-Efficient Classroom .....	87

### **Meet the Teachers**

23. A Conversation with Former LWS Second Grade Teacher Kshama Kellogg .....	99
24. A Conversation with LWS Kindergarten Teacher Lilavati Aguilar .....	113
25. Rose Atwell: LWHS Alumna, Teacher, Actor, Chef .....	127
26. Can the Arts Help Children Excel Academically? .....	133

### **The Curriculum**

27. Happiness, Success, and the Curriculum in Grades TK-8 ..	143
--	-----

### **Meet the Parents**

28. Meet the Parents: Esther Peralez-Dieckmann .....	153
29. Meet the Parents: Jack Dieckmann .....	155

### **Testimonials for Living Wisdom School**

30. Living Wisdom Graduates Enjoy Varied and Exciting Careers .....	159
31. More Testimonials for the Living Wisdom Schools .....	165
32. Final Thoughts: On Choosing Your Child's School .....	177

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1. Education for Life Resources .....	177
Appendix 2. Education for Life and the Living Wisdom Schools .....	183
Appendix 3. Research that Supports Education for Life .....	185

# 1. Introduction

For more than fifty years, the Living Wisdom Schools have pioneered a radical new approach to educating young children — an approach that empowers them to be happy while they excel in school and life.

In education today, there's a quiet but powerful groundswell — a grassroots rebellion against the government-mandated “No Child Left Behind” and Core Curriculum initiatives that have hamstrung teachers, alienated students, and distorted the purpose of education by preventing children from receiving the best possible experience of school.

The Education for Life philosophy can be simply stated:

***At school, the factor that most assuredly  
promotes deep, engaged, lasting learning  
is happiness.***

Parents are often dumbfounded when they hear the Living Wisdom School teachers proclaim that a happy, arts-enriched, highly individualized curriculum promotes more *efficient* learning than the “academically rigorous” curricula offered by other schools.

They are nonplussed by the suggestion that the LWS curriculum gives children a *deeper* education because the teachers are encouraged to teach principles and review content with each student until they have a firm grasp on concepts before moving on, instead of skimming the surface of the subject matter in an ill-considered rush to demonstrate good test scores.

Young people who are subjected to a one-sided, academically overloaded curriculum are at risk not only of receiving a superficial education; they end up mentally and emotionally less well-prepared to succeed in high school and beyond. Perhaps most troubling, they are less likely to acquire important personal qualities that are defining among successful people.

One prospective parent, during a visit to LWS, protested, “But these kids can’t be learning — they’re too happy!”

Yet groundbreaking research has confirmed beyond any possibility of doubt that happiness and school success are intimately connected.

What are some of the qualities that we, as parents and teachers, should encourage in our children to prepare them for success in high school, college, and life?

Aside from the knowledge and skills required to succeed in a profession, surely it’s fair to suggest that there also needs to be a deep wanting to do worthwhile and wonderful things.

There has to be a confidence, self-knowledge, positive expectations, and an ability to work well with others — all qualities that must be deliberately nurtured. They cannot be imposed from without, nor will they magically appear as a side-effect of good grades and test scores.

These personal qualities, which are highly predictive of career success, cannot be nurtured by only trying to motivate kids to get good grades. Any motivation that grades and test scores provide will be superficial and will fail to touch their hearts. Worse, it may encourage a dependence on external recognition that can never be fully satisfied. After one test, there will always be another.

As will become clear in the chapters that follow, success and happiness come most reliably to those who are focused enthusiastically on the process — who are not postponing their happiness until some vaguely imagined future, but are able to rejoice in the expansion of their powers today.

## 2. What Do You Want for Your Child?

What are your hopes and dreams for your child? Not just for school, but for the whole of his or her life?

Financial security? A good job? A nice home?

Material goals are self-evidently necessary and worthwhile. But surely there are also many intangibles worth considering, such as happiness and peace of mind.

We all want our children to acquire an awareness of positive, inspiring values and ideals, and a deep understanding of the ultimate meaning of life.

### **Education Reflects Parents' Goals**

No influence outside the home has a greater impact on young people than the countless hours they spend at school. Yet nowadays, little attention is paid at school to developing higher values. But what if your aspirations for your child go beyond the material?

It's difficult in our culture to succeed without rigorous intellectual training. But life itself teaches us that success and happiness depend to a great extent on human skills such as knowing how to get along with others, how to persevere, how to focus our attention, how to cooperate, and how to be a good friend.

In the Living Wisdom Schools, we feel that the students should benefit from the storehouse of wisdom that humanity has gathered through the ages regarding the personal skills and understanding that they will need to build a fulfilled and happy life. We feel that it's our duty to give young people these essential life skills, beginning at a young age.

For more than fifty years, we have found that children who learn how to be happy are far more likely to love learning and be successful in their academic studies.

In the Living Wisdom Schools, the students learn to be balanced, mature, effective, happy, and harmonious. We call our philosophy

Education for Life, because it relates the lessons young people learn in school to their lives as a whole. At LWHS, we study not only the great things people have accomplished, but the human qualities that enabled them to achieve greatness.

### **The Secrets of Success**

Before we can be happy and secure, we must know a great deal about the world around us. We need to learn to interact appropriately with the people and circumstances in our lives, because life will seldom mold itself to our expectations.

We must be ready to adjust to realities outside our own. We must learn practical skills, and we must master academic knowledge. Education for Life helps students prepare for maturity on all levels — physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual.

### **More Than Natural Talent**

In the Living Wisdom Schools, the teachers' constant focus is on guiding the individual student in developing their five universal human "tools of maturity": body, feelings, will, mind, and soul. With health and high energy, sensitive feelings, dynamic will power, and mental clarity, young people are able to expand their awareness and find a deep sense of purpose and joy.

In our schools, we gauge each student's success not only by test results, but by the quality of their attitudes, effort, and interactions with others.

### **The Best Teaching is Highly Individual**

Young people display a far broader array of individual traits than adults. Instead of forcing them to conform to the rigid mold of a "standardized" curriculum, we feel it makes more sense to discover their unique strengths and help them build on those positive qualities to acquire the knowledge and skills they will need today, tomorrow, and for all their years.

The students in our schools develop self-confidence and enthusiasm for learning, because encouraging their strengths releases a flow of energy and enthusiasm that carries over into their coursework.

Our class sizes are deliberately kept small so that the teachers can develop a close relationship with each student. The teachers are trained to assess the student's individual physical, mental, and emotional development, and guide them along the lines of their strengths. They

relate to them much as their parents do, helping them meet their unique, ever-changing challenges.

### **Joy in the Classroom**

We feel it is our responsibility to help make each child's school years a positive, joyful experience, as a foundation for success and happiness in later life. In the Living Wisdom classrooms, the atmosphere is happy, relaxed, and family-like, while at the same time there is order, appropriate discipline, and a clear sense that the teacher is in charge.

The teachers win the students' respect by skillfully awakening their energy and enthusiasm for the tasks at hand. The students learn that they are expected to behave with consideration and respect for others, and that they can always approach the teacher for individual guidance, without fear.

A positive learning environment doesn't automatically transform young people into angels. In our classrooms, we find the same issues, interactions, and challenging transitions as in other schools. What's different is that the students are given the tools and the opportunity to deal with the challenges in effective, enlightened ways.

### **The Inner Life**

In the Living Wisdom Schools, each student's natural spirituality is acknowledged and encouraged. Spirituality isn't defined as a system of narrow dogmas; the focus is on the student's own experience of universal spiritual truths. We make time for meditation, yoga postures, and other uplifting activities. The children can experience for themselves what it feels like to be in harmony with their own higher thoughts, feelings, and consciousness.

The students discover that expansive feelings, thoughts, and actions increase their own sense of happiness and well-being, whereas contractive attitudes and actions take their happiness away. "Right and wrong" become personal experiences of the consequences of specific behaviors, rather than abstract rules. The students become deeply interested in changing their behavior when they realize that there are effective ways to take control of their own happiness and joy.

### **The Importance of Good Teachers**

Living examples inspire us far more effectively than books or rigid rules. A teacher who deeply understands and loves the subject matter is more likely to awaken a love and commitment in the students. The Living

Wisdom Schools are built around the teachers' open-hearted sensitivity to the students in their charge. We consider it essential that the teachers express in their lives and personal demeanor the positive attitudes and spiritual and moral values and maturity we seek to awaken in the students.

Our teachers participate in Education for Life as a lifelong process. Each teacher is deeply involved in personal development, and we offer our teachers ongoing support and training to keep them fresh, enthusiastic, and expansive.

# Happiness & Success in the Real World



### 3. Happiness and Success at Google

Does the happiness principle work outside of school? Does it work in the adult world of job and career — in the daily grind?

When Sergey Brin and Larry Page started Google in 1998, they set a policy of hiring only the most brilliant applicants in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and math).

Fifteen years later, Google decided it might be a good idea to evaluate the results of this policy.

A *Washington Post* article, “The surprising thing Google learned about its employees — and what it means for today’s students” (December 27, 2017), summarized what Google learned from Project Oxygen, the in-depth examination of its hiring practices.

Project Oxygen completely overturned the company’s understanding of the qualities that best predicted success in a high-tech business environment. Most notably, among the eight standout qualities of Google’s top employees, STEM expertise was *dead last*.

The top qualities that augured success at Google were “soft” skills. The researchers found that the most successful Google employees:

1. Are good coaches
2. Empower the team and do not micromanage
3. Express interest in and concern for the other team members’ success and personal well-being
4. Are productive and results-oriented
5. Are good communicators — they listen and share information
6. Help others with their career development
7. Have a clear vision and strategy for the team
8. Have key technical skills that help them advise the team

A follow-up study by Google on the defining qualities of its most productive research teams (Project Aristotle, 2016) confirmed these results.

In the *Post* article, Cathy N. Davidson, a professor in the graduate school at CUNY, described the findings:

“Project Aristotle shows that the best teams at Google exhibit a range of soft skills: equality, generosity, curiosity toward the ideas of your teammates, empathy, and emotional intelligence. And topping the list: emotional safety. No bullying. To succeed, each and every team member must feel confident speaking up and making mistakes. They must know they are being heard.”

Davidson cited a survey of 260 companies conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers. The study, which included industry giants Chevron and IBM, found that recruiters ranked communication skills among the top three qualities companies look for in job applicants. “They prize both an ability to communicate with one’s fellow workers and an aptitude for conveying the company’s product and mission outside the organization.”

What conclusions can we draw from these studies, about the best way to help our children succeed and be happy?

A common feature of the qualities that set the top Google employees apart is that they are “expansive.” That is, they foster a work environment where the employees are encouraged to expand their awareness to include others.

The qualities that the researchers identified as furthering success at Google and other top companies are the same qualities that the teachers in the Living Wisdom Schools expend tremendous energy to cultivate in the classroom, considering them essential to create a safe, nurturing, joyful learning environment for the children.

Oddly enough, the Google findings reflect the results of a vastly older body of studies conducted in the forest ashrams of ancient India.

## 4. Ancient Secrets of Happiness And Success

India's ancient sages were not, strictly speaking, "philosophers" — that is, those who love wisdom. (From the Greek *philo-* "loving" + *sophia* "knowledge, wisdom.") They were scientists, interested in wisdom itself, and intent on discerning what actually works in people's lives.

They began their search for understanding by asking basic questions, the most fundamental of which was: *"What is it that all people are seeking?"*

By observing the human scene with calm scientific objectivity, the answer they arrived at was: *"Beneath the colorful multiplicity of their stated motives, all people are seeking happiness, and freedom from suffering."*

The next most obvious question was: *"What are those actions, thoughts, and feelings that most reliably give people an increase of happiness and that lessen their experience of suffering and sorrow?"*

From their further observations in the laboratory of human existence, they concluded that happiness reliably increases whenever people expand their awareness to include broader realities, and that every such expansion is rewarded by a corresponding increase in the person's sense of happiness, well-being, and joy.

Next, they investigated the human tools by which we can expand our awareness and experience increasing happiness. And they discovered that the tools are five in number: body, feelings, will, mind, and soul.

Thus the five branches of yoga were born, with each branch cataloguing the most effective means for expanding awareness using a particular human tool: Hatha Yoga for the body, Bhakti Yoga for the feelings, Karma Yoga for the will, Gyana Yoga for the mind, and Raja Yoga for the soul.

Of these tools, the “outliers” at either end are beyond the reach of human volition. Thus the body is a lump — it sits there, inactive until acted upon. Similarly, the soul cannot be activated by human effort alone; its qualities can only be invited by cultivating expansive thoughts, feelings, and actions. But the three central tools — feeling, will, and mind — are under our control and are available for expanding our awareness.

Nature, in its wisdom, develops the five tools in children in a series of stages, each of which lasts roughly six years. The three important “middle” tools become the primary areas of development during the school years, from age 6 to 24.

From birth to age 6, the child is concerned primarily with gaining control of its body and senses. From 6 to 12, feelings come to the fore. And from 12 to 18, will power becomes the dominant focus. From 18 to 24, the intellect takes over, evidenced by young people’s late-night discussions of philosophy, politics, science, and the arts. And at roughly age 24, many people may experience some form of spiritual awakening.

(Interestingly, the ancient scriptures always list the yoga branches in the same order, corresponding to the sequence in which they become the focus in the life of the growing child.)

The Indian sages weren’t satisfied merely to scratch the surface of this greatest of all human sciences: the search for happiness. In time, they devised methods of meditation by which human awareness can be expanded infinitely, with infinite rewards.

Like the children at Living Wisdom School and the top Google scientists, we can increase our sense of happiness and security by expanding our awareness, starting at our own, present level. The beauty of the system is that our happiness will expand with each step we take, no matter how small, beginning exactly where we are.

It’s a deceptively simple spiritual principle with profound implications. Our happiness increases whenever we expand our hearts in kindness, compassion, and sympathy; when we offer our support to others; when we cultivate a calm, focused, cheerful mind; and when we meditate on the blissful presence of Spirit within, in which expansive attitudes flower naturally in the human heart.

## 5. Happiness and Success at Harvard

When Shawn Achor was a graduate student in psychology at Harvard, he served as an academic proctor, a role that required him to have hundreds of conversations with the incoming freshmen.

During their informal get-togethers, Achor began to notice traits that set the most successful young Harvard students apart. It was an insight that, in time, would completely overturn all his previous assumptions about success.

He realized that the Harvard freshmen who were most likely to excel were not those who buried themselves in the library stacks, grimly intent on grinding out good grades. The most successful students were the happiest and most socially adept. They interacted with their peers, formed study groups, continually asked questions, and approached their studies in a spirit of joyous exploration. They were connected, engaged, and were skilled communicators.

Achor is the author of an influential best-selling book, *The Happiness Advantage: The Seven Principles of Positive Psychology That Fuel Success and Performance at Work*.

Achor ended up teaching the most popular course at Harvard, on the principles of positive psychology. Today he applies his findings about the links between happiness and success to help corporate executives advance their careers and transform their companies' cultures.

Achor realized that when it comes to success and happiness, our traditional assumptions are backwards.

Most people assume that they will be happy *after* they have achieved material success. But Achor found that the opposite is true — that people who are happy are far more likely to be successful in their careers.

These findings confirm a discovery of neuroscientists, that people with high levels of activity in the prefrontal cortex of their brains — the brain area

where happy attitudes, positive expectations, will power, and the ability to form and persevere in achieving long-term goals are localized — are more successful in their lives than those with weaker prefrontal cortex activation.

Neurophysiologist Richard J. Davidson, Ph.D., director of the Lab for Affective Neuroscience at the University of Wisconsin, is one of the world's foremost experts on the prefrontal cortex. When Davidson studied the brain patterns of college students, he found that those with higher levels of prefrontal cortex activation were uniformly better at setting and achieving goals and had fewer problems with drugs and alcohol, compared to students with lower prefrontal activity.

To put it differently, our brains are wired so that happiness and success go together. Qualities that are essential for success — will power, planning, perseverance — are localized in the same brain area where upbeat, happy attitudes reside. The very structure of our brains tells us that happiness and success are inseparable.

Achor would eventually confirm that the happiness principle is true not only for Harvard students, but for successful people in many fields.

The traditional expectation that happiness is a reward that we can expect to enjoy *after* we've achieved success, defined as a good job, a beautiful home, an impressive income, and a shiny car, was simply wrong. The most successful people are those who are happy from the get-go; thus the title of Achor's book, *The Happiness Advantage*.

If you were to ask school administrators to name the most important factor for school success, many would probably say: "Good study habits." But a mounting body of evidence suggests that this is only a small part of the school success equation, albeit an important one.

The Living Wisdom Schools have shown that the best determinants of school success more closely reflect Achor's findings: a happy learning environment, permeated by a spirit of joyful exploration, where each student can be challenged to learn at his or her own pace.

## 6. Happiness and Success at Stanford and MIT

How well do students educated in today's schools perform when they enter the nation's most prestigious universities?

How well do test scores and the state-mandated, standardized curriculum predict college success?

Merilee Jones, Director of Admissions at MIT, says, "We're raising a generation of kids trained to please adults.... That's the big difference with this generation. They're being judged and graded and analyzed and assessed at every turn. It's too much pressure for them."

The MIT faculty tell Jones that many of their students today aren't as much fun to teach. They no longer come to MIT with the kinds of wildly creative ideas and research projects that were formerly more common. The faculty report that the current generation of students "want to do everything right, they want to know exactly what's on the test. They're so afraid of failing or stepping out of line that they're not really good students."

The child who learns that his self-worth is attached to an external test result or grade is at risk of becoming emotionally dependent on outward affirmation, over-focused on test scores and adult approval as measures of his or her self-worth. That child risks becoming fixated on grades to the detriment of other important, well-rounded factors that contribute to success and happiness in school and life, including an enthusiasm for pursuing wildly creative ideas that may not fall strictly within the boundaries of the curriculum.

Because educators have begun to recognize this, a 4.4 GPA may no longer guarantee admission to a top-flight university. A source in the Stanford admissions office confided that the university now prefers to accept applicants with a 3.9 or 4.0 GPA who are well-rounded as people, having realized that the test-taking superstars are too often deficient in human qualities that more accurately foretell success in school and adult life.

From an article in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, “Perfect scores alone don’t make grade for admission to college of choice” (May 16, 2013):

A Stanford admissions official said the university considers college board scores, grades, the difficulty of courses, extracurricular activities and achievement outside of school. But it’s the personal essay that differentiates one top student from the next, she said. Princeton asks applicants to “tell us your story. Show us what’s special about you....”

Stanford had a school record 38,828 applications this year and will admit 1,700 freshmen, including legacy applicants and scholarship athletes. Minneapolis attorney Fred Bruno, a Stanford alumnus and local recruiter for the school, said Stanford could completely fill its freshman class with valedictorians.

“When I meet with an applicant, I look for interaction, for presence,” Bruno said. “We assume they have huge credentials. I don’t even ask them about grades. We’re looking at the human side of these kids.”

Parental praise for grades and test scores may motivate the child, as is, of course, perfectly natural. But if it becomes an obsessive source of affirmation for the child, it risks sacrificing the development of self-confidence, independence, initiative, and a sure inner sense of their goals and purpose in life.

Schools today are training children to be afraid to make mistakes. And, as Sir Ken Robinson pointed out in his TED Talk, “Do Schools Kill Creativity?” far from enhancing their creative initiative, it may only guarantee that they will never come up with an original idea.

“Kids will take a chance. If they don’t know, they’ll have a go. Am I right? They’re not frightened of being wrong. I don’t mean to say that being wrong is the same thing as being creative. What we do know is, if you’re not prepared to be wrong, you’ll never come up with anything original.... And by the time they get to be adults, most kids have lost that capacity. They have become frightened of being wrong. And we run our companies like this. We stigmatize mistakes. And we’re now running national education systems where mistakes are the worst thing you can make. And the result is that we are educating people out of their creative capacities.”

Robinson’s ideas reflect the thinking of Seymour Papert, a South African-born American mathematician, computer scientist, and educator who spent most of his career teaching and researching at MIT. In his best-

selling book, *Mindstorms: Children, Computers, and Powerful Ideas*, Papert proposed that a key benefit of teaching kids to program computers is that it teaches them “a bug-fixing approach to life.” They learn that mistakes are an unavoidable and perfectly natural part of the creative process, and should be welcomed gratefully and joyfully as milestones on the path to discovering solutions.

Sir Ken Robinson points out that colleges today are inundated with applications from kids with outstanding grades, and that businesses can now take their pick of applicants with high college GPAs and advanced degrees. Jobs that formerly required a bachelor’s now require an MS/MA, and jobs that once demanded a master’s now require a Ph.D.

The key differentiators for admission to an elite university today, and for employment at a prestigious company, have shifted; they now include such “soft” factors as proven communication skills, high energy, personal magnetism, and an ability to cooperate and work harmoniously with others.

The approach of the teachers in the Living Wisdom Schools to motivating the children in their academic studies reaches deep into their hearts and encourages the development of these positive personal qualities. The Education for Life methods have proved highly successful in eliciting the child’s natural enthusiasm for learning. The results are evidenced by the children’s test scores, their grades in high school and college, their admission to elite schools, and their careers.

The Living Wisdom teachers are trained and expected to take the time to become intimately familiar with each child, to gain a deep and full awareness of the child’s natural inclinations and enthusiasms, so that they can understand the internal motivations that the child brings to the classroom.

The teachers build upon these motivators to tailor the child’s education individually. If the child is artistic, the arts may provide a portal through which the teacher can introduce the standard curriculum in math, history, English, and science. If the child is good with his hands but relatively uninterested in academics, the teachers will use the child’s strengths to motivate him/her to learn — perhaps by showing them the indispensable applications of math, science, history, and English to the kind of work the child is inclined to pursue.

The same is true for the child who is inspired by business, science, the arts, math, or a trade — the LWS teachers will help the student understand that these fields all are intimately related; that a person cannot be a first-

class mathematician without a strong ability to communicate his or her ideas, and without knowing something of the history of mathematics and its applications to other fields such as engineering and the physical sciences. The child may someday find fulfillment in using his or her math skills to help researchers find solutions to deeply meaningful problems.

Perhaps most important for children is to teach them that the highest success in every field — as the stunning Project Oxygen study of Google’s top employees revealed (Chapter 3) — comes to those who can cooperate, who understand and support the needs of others, and who relish the joy of working together to accomplish worthwhile goals.

Children who have a sure sense of themselves, with positive feelings about their strengths and clear, positive images of what they most deeply desire to accomplish, will be able to enter college better equipped to succeed than those whose brains have been stuffed with quickly forgotten facts, to the detriment of the feelings of the heart and the strength of will that give life its motive power and its meaning and value.

## 7. Happiness and Success in Math Class

Jo Boaler's revolutionary work in math education has brought her worldwide acclaim. A professor in the Stanford University Graduate School of Education, Boaler was the subject of a feature article in *Stanford* magazine, "Jo Boaler Wants Everyone to Love Math: Yes, even you." (April 27, 2018. The excerpts that follow are used with Prof. Boaler's permission.)

Jo Boaler has repeatedly demonstrated that amazing things happen when we adjust math instruction to the student's individual mindset:

By adopting richer, more open teaching methods and encouraging kids to adopt a growth mindset, Boaler believes, educators can help students make strides. In 2015, she and her associates brought 81 middle schoolers — many of them underachievers -- to [the Stanford] campus for a four-week math camp centered on activities taken from the Week of Inspirational Math. The students began the camp convinced they were "not math people," Boaler says. But they were soon engaged. After four weeks of morning classes and afternoon enrichment, the students had improved their scores on standardized math tests by an average of 50 percent, or 2.7 school years.

Granted, the results were achieved in a university research environment, under focused conditions, with multiple expert instructors, using state-of-



the-art methods. But Boaler has found that when math instruction in public schools is adapted to each student's unique mental and emotional makeup, successes like these are common.

The article relates the experiences of Marc Petrie, a middle school math teacher in Orange County, California. Petrie teaches in a district where 98 percent of the

students qualify for free or low-cost lunches. When he began teaching, the students were deeply demotivated — traditional “test-and-drill” methods had let them down, leaving most of the students behind.

A decade later, the students sit in groups, “working together to come up with varying approaches to problems, while Petrie cruises the room as a coach, more likely to ask guiding questions than to give answers.”

The results have been dramatic, with math test scores rising 60 to 90 percent. Other district schools have since adopted Petrie’s methods.

Petrie’s classes closely resemble how math is taught in the Living Wisdom Schools — with the exception that adult math aides will wander the classroom at LWS, responding to questions and working with the students individually.

The value of this non-traditional approach is evidenced by the LWS students’ success in fields that require high levels of math proficiency. Living Wisdom graduates have thrived at Stanford, UC Berkeley (physics), the University of Michigan (Ross School of Business), Cornell (mathematics), the University of Bremen, Germany (doctoral program in Space Technology and Microgravity), and other top schools.

From a companion volume to this book, *Head & Heart: How a Balanced Education Nurtures Happy Children Who Excel in School and Life* (<http://bit.ly/2wJ4TqX>):

Over the years, our middle school teacher, Gary McSweeney, has carefully monitored the atmosphere in the classroom while the students take the challenging American Mathematics Competition and the International Math Olympiads test. Gary has been pleased to note that it is much more relaxed than the more typical test scenario where the teachers is pressuring the students to do well, and the students may feel that their self-worth is on the line.

“I would say that my students enjoy the concentrated effort of taking a timed test in silence. The questions require the students to employ creative, out-of-box strategies to solve problems. These are not multiple-choice tests, so there is no possibility of them guessing the correct answer. In part, they are reading comprehension problems. They challenge the students to analyze the question carefully and understand what is being asked. Our students enjoy taking the tests as a way to demonstrate their skills, and to see where they can improve their understanding and knowledge.”

Jo Boaler believes high-pressure testing impairs math performance:

For Boaler, the test — with its focus on speed, volume and performance — is a big part of why math crushes spirits like no other subject. To her, it represents shallow learning with debilitating consequences. Students who work slowly are often left convinced of their own inability, although they may be the deeper kind of thinkers who make the best mathematicians. And even those who calculate speedily — not a skill Boaler thinks is particularly valuable in the digital age — may end up shrugging off math as a high-pressure hamster wheel.

As a researcher, teacher and evangelist, Boaler is a leading voice for a wholly different pedagogy where speed is out, depth is in, and the journey to an answer can be as important as the destination. It's an approach where sense-making matters more than memorization, and retaining "math facts" matters less than understanding how such facts interconnect.

It's the approach that has been adopted with seamless success for fifty years in the Living Wisdom Schools. How well does it work? A *Head & Heart* chapter, "Mathematics Competitions at Living Wisdom School," outlines the method and describes the results:

At LWS, our overriding concern is how our students' math skills are improving individually over the years. This is in keeping with our philosophy of helping each child experience the joy and satisfaction of overcoming academic challenges at their own level. This is why we focus on improving math skills, rather than improving test performance. We have found that focusing on skills improves test results naturally and enjoyably.

The results are reflected in our students' performance when they enter high school. Many LWS graduates test out of freshman math. Occasionally they test out of algebra, geometry, and even trigonometry....

During the 2015-16 academic year some of our youngest students (4<sup>th</sup> graders) who took the International Math Olympiads tests scored in the top 30% on the 8<sup>th</sup> grade test. Very impressive! And two students scored in the top 5% internationally. Extremely impressive!

Individualized math instruction is highly effective for students at all levels of ability, not only the math-challenged. From *Head & Heart*:

The [American Mathematics Competition] AMC 8 for junior high students includes many problems that demand math skills and

experience far beyond those required in most junior high math classes. Congratulations to Freya Edholm of LWS, who [in 2013] achieved a perfect score of 25 — the only perfect score by a sixth-grader in the state of California on this very challenging test for eighth-graders. Of the 20,571 sixth-graders who took the AMC 8 worldwide, only six achieved a perfect 25. And of the 152,691 students in grades 5-8 worldwide who took the AMC 8, only 225 students achieved a perfect score. The average score was 10.67.

## 8. Happiness and Success in the History of Education

In ancient Greece and Rome and throughout the Dark Ages, the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Enlightenment, schools were divided into the approximate equivalents of our modern elementary school, middle school and high school, and college, corresponding to ages 6 to 12, 12 to 18, and 18 to 24.

It was only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, during the Industrial Revolution, that government officials and factory owners decided that schools should be focused on training children to become good laborers and managers. Thus math and science and other “objective” subjects were to be given highest priority in all grades. Other matters, such as children’s emotional, moral, and spiritual development, were to be eliminated from the classroom as impediments to the “practical” curriculum. It was assumed that these areas would be sufficiently addressed in church and at home.

The result of this system is the public school system of today, with its government-mandated curriculum and its heavy emphasis on academics to the exclusion of nearly everything else.

The mission of the Living Wisdom Schools is to rescue children from this system, whose weaknesses have become abundantly clear in recent years, in the form of an alarming number of student suicides and significant numbers of children acting out their frustration through drugs and violence. The Living Wisdom Schools have shown that educating the whole child — body, mind, heart, and spirit — doesn’t leave the children’s intellectual potential neglected; rather, the opposite is true: by engaging the whole child in the learning process, vast reserves of energy and enthusiasm are released to fuel the highest accomplishment, leading to first-class test scores and exceptional grades.



## 9. Happiness, Success and the 5 Stages of a Child's Development

By George Beinhorn, Living Wisdom School of Palo Alto, California.

I don't read the papers much, but I came across an article in the *Sacramento Bee* some years ago that fairly begged to be disbelieved. Here's an excerpt:

In a *Journal of Medical Ethics* article titled "A Proposal to Classify Happiness as a Psychiatric Disorder," Liverpool University psychologist Richard P. Bentall argues that the so-called syndrome of happiness is a diagnosable mood disturbance that should be included in standard taxonomies of mental illness such as the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual. Happiness, as Bentall states in his abstract, is "statistically abnormal, consists of a discrete cluster of symptoms, is associated with a range of cognitive abnormalities and probably reflects the abnormal functioning of the central nervous system." (In this regard, as Bentall later notes, happiness resembles other psychiatric disorders such as depression and schizophrenia.)

The author of the *Bee* article, Maggie Scarf, a *New Republic* contributing editor, related Dr. Bentall's suggestion "that the term 'happiness' be removed from future editions of the major diagnostic manuals, to be replaced by the formal description 'major affective disorder, pleasant type.'"

When I read the article aloud to a friend, she promptly doubled over with major affective disorder, pleasant type. "That's such amazing cock-a-doo!" she howled. "It's so carefully reasoned — yet it's completely incredible!"

### **The Practice of Happiness**

It is nutty-cakes. And yet, is there anything actually wrong with using scientific methods to study happiness? After all, it's what the spiritual

explorers of all ages have done — they’ve studied happiness in the laboratory of human bodies, hearts, and minds and kept tidy notes on what worked and didn’t. (See Chapter 4, “Ancient Secrets of Happiness & Success.”)

For most of us, happiness isn’t a “mood disturbance” – it’s the prize we’re seeking. And if we can get a little more with the help of scientific order and method, all the better.

The spiritual researchers realized that the single underlying desire that drives our actions is a longing to experience greater happiness, and to escape from suffering.

Albert Einstein, ever a keen observer of the human scene, stated it this way:

Everything that the human race has done and thought is concerned with the satisfaction of deeply felt needs and the assuagement of pain. One has to keep this constantly in mind if one wishes to understand spiritual movements and their development. Feeling and longing are the motive force behind all human endeavor and human creation, in however exalted a guise the latter may present themselves. (From an essay, “Cosmic Religious Feeling.”)

Because the world’s spiritual traditions have made the longest recorded scientific study of happiness, what they say may be worth hearing, in these times of pandemic discontent.

After all, their approach is practical. They tell us, for example, about the five instruments through which we can experience greater happiness: body, heart, will, mind, soul. Our happiness, they say, increases as we learn to use each tool “expansively.” (More on “expansion” in a moment.) Thus, the most important time in our lives for learning to be happy is when we’re growing up, as each tool in turn becomes the main focus of our development.

To review: from birth to age six, an infant’s primary developmental task is to become familiar with its body and senses. From six to twelve, feelings come to the fore — this is a time when children are especially receptive to learning through the arts — through stories, music, theater, art, and dance – the “media of feeling.”

From twelve to eighteen, teenagers welcome challenges to their will power in preparation for independent adult life. And at around eighteen,

young people become fascinated with the life of the mind, engaging in late-night discussions of science, philosophy, politics, and the arts.

Finally, at about twenty-four, many people experience life events that may precede a spiritual awakening.

As each tool takes center stage, the others don't simply fade away. Thus, while a toddler is primarily concerned with its body and senses, it won't hesitate to express its feelings — with the volume turned up! Nor do the stages begin and end exactly on our sixth, twelfth, eighteenth, and twenty-fourth birthdays; the transitions are gradual.

Why did nature settle upon this particular scheme? In his insightful book, *Education for Life*, J. Donald Walters explains how each stage prepares the child for the ones that follow. Thus, feeling comes before will power because feeling is the faculty that enables us to tell right from wrong. Before we can use our will power intelligently, with awareness of others, we need to develop the ability to *feel* their realities. Walters laments the ruinous consequences of cramming young children's minds with facts, at the expense of developing their capacity to feel sensitively.

Similarly, each stage fulfills the one that came before. Thus, feeling motivates us to act, and will power provides the energy to act on our feelings. Unless we *want* something strongly enough, we won't muster the energy to achieve it.

Will power, in turn, finds its fulfillment in wisdom, which tells us which actions will make us happy, and which will not. And wisdom is fulfilled in Spirit. In Self-realization, we realize that true wisdom and joy come from a higher Source within.

The history of education reveals that in ancient Greece and Rome, and throughout the Middle Ages and Enlightenment, the six-year stages were recognized as natural phases of a child's growth. Thus appropriate teaching methods were devised for each stage, and schools were roughly divided into the equivalents of our modern elementary school (six to twelve), junior and senior high (twelve to eighteen), and college (eighteen to twenty-four).

### **Expanding Awareness Equals Joy**

The spiritual teachings of the ages tell us that our happiness increases as we learn to use our five human instruments "expansively." Like most abstractions, "expansion" is most easily understood through examples.

Let's look at what happens when we begin a fitness program.

After the first two or three weeks, we find that we are feeling happier and more alive. Why? Because the exercising body has begun to generate energy that spills over to nourish our feelings, will, and mind, expanding their range and force. Expanding our awareness through one “tool,” the body, has influenced the others. Good actions spread their effects — as do “bad” ones. It’s now well-known that negative, contractive attitudes have adverse mental, emotional, and physical consequences.

People tend to specialize in one, or perhaps two, of the “tools of expansion.” Thus, some people go more by feeling, while others tend to “lead” with their will power or mind. The spiritual teachings encourage us to go with our strengths, while working to correct any imbalances.

In many natural processes, the “tools of happiness” tend to appear in the same sequence as in a child’s development. When we fall in love, for example, the first attraction is often, though not invariably, physical. We see a person across the room whose appearance attracts us, and our feelings become aroused. We form a volition to act on our feelings, and we walk over and strike up a conversation. The mind probes for information: *What interests do we share? Does he like children?* And if we’re wise, we’ll consult a higher guidance before entering this important new life venture. We’ve passed through the five tools in order: body, feeling, will, mind, soul.

When I ran ultramarathons, I noticed that the tools tended to show up in the same natural order. The first hour or two were for the body, as my heart, legs, and lungs found a rhythm and began to generate a flow of energy. The next hour was for the heart — cheerful conversations would spring up among the runners. As the body tired, will power came to the fore — it was time to focus attention and not waste energy on distractions.

Farther along, it became important to apply the mind to questions of logistics: How can I pace myself to make it to the next aid station? How can I deal with this blister? Finally, if I succeeded in using the tools wisely, I would enjoy a wonderful inner freedom. I became a very simple person, free from distractions, worries, and restless thoughts, living wholly in the present moment.

Talking with other runners, I realized that many experienced a similar sequence in the longer rhythms of their careers.

At the start, the major issues tended to be about the body — how to train, which shoes to wear, how to treat an injury, what to eat and drink, etc.

Then, as the body grew fit, feelings took center stage. The feeling phase is rich with the romance of running, as we explore longer distances, seek interesting courses, and absorb the inspiration of sports role models.

Later, we begin to crave challenges to our will. We may take up speedwork, compete with ourselves to run faster times, and enter more difficult races. As we pass through the five phases, we find that the tools we need for the next stage tend to show up in uncanny ways.

After the will power phase, runners often become intrigued by the life of the mind. They learn to plan their training wisely, perhaps using a heart monitor.

Finally, there may be a period where the overriding concerns are spiritual, where all of the tools are merged in a quest for inner harmony. We seek a fulfillment that comes by “running in beauty,” our activities balanced in a careful synchrony.

It helps to be aware of the five stages of a run, and the natural sequence of a runner’s career.

As with running, so too with educating a young child. To help each child in the best possible way, we must first understand the child’s unique gifts and apply the most appropriate methods at each stage to prepare them for the stage that follows.

More than we may realize, each tool is a world unto itself, with its own wonderful strengths and rewards. In my life, I’ve had the good fortune to enter two of these worlds as a relative newcomer: first, when I started an exercise program, and later when I spent several years working to open my heart.

In the first case, I was overjoyed to discover the world of the fit body. I had never been in good physical condition, and now at age twenty-six I could run for miles barefoot on the beach, probing with fingers of consciousness into the rich inner world of a body that glowed with health and energy. How fulfilling and expansive it was, to enter this spacious new world for the first time!

Later, as my heart began to open, I was delighted to discover a vast inner world of feeling. I became aware that there were issues in my life for which the heart held answers that were hidden from the rational mind. I gained a renewed respect for the world of feeling in which women spend much of their lives. Standing in line at the bank or supermarket, I could quietly

enjoy watching women working together, appreciating their communion of feeling.

### **The System Is Rigged**

It all sounds so straightforward — simply use the tools expansively, and happiness is sure to follow, rather like remembering to brush our teeth in the morning. But, in real life, cultivating expansive attitudes turns out to be a challenge. That's because the opposite urge, contraction, is a temptation for us also.

Life places essentially the same choice continually before us: will we use our bodies wisely, or abuse them? Our hearts, to love or to hate? Our minds, to be wise, or merely clever? Our spiritual yearnings, to aspire to the heights, or to dabble in psychic trivialities? History — ours and the world's — is the story of the eternal struggle between these opposing forces in human nature.

Also, the theory is simple, but the details seldom are. We've been given all of the tools we need to achieve happiness and success — or so it seems. The trouble is, if we rely too exclusively on our purely human resources, we sooner or later find ourselves coming up against their limitations.

The five tools of expansion embody wonderful expertise, yet their specialization can trip us. When this happens, we can still find answers by looking beyond those merely human instruments. Happily, we can use the tools to tap into an awareness that is fathomlessly wise and loving, and that has our best interests always at heart.

This is what an expansive Education for Life is about: harmonizing the children's environment and guiding their activities in ways that will bring each of them individually the greatest success and joy at each step of their journey.

George Beinhorn received his B.A. and M.A. at Stanford University at a time when dinosaurs still roamed the Quad.

## 10. Happiness & Success: the Love Plant Approach

By George Beinhorn

In the late 1980s, I wrote an article about an experiment by the children at the original Living Wisdom School. I present the forty-year-old article here with two thoughts in mind: first, as an example of how the Living Wisdom teachers encourage young people's expansive feelings; and as a reminder that the ultimate key to helping children thrive, personally and at school, is love.

### **The Love Plant**

The children in teacher Kabir MacDow's classroom at Living Wisdom School, age five through eight, have applied the scientific method to investigate the power of love.

In an experiment suggested by Kabir, the children planted five seeds in each of four pots.

One pot, the "Dark Plant," received only water and was kept in a closet with no exposure to sunlight.

A second pot, the "Too Bad Plant," received sunlight and water, but no extra soil nutrients or special attention.

A third pot, the "Everything But Love Plant," got sunlight, water, and soil nutrients — the normal care a good gardener would give it.

The Love Plant received the same care as the Everything But Plant, plus the added ingredient of love.

It's 9:30 in the morning. The children are working quietly at their desks, when Kabir asks for their attention and invites them to bring the four plants to an open area on the rug. The children respond eagerly, smiling as they gather in a circle. It's obvious that this is something they've looked forward to.



First the plants are watered, and then the Dark Plant is returned to the closet and the children take the Too Bad Plant back to the window sill. The Everything But Love Plant is fussed over amid a discussion of the nutrients a plant needs to grow.

Kabir: "We're going to focus our attention on the Love Plant now. This is the one we want to give our attention to. I'd like someone to explain what this experiment is about — someone who's been

centered this morning. Tara, would you explain what the experiment is?"

Tara: "It's to watch the plants grow and see what they do when you put them in different places, like put them in the sun, and put them in different kinds of soil, and put them in the dark."

Kabir: None of us can really grow without all of those things — the water and the sun and the air and good soil — and something special is there, too.

(Several children begin talking at once.)



Kabir: “Let’s sit up, please. Sit up nice and straight. Now look at the plants. Look at them closely. You can see how well they’ve done. We’ve started these plants from seeds, and they’ve depended on us to take care of them and help them grow. Now, the plants that we gave a little bit to, they grew a little bit. The plants that we’ve given a lot to, they’ve grown a lot, they’ve grown a lot more than the rest. What we give is what has helped this plant, and we’ve been giving our love, which is one of the most important things that it could have. So we want to give it some more right now.

“We can start by sitting up. Close your eyes. Inside of your mind, try to see the plant. Do this: Try to see the plant inside — it’s green and it’s leafy.

“As we sing, we’re going to try to feel that it’s pulling the plant up, making it great and big. All the leaves are spreading out and branching out and getting big. The blossoms are starting to come out on the plant, and the flowers.”

(The children sing to the plant with obvious enthusiasm while projecting loving feelings toward it.)

“The flowers this plant has are its gift to us. We give it love and it gives us its beauty. Ready? Have the plant in your mind. As we sing, we can feel that we’re bringing it up. We can even bring our hands over it. Here we go, just bringing our energy up as we sing.”

(The children sing again, then Kabir leads them in a prayer. The quality in their voices is startling, as if they are praying with a single voice, vibrant, rich, enthusiastic. No voice wanders or lags; the children’s full attention is on what they’re doing.)

Kabir (followed responsively by the children): “Bless this plant. Fill it with Your love. Help it to grow strong. And beautiful.”

## **The Love-Plant Model for School Success**

The worst mistakes in education generally begin with a subtle thought. Instead of nourishing the Love Plant in children's hearts, we ignore its needs — we put it in the dark, in a feverish obsession with test scores and grades. We burn its joyful fronds with a deadly-boring lockstep, standardized curriculum. Or we ignore the quiet instinct of our hearts that is separately telling us what each child in the class truly needs in order to thrive.

There is a current that runs through the Living Wisdom Schools, a constant theme: that the right thing, in school and life, is to engage with love, and never limit the classroom instruction to force-feeding young plants with barren ideas. The inborn excitement of math or science, history or English, beautifully revealed by teachers who are free to be creative and independent and strong, infects the kids with a love and enthusiasm for learning that empowers them to blossom.

The Palo Alto Living Wisdom K-8 school's graduates do extremely well when they enter the San Francisco Bay Area's academically challenging public and private high schools. Yet parents who inquire about the school are often skeptical.

They worry that the kids will fall behind academically because we spend so much time cultivating their hearts. Or they raise reasonable objections. Surely we're successful because our students come from smart, successful families. Surely we accept only the top students. Surely our kids do well because of our fabulous nine-to-one student-teacher ratio. Surely our system, which spends so much time on "soft skills," will fail to help the kids compete when they enter the harsh, dog-eat-dog world of high school.

It's true that many of our students have highly educated parents. It's true that our student-teacher ratio is as low as six to one in middle-school math, where the teacher and two adult math aides are present in the classroom. But the truth is, we accept students across a broad spectrum of academic ability.

Our successes aren't due to those external factors, as some visitors suspect. They are the natural outcome of an approach to working with children that takes account of each child's individual hopes and dreams.

The high-pressure K-8 academic prep schools in the area don't evoke our envy. To put it kindly, their results are no better than ours, because our

philosophy is rooted in the Love Plant approach. A saying at our school is “Children who are taught to love, love to learn.”

Our philosophy is based on the idea that life has meaning, that life’s meaning is reflected in school, and that the principles that work in life — at Harvard, MIT, and Stanford, and on sports teams, in the military, and at Google and other top companies — are the same principles that help children thrive from kindergarten through college and beyond.

An education that instills these principles gives children two things that all people have craved since the dawn of time: continually increasing happiness, and regular, ongoing experiences of success.

If there is one core truth that has emerged in the fifty-year history of the Living Wisdom Schools, it’s that, at school and in life, expansive attitudes of love, kindness, compassion, and joy improve performance, while negative, contractive attitudes and feelings destroy happiness and impede success.



## 11. Happiness, Success, and Academic Achievement

*This chapter is adapted from an article on the website of Education for Life International (edforlife.org).*

Mainstream education, with its emphasis on test scores, emphasizes training just one of a student's developmental tools, the intellect, at the expense of their potential for growth in other areas.

Education for Life (EFL) is based on helping students succeed academically and personally through balanced development of their five "Tools of Maturity" – Body, Feelings, Will, Mind, and Spirit.

Let's compare the results of these two very different systems.

### **Education for Life and Testing**

While Education for Life doesn't emphasize academic testing for young children, our older students often express an interest in knowing how they are performing, compared to students their age in other schools.

When the original Living Wisdom High School applied for accreditation, the students were required to take a nationally recognized standardized test. The results were remarkable. The students placed in the top 10 percent of schools nationwide as a group, and over the next 10 years they scored consistently in the top 10 percent, placing in the top 1 percent one year.

Their SAT scores were equally impressive, averaging 1248 compared to the national average of roughly 1060. In recent years, an LWHS student earned a perfect score on the SATs.

### **Scholastic Aptitude Test Scores**

	EFL Averages	National Averages
Language Arts	640	533
Mathematics	608	527
Total	1248	1060

How can EFL schools compete so well against elite academic schools, when the EFL students spend significant time on the arts, outdoor activities, service projects, and adventure travel?

Current research offers some insights.

### **The Body and the Intellect**

Surely it's obvious that disease, stress, and poor hygiene can erode the energy available for sustained mental performance in academics. This relationship was demonstrated in a 2013 study by the National Academy of Sciences:

State-mandated academic achievement testing has had the unintended consequence of reducing opportunities for children to be physically active during the school day and beyond.... Yet little evidence supports the notion that more time allocated to subject matter will translate into better test scores. Indeed, 11 of 14 correlational studies of physical activity during the school day demonstrate a positive relationship to academic performance. Overall, a rapidly growing body of work suggests that time spent engaged in physical activity is related not only to a healthier body but also to a healthier mind.

### **Feelings and the Intellect**

Similarly, the ability to manage feelings constructively is a tremendous aid for maintaining calm mental focus in challenging circumstances.

The advent of "emotional intelligence" in 1995 stimulated a wave of research that authenticated the importance of social and emotional guidance.

A key survey by J. Payton, et al. examined data from 317 studies involving 324,303 students. The authors concluded:

SEL [Social and Emotional Learning] programming improved students' academic performance by 11 to 17 percentile points across the three reviews, indicating that they offer students a practical educational benefit.... Although some educators argue against implementing this type of holistic programming because it takes valuable time away from core academic material, our findings suggest that SEL programming not only does not detract from academic performance but actually increases students' performance on standardized tests and grades.

## **Will Power and the Intellect**

The vital connection between will power and the intellect is evident in qualities such as perseverance, concentration, and personal initiative. In *The Willpower Instinct*, Stanford psychologist Kelly McGonigal, PhD surveyed the results of more than 200 studies in this area and concluded:

People who have strong will power are better off — i.e., [they have] better control of their attention, emotions, and actions. They are happier and healthier. Their relationships are more satisfying and last longer. They make more money and go further in their careers. They are better able to manage stress, deal with conflict, and overcome adversity. They live longer. Self-control is a better predictor of academic success than IQ. It's a stronger determinant of effective leadership than charisma. It's more important for marital harmony than empathy.

## **Conclusion — and a Prediction**

Widespread change always takes time, but educators are already acknowledging that too much one-sided emphasis on the intellect is counterproductive.

For more than fifty years Education for Life has pioneered an approach that cultivates the intellect without neglecting other important factors that contribute to students' success in academics; namely, the body, feelings, will, and spirit.

The research tells us that the future of education will favor schools that can implement an integrated approach along the lines of Education for Life and the Living Wisdom Schools.



# 12. Happiness, Success, and Education for Life: Grades Tell the Story

We present these academic results by graduates of the K-8 Living Wisdom School in Palo Alto, California as evidence of the validity of the Education for Life approach to learning.

We invited recent Palo Alto LWS graduates (2011-2014) to share their high school and college grade-point averages. The Palo Alto school has 70-75 students in nine grades, K-8. On average, 4-8 students graduate per year; thus these 20 responses over the last four years are representative.

Presentation High (San Jose)	4.7
Mountain View High	4.5
Los Altos High	4.5
Harker School (San Jose)	4.18
Carlmont High (Belmont)	4.1
Summit Prep (Redwood City)	4.1
Loyola Marymount University (Los Angeles)	4.1
Los Altos High	4.0
Menlo College Prep (Menlo Park)	4.0
Mid-Peninsula High (Menlo Park)	4.0
Palo Alto High	4.0
Harker School (San Jose)	3.9
Woodside Priory School, Bowdoin College	3.825
Menlo College Prep	3.706
San Lorenzo High	3.7

Gunn High (Palo Alto)	3.6
Gunn High, Cornell University	3.5
Summit Prep (Redwood City)	3.5
Bay High School (San Francisco)	3.23
Mid-Peninsula High (Menlo Park)	2.7

**LWS graduates' average high school GPA (2011-18) was: 3.85**

**LWS alumni have graduated from these high schools:**

Bay School in San Francisco	Mid-Peninsula High School
Carlmont High School	Mountain View High School
Everest High School	Palo Alto High School
Gunn High School	Pinewood School
Harker School	Presentation High School
Los Altos High School	San Lorenzo High School
Menlo College Prep	Summit Prep High School
Menlo-Atherton High School	Woodside Priory

**LWS alumni have graduated from these colleges:**

Bowdoin College	San Francisco Art Institute
Brooks Institute of Photography	San Francisco Conservatory of Music
Cal Poly	Santa Clara University
Columbia University	School of Visual Arts, New York
Cornell University	Stanford University
Dominican University	UC Berkeley, UCLA, UC Davis,
Dublin University, Ireland	UC Santa Cruz, UC Santa Barbara
Georgetown University	University of Bremen, Germany
Humboldt State University	University of Michigan
London College, UK	University of San Francisco
Loyola Marymount University	University of Washington (Ross School of Business)
New York University	
Oberlin College	
Portland State University	

### **LWS graduates' college majors:**

Anthropology	Genetics
Art	Library Science
Computer Science	Marketing
Culinary Arts	Mathematics
Economics	Medicine
Education	Music
Engineering	Photography
Film	

### **Recent LWHS graduates:**

Cal Poly (Psychology)  
Chapman University (Computer Science, Cyber-Security)  
San Jose State University (Marine Biology)  
Santa Clara University (Political Science; Pre-Law)  
UC San Diego (Psychology)

### **Graduates of Living Wisdom High School in Palo Alto have been accepted at (2018-2021):**

Bard College at Simon's Rock	Santa Clara University
Boston College	Sarah Lawrence College
Cal Poly	Simon Fraser University
Chapman University	UC Davis
Lewis & Clark College	UC San Diego
Muhlenberg College	University of Puget Sound
New York University	University of San Francisco
Redlands University	University of the Pacific
Saint Mary's College	Whittier College
San Jose State University	Willamette University



## 13. Bill Aris's Truth: Happiness and Success in Sports & the Military

In school, sports, and the Navy,  
respect for the uniqueness of the individual  
opens portals for breathtaking success.<sup>1</sup>

By George Beinhorn, Living Wisdom School of Palo Alto

Nobody believes Bill Aris.

People ask Bill, over and over, how his Fayetteville-Manlius High School (NY) girls' cross country teams have managed to win the Nike Cross Nationals (NXN) an amazing ten times.

(NXN, where the nation's forty best teams compete, is the de facto national high school cross country championship.)

Bill graciously shares his methods. He patiently explains how he trains his runners. And other coaches suspect he's *signifyin'*, as they say in the Ozarks. Surely he's pulling their legs. At the very least, he's got to be holding something back.

Coaches fall off their chairs when Bill explains that he spends relatively little time designing his runners' training:

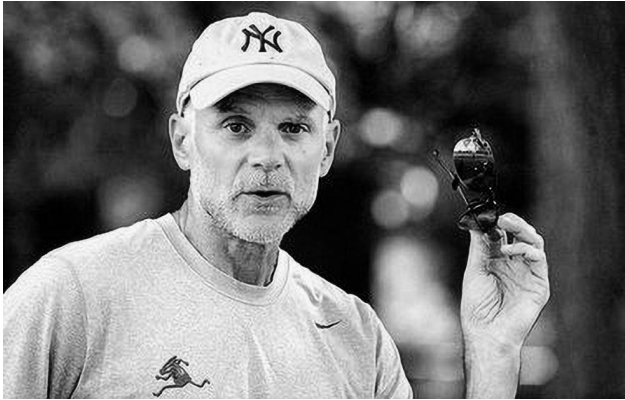
"I spend 80 percent of my time on psychological and emotional considerations of each kid," Aris says. "I put 20 percent of my time into designing the training. I spend most of my time thinking about and trying to get to the heart and soul of each kid, to both inspire them and to

---

<sup>1</sup>Adapted from *The Joyful Athlete: the Wisdom of the Heart in Exercise & Sports Training*, by George Beinhorn.

understand them. I'm always trying to figure out what keys unlock what doors to get them to maximize their potential."<sup>2</sup>

Other coaches believe there's no way Aris can produce national champions, year after year, without huge numbers of kids trying out for the team, and without recruiting. Fayetteville-Manlius High School has 1,500-2,000 students, yet just 25 runners turn out each fall for cross country. And Aris doesn't need to recruit, because his methods turn talented kids into champions.



*Bill Aris. His methods are simple but profound.*

Aris's boys' teams won NXN in 2014 and 2017. They've placed second several times, plus a third and fourth. To put this in perspective, it's a tremendous achievement to be among the forty teams invited to race at NXN. Scoring consistently in the top five puts the F-M boys in the absolute stratosphere of high school cross country.

At the library recently, I picked up a wonderful book. At first glance, *It's Your Ship: Management Techniques from the Best Damn Ship in the Navy* would seem to have little to do with training high school runners. Yet Bill Aris and the book's author, former U.S. Navy Captain D. Michael Abrashoff, have a lot in common. They're both renegade thinkers, in professions where the safest path to career advancement is to keep one's head down and do things the way they've always been done.

Abrashoff describes what happened when the Navy gave him command of a deeply troubled ship with bottom-scraping efficiency ratings.

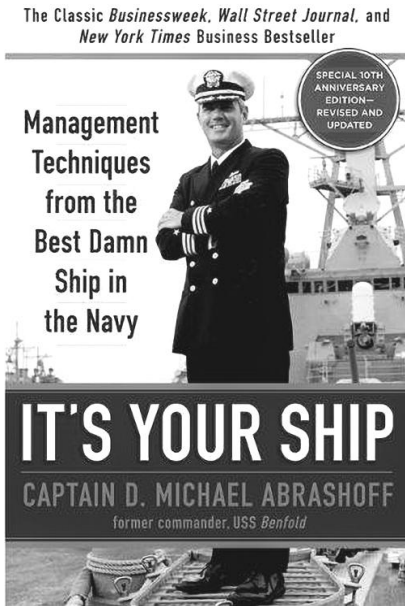
---

<sup>2</sup> "The Secret to F-M's Success: There Is No Secret," Tom Leo and Donnie Webb, Syracuse.com, December 10, 2010. <http://bit.ly/2JT3vnn>.

In the Navy, officers are expected either to get ahead or get out. If they aren't being promoted regularly, they risk being seen as damaged goods, losers, and shunted off to posts where they can't hurt other officers' careers.

It's a system that breeds a paranoid management style with a high priority on not looking bad — it encourages officers to micromanage their subordinates to get results that will look good on their resumes, and it ultimately produces mediocre results, and it has a terrible effect on a ship's morale. When Abrashoff took over *Benfold*, most of the crew told him

they couldn't wait to leave the ship and get out of the Navy.



What Abrashoff did was amazing. As I read the book, I laughed, smiled, and occasionally wiped a tear. Abrashoff decided to apply the lessons he'd learned during a two-year stint as an aide to Secretary of Defense William J. Perry. He would put the individual crew members' welfare first — just as Bill Aris does with his cross-country runners.

Abrashoff spoke personally with every one of *Benfold's* 310 sailors, asking them about their backgrounds, their goals, what they hoped to get out of their time in the Navy, and what they felt was wrong with the Navy's

way of doing things.

Above all, he invited their suggestions for improving procedures in their own departments, and he implemented them, even if it meant bending the Navy's rules. Within six months, *Benfold* was winning at-sea exercises against ships with much stronger ratings.

How did Abrashoff turn *Benfold* around? By adopting a simple guiding principle.

"I decided that on just about everything I did, my standard should be simply whether or not it felt right. You can never go wrong if you do 'the right thing.' ....

“If it feels right, smells right, tastes right, it’s almost surely the right thing — and you will be on the right track.

“If that doesn’t sound very profound or sophisticated, in the Navy, in business, and in life, it really is as simple as that.”

Let’s add: “In sports training, and in the classroom.”

We *know* when we’re doing the right thing in sports, and when we’re truly reaching students in the classroom and helping each one improve at their own level — because it feels right. And we know just as surely when we’re screwing up — when we’re ignoring the child’s reality in a headlong pursuit of test scores — because it feels ever so subtly wrong.

It’s simple. Do the right thing as an athlete, and your training will go well and you’ll enjoy it. Do the right thing for every child at school — get to know each student and work with their individual strengths — and you’ll quickly find them becoming amazingly enthusiastic and engaged and loving school, because they feel respected.

Few believed that Captain Abrashoff’s expansive leadership style would work, until *Benfold* began garnering a reputation as “the best damn ship in the Navy.”

Assigned to the Persian Gulf during the second Gulf War, *Benfold* became the go-to ship whenever commanders needed things done fast and correctly. When other captains wanted to improve their ships’ performance, they visited *Benfold* and talked with Abrashoff and his crew.

It’s an incredibly inspiring story, and the principles behind *Benfold’s* success are exactly the same as those that have brought the girls’ teams at Fayetteville-Manlius ten national championships.

In my working life, I occasionally help Donovan R. Greene, PhD, a highly regarded industrial psychologist. Companies hire Don to identify executive candidates who can strengthen their cultures and amplify their success. A habit shared by many of the best candidates is “managing by walking around” (MBWA).

That’s what Mike Abrashoff did, and what Bill Aris does. Abrashoff spent countless hours visiting each of *Benfold’s* departments, learning its functions and where they fit within the ship’s overall operations. He met with each crew member and invited their thoughts on how they could do their jobs better, and he empowered them to make changes. He respected them and tapped their creativity, knowledge, and enthusiasm. Morale soared, and success came quickly.

It was uncannily similar to how Bill Aris guides his high school cross country teams.

Coaches don't believe Bill because he doesn't tell them what they expect to hear. They want to hear: "I get results by hard-nosed methods. I work my kids' tails off, and I'm not above recruiting so long as I don't get caught. We do huge mileage in summer, and I won't tell you about our speedwork, because that would be revealing too much. But it's all in the numbers."



*Bill with his Manlius girls after winning Nike Cross Nationals.  
Bill's genius is that he creates happy, tightly bonded teams.*

Does that sound like schools today? The obsession with numbers. The "studying to the test." The government-imposed standard curriculum that leaves one-third of the kids bored out of their minds, another third unable to keep up, and only one-third challenged at their level.

When sports scientists from America and Europe travel to Africa to study the world-leading Kenyan elite runners, they bring along their little measuring sticks. They measure the Kenyans' leg lengths, muscle elasticity, and calf and thigh dimensions. They weigh and analyze what they eat — how much carbohydrate, fat, and protein. They study how many miles they run, and how hard. And they write it all down in a little notebook filled with numbers.

Few of them ask the Kenyans about their hopes and dreams. Yet if you invite the Kenyans to talk about what sets them apart from their American and European counterparts, they *never* mention numbers. Instead, they talk about qualities of the heart — not heart volume and such-like science, but the heart's *feelings*.

They explain that they run based on inner feeling — they take joy in running together, and if their bodies don't feel up to running hard on a given day, they're perfectly willing to pack it up and go home, whereas an

American runner would be more likely to force himself through the workout, haunted by a need to “make the numbers.”

The Kenyans know that their bodies will tell them when it’s okay to run hard and when it’s best to knock off. They’ve long since learned to do the right thing.

They talk about how the U.S. runners are so *serious* about their training, how obsessed they are with numbers and technology, and how it’s all geared toward some feverishly imagined far-off future result. Meanwhile, the Kenyans are intent on maximizing the joys of *today*.

Captain Abrashoff did a very simple thing on *Benfold* — he created a happy ship. He gave his crew the freedom to enjoy doing their jobs well, and other ships’ officers and crew members were soon seeking any excuse to visit *Benfold* for the experience of being infected and inspired by its upbeat mood.

That’s the secret of Bill Aris’s success, and it isn’t complicated. Aris creates happy teams. How? By getting to know his runners and helping them realize their dreams. That kind of caring creates loyalty, enthusiasm, and success — on a Navy missile destroyer, a cross country course, and in the classroom.

School administrators and politicians could take a valuable lesson from Aris and Abrashoff. Instead of cramming students into a lockstep curriculum, thereby demotivating all but the average few, they could empower teachers to institute an individualized curriculum that would take the measure of each one’s hopes and dreams.

When Abrashoff left *Benfold*, he studied surveys conducted by the Navy to discover why people weren’t re-enlisting. Surprisingly, low pay was far down the scale, in fifth place.

“The top reason was not being treated with respect or dignity; second was being prevented from making an impact on the organization; third, not being listened to; and fourth, not being rewarded with more responsibility.”

Abrashoff worked tirelessly to reverse these trends. He wouldn’t tolerate attitudes in his officers that would risk creating a bossy, feudal culture that would spread poisonous feelings of resentment throughout the ship.

Every crew member’s contributions were to be considered important, and they were to be made aware of their value to the ship.

By treating his crew as if they mattered, and giving them freedom to shine, Abrashoff built the best damn ship in the Navy — just as Aris has built the nation's best high school cross country program.

Six months after Abrashoff's departure, *Benfold* earned *the highest grade in the history of the Pacific Fleet* on the Navy's Combat Systems Readiness Review.

Abrashoff tells story after story of how he transformed the culture of his ship, one detail at a time. It's a deeply moving account, and ultimately the "method" can be boiled down to a simple principle: the best approach to organizational change and excellence is the one that creates the greatest fulfillment and happiness for the individual.

"Every year, I look at every kid in our group," Aris says of his approach to training high school runners. "Number one, I try to find out what's in their mind and in their hearts. How high is up, in other words. From there I build a training program around that."

Speaking of the unique culture that Aris built, award-winning running journalist Marc Bloom said:

"In all my 40-plus years (of being involved with high school cross country), I don't think I've seen anything this extraordinary, at least on the high school level.... If you look at professionals it's like looking at the Kenyans and the Ethiopians. On the high school level, F-M is so far better than anyone else.

"You say how do they do it?" Bloom added. "You can look at the physiological aspect and the running, but there is also a cultural foundation to it. It's a different society. It's a different attitude."<sup>3</sup>

It's a culture that engenders good feelings within each runner and within the team. Aris persuades his runners to tap the joy of training for something larger than themselves. And it all sounds remarkably like the culture at Living Wisdom School.

"When our kids train or race, they do so for each other rather than competing against each other. When one releases themselves from the limiting constraints of individual achievement alone, new worlds open up in terms of group AND individual potential and its fulfillment.... Each is capable of standing on their own, but when working together so much

---

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

more is accomplished both for the group and individual. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts basically, nothing new here.”<sup>4</sup>

Why aren’t people more receptive to these radical but exhaustively proven ideas? Why are so few listening — in school, in sports, and in business and the military?

Mark Allen, six-time winner of the Hawaii Ironman Triathlon, may know the answer. Before he began entering triathlons, Allen was a hard-charging All-American swimmer at UC San Diego. Swimmers do intensive interval workouts, and when Allen became a triathlete he trained full-out all the time, whether running, riding, or swimming. Yet year after year he fell just short of winning the Ironman.

Then Allen met coach Phil Maffetone, who had him do several months of easy aerobic training at the start of the season, followed by six weeks of very hard work. Maffetone understood Allen’s needs and adapted his training accordingly. That’s when the string of Ironman victories began.

In an interview with Allen, Tim Noakes, MD, author of the authoritative *Lore of Running*, asked him for his thoughts on why more triathletes hadn’t adopted the methods that had brought him so much success.

“Allen answered that many athletes are too ego-driven. They can’t wait to perform well and will not accept anyone else’s ideas.”<sup>5</sup>

Why are our academically obsessed public and private schools not adopting the principles that work so well in sports and in the Navy, and that have created happiness and success for so many students for fifty years in the Living Wisdom Schools, because they help each child learn more *efficiently* than the failed, lockstep Core Curriculum and the equally disastrous No Child Left Behind?

The answer is that politicians and school administrators are too heavily invested in their own ideas and obsessed with numbers — even when the numbers lie.

Bill Aris’s methods aren’t what the politicians and administrators want to hear. And that’s too bad, because there’s solid evidence that the heart and brain can work harder, with less strain, in the presence of happy feelings. In the classroom, research shows that the brain becomes a more efficient

---

<sup>4</sup> “Stotan: The Secret of Fayetteville Manlius,” XCNation/RunnerSpace, September 23, 2013. [http://www.runnerspace.com/news.php?news\\_id=180217](http://www.runnerspace.com/news.php?news_id=180217)

<sup>5</sup> *Lore of Running*, op. cit.

learning machine in the presence of harmonious, expansive feelings — as opposed to the stress and emotional toll of a needlessly competitive, test-focused atmosphere.

Teachers and coaches who support the individual child, intent on helping them become happy members of a happy team, aren't just wasting the students' time. They're amplifying their ability to learn by tapping the power of positive feelings to make each child's brain a champion.

Imagine that you're a teacher and there's a child in your classroom who clearly needs special attention and loving help — would you blithely ignore the their needs, prioritizing test preparation and grades? As parents, and as a society, would we set up our entire school system so that teachers were forced to ignore that child's unique circumstances?

Mass education is “dead-ucation.” Teachers who can skillfully elicit the individual child's enthusiasm for learning by giving them daily experiences of success, each at their own level, are able to educate them far more effectively than teachers who are required by government decree to cram a barely digestible load of facts into the students' overworked and resisting brains.

*(Adapted from The Joyful Athlete: The Wisdom of the Heart in Exercise & Sports Training, by Living Wisdom School of Palo Alto content manager George Beinhorn: [www.joyfulathlete.com](http://www.joyfulathlete.com))*



## 14. How to Improve Schools Using Coaching Principles

If teachers were allowed to be coaches,  
our schools would become centers of learning populated by happy,  
inspired students and their happy teachers.

In Tony Holler's thirty-eight years as a high school teacher, he's seen the best and worst of public education. Tony taught honors chemistry at Plainfield North High in the greater Chicago area.

Now retired, he laments the way teachers today are hamstrung by the mandate for a core curriculum, and by national policies such as "No Child Left Behind" that force students into a standardized, lock-step education that ignores their individual needs.

Tony says, "Schools force-feed the curriculum to students every single day. The political 'war on education' has forced schools into an all-consuming quest for higher ACT and SAT scores, disregarding the toll it takes on the students.

"I work at an excellent school. My principal asked the teachers what our school was doing well. My answer: 'The trains run on time.'

"This was not the answer my principal expected. I would give my school an A-plus for organization and discipline. It's the education that bothers me.... My own best teachers were artists. They didn't paint by the numbers."

Tony's views on education are biting, but they are fueled by a desire to see young people thrive and be successful and happy, and a distaste for the obstacles that politically motivated policies place in their way.

For Tony, the flipside is that he's intimately familiar with a side of public education where happy, motivated students learn to perform at high levels of excellence every single day.

The methods used on that side of the high school campus look remarkably like the Education for Life principles of the Living Wisdom Schools. The problem is, you will rarely find these extremely successful, comprehensively proven methods practiced in the classroom.



*Tony Holler with nine-time Olympic gold medalist Carl Lewis at a training consortium where they were featured speakers. Tony's ideas on training sprinters reflect his beliefs about learning in the classroom: it should be challenging and fun, but not grimly stressful or drearily mechanical.*

Tony believes that if teachers were allowed to adopt coaching principles, it would transform our schools overnight into vibrant centers of learning, populated by happy, motivated students.

Those methods are on display daily, right under the noses of the school administrators and government policy makers — yet nobody is paying attention.

When Tony coached freshman football from 2010 to 2015, his teams went 49-4, averaging 44-plus points per game. When he taught at Harrisburg (Illinois) High School, his track teams won the state title in the 4x100 a remarkable four times. In 2018, his Plainfield North High track team won the 4x100 title in an Illinois state record time of 41.29. An hour later, a 15-year-old PNHS sprinter ran a state record in the 100 meters (10.31). The team won four gold medals and placed third, close behind two larger track powerhouse high schools.

Tony knows what it takes to produce winners on the track and in the classroom. What follows is his overview of the principles that earned him election to the Illinois Track and Cross Country Coaches Association Hall of Fame, and that he believes should be adopted in school classrooms everywhere.

1. Sports are not a graduation requirement. Kids play sports because they are challenging and fun. Advanced Placement courses should similarly “sell” themselves, and not be forced upon all of the students by government decree.
2. Coaches don’t spend 80 percent of their time with the 20 percent of kids who can’t do the work. Students should be helped to succeed at their own level. A one-size-fits-all definition of success is ridiculous and is bound to fail.
3. Coaches aren’t told how to coach. Schools should give teachers the freedom to adapt the curriculum to the needs of the individual student.
4. Kids play sports because they hear rumors about the great team culture on a football, basketball, baseball, or track team. Teachers should be allowed to make their courses exciting and attractive to the students — whatever it takes.
5. You play to win the game. Too many schools are diploma mills. Schools should set themselves no less a goal than to help every single student experience the greatest possible success at their own, individual level of ability.
6. All men are *not* created equal. Every student is talented, but not in the same way as others. This obvious fact of individual differences should be given primary consideration in the classroom.
7. Coaches don’t give grades. Grades are meaningful only as they measure the individual students’ progress. Grades should not be held up as a goal, or used as a motivator or, much worse, as a punishment.
8. Failure is not an option. Great coaches make sure every player has daily experiences of success. This is the way to create excitement and enthusiasm for learning. How to give each student daily success experiences? By challenging them daily at their own level.
9. Coaches are leaders, not bosses. Rigid, authoritarian teachers are obsolete. Teachers must be given the freedom, skills, and experience to make learning exciting and to introduce every student to the thrill of overcoming challenges again and again, every day.
10. Coaches don’t need advanced degrees. The value of an advanced degree has been artificially inflated in the teaching profession. Good teachers know how to help kids succeed regardless of their academic credentials.

Tony concludes:

“I’ve spent thirty-eight of my fifty-nine years going to high school and hanging out with teenagers. As I enter the twilight of my teaching career, I dream of better schools. I dream of independent students who are bold and assertive. I dream of students who have the enthusiasm of athletes. I dream of teachers who run their classrooms like coaches, tailoring courses to the talents and interests of their students. If schools were more like sports, maybe kids would love school.”

*(Adapted with permission from “Ten Ways to Improve Schools Using Coaching Principles,” by Tony Holler: <https://www.freelapusa.com/ten-ways-to-improve-schools-using-coaching-principles/>.)*

## 15. Sir Ken Robinson on Creativity at School

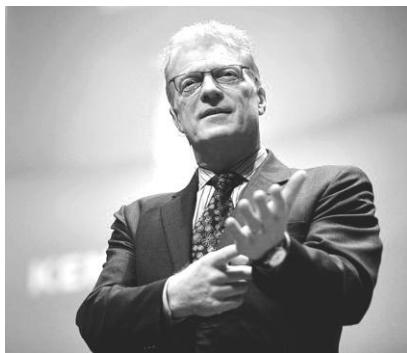
Many parents simply don't believe the Education for Life methods can possibly be valid, since everybody else is doing it differently.

And yet, a deeper look at schools with more "traditional" curricula reveals troubling omissions.

The shortcomings were eloquently outlined by Sir Ken Robinson, the award-winning international educational consultant whose fiery call to action, "Do Schools Kill Creativity?" is the most-watched TED talk ever, with more than 40 million views by 320 million people in 160 countries.

In another TED talk, Robinson shared his thoughts on the need for change in education today the following is taken from "How to Escape Education's Death Valley" (2013; excerpted with permission — to watch the full talk, visit [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com).)

"In place of curiosity, what we have is a culture of compliance. Our children and teachers are encouraged to follow routine algorithms rather than to excite the power of imagination and curiosity.... Human life is inherently creative. It's why we all have different résumés. We create our lives, and we can recreate them as we go through them. It's the common currency of being a human being. It's why human culture is so interesting and diverse and dynamic.... *(Photo: Ken Robinson at a Creative Company conference.)*



"We all create our own lives through this restless process of imagining alternatives and possibilities, and one of the roles of education is to awaken and develop these powers of creativity. Instead, what we have is a culture of standardization.

"It doesn't have to be that way.... Finland regularly comes out on top in math, science, and reading. Now, we only know that's what they do well at,

because that's all that's being tested. That's one of the problems of the test. They don't look for other things that matter just as much. The thing about [the] work in Finland is this: they don't obsess about those disciplines. They have a very broad approach to education, which includes humanities, physical education, the arts.

"Second, there is no standardized testing in Finland. I mean, there's a bit, but it's not what gets people up in the morning, what keeps them at their desks.

"The third thing — and I was at a meeting recently with some people from Finland, actual Finnish people, and somebody from the American system was saying to the people in Finland, 'What do you do about the drop-out rate in Finland?'

"They all looked a bit bemused and said, 'Well, we don't have one. Why would you drop out? If people are in trouble, we get to them quite quickly and we help and support them.'....

"What all the high-performing systems in the world do is currently what is not evident, sadly, across the systems in America — I mean, as a whole. One is this: they individualize teaching and learning. They recognize that it's students who are learning, and the system has to engage them: their curiosity, their individuality, and their creativity. That's how you get them to learn.

"The second is that they attribute a very high status to the teaching profession. They recognize that you can't improve education if you don't pick great people to teach and keep giving them constant support and professional development. Investing in professional development is not a cost; it's an investment, and every other country that's succeeding well knows that....

"And the third is, they devolve responsibility to the school level for getting the job done. You see, there's a big difference here between going into a mode of command-and-control in education — that's what happens in some systems. Central or state governments decide they know best and they're going to tell you what to do. The trouble is that education doesn't go on in the committee rooms of our legislative buildings. It happens in classrooms and schools, and the people who do it are the teachers and the students, and if you remove their discretion, it stops working....

"Many of the current policies are based on mechanistic conceptions of education. It's like education is an industrial process that can be improved

just by having better data, and somewhere in the back of the minds of some policy makers is this idea that if we fine-tune it well enough, if we just get it right, it will all hum along perfectly into the future. It won't, and it never did.

“The point is that education is not a mechanical system. It's a human system....

“So I think we have to embrace a different metaphor. We have to recognize that it's a human system, and there are conditions under which people thrive, and conditions under which they don't. We are, after all, organic creatures, and the culture of the school is absolutely essential.”



## 16. Happiness, Success, and Feelings: a Brief Photo Essay

In a Living Wisdom classroom, feelings are noticed and dealt with without delay. Negative feelings, ignored or suppressed, can create an underlying current of discontent that can disturb the harmony in the classroom, disrupting concentration and motivation.

The following photos show how Living Wisdom School second-grade teacher Kshama Kellogg helped a young student accept and transcend sad feelings at the start of the school day. The photos were not posed — they are real.



*Second-grade teacher Kshama greets a student at the start of the school day. Noting the student's sad expression, she immediately makes a connection and inquires what's going on.*

*HAPPINESS & SUCCESS AT SCHOOL*



*Sometimes a hug can heal – the student feels acknowledged, connected, and supported.*



*Ava notices that her friend is having trouble and offers a supportive smile.*



*Other students become aware that the student is having difficulty and gather around in silent support.*



*Ava offers a helpful funny face!*



*When teacher Kshama and her students sense that their classmate is feeling better and warmly included, she begins Circle Time with a song that lifts everyone's spirits before starting math class.*

# The Science of Happiness & Success



## 17. Happiness, Success, & the Science of Positive Feelings

Modern science is confirming the lessons we've learned in the Living Wisdom classrooms about the strong correlation between happiness and success at school.

Scientists at the Institute of HeartMath™ Research Center (IHM) in Boulder Creek, California are studying the effects of positive feelings such as love, compassion, and kindness on our bodies and brains. Their research supports the notion that it's important for children's academic success that they learn to "accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, and don't mess with Mister In-Between."<sup>6</sup>

Here are some of the IHM findings:

- Positive emotional states exert a whole-body synchronizing effect by bringing brain waves, heart rhythms, breathing, and blood-pressure oscillations into a unified, harmonious rhythm. During positive feelings, "bodily systems function with a high degree of synchronization, efficiency and harmony."
- Deliberately focusing attention in the heart while cultivating feelings of love, compassion, etc., leads to clearer thinking, calmer emotions, and improved physical performance and health, as well as increased frequency of subjective reports of spiritual experiences.
- Positive, expansive feelings such as love, appreciation, and compassion promote relaxation and synchronization of the nervous system. They quiet the "arousal" (sympathetic) branch of the nervous system and activate the "relaxation" (parasympathetic) side. The sympathetic

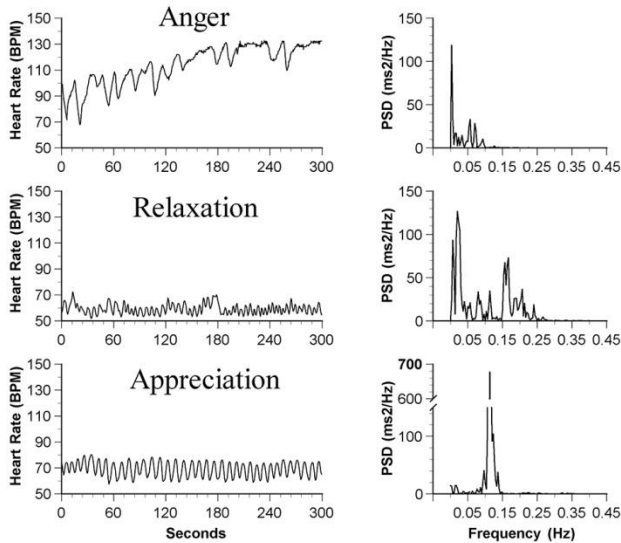
---

<sup>6</sup> The Institute of HeartMath research is described in *The HeartMath Solution* by Doc Childre and Howard Martin (HarperSanFrancisco 1999), as well as in research papers on the organization's website, [www.heartmath.org](http://www.heartmath.org).

branch of the autonomic nervous system is responsible for speeding up heart rate and preparing the body for action, while the parasympathetic branch governs the “relaxation response,” slowing heart rate and calming body, emotions, and brain.

- Positive feelings quiet the mind, generate a sense of “self-security, peace and love,” and increase the frequency of reported feelings of “connectedness to God.”

Additionally, the researchers found that negative emotions such as anger, fear, and hatred make the heartbeat change speeds erratically – the heart literally speeds up and slows down chaotically from one beat to the next, like the random, jerky motion of a car that’s running out of gas.



Positive emotions such as love, compassion, and appreciation, on the other hand, make the heart beat with a harmonious, regular rhythm. During negative emotions, the heart’s irregular speed changes appear as jagged, disordered spikes, and its power output is relatively low.

Simple relaxation produces a more regular rhythm; but deliberately cultivating positive emotions makes the heart beat in a steady, consistent, harmonious rhythm, reflected in the regular, sine-wave-like pattern in the figure (“Appreciation”). During positive emotions, the heart’s power output jumps by over 500% above the levels attained during negative emotions and simple relaxation. (In the figure, note the Power Spectral Density [PSD] scale in “Appreciation.”)

The Institute of HeartMath findings have begun to find practical applications in professional sports. Here's an excerpt from an article on the website of the Professional Golfers' Association (PGA):

When we're stressed or upset, it's physically impossible to think clearly or perform at our best. This is because a disordered heart rhythm pattern sends a signal to the brain that inhibits the cortex, the higher thinking and reasoning part of the brain. On the other hand, when we are feeling confident, secure, and appreciative, our heart rhythms become smooth and even.... Smooth heart rhythm patterns send a signal to the brain that synchronizes and facilitates cortical function, speeding up our reaction times and making it easier to think clearly, perceive a bigger picture, and make better decisions.<sup>7</sup>

The heart and brain communicate continually through the nervous system; thus the heart's powerful positive or negative, harmonizing or disruptive messages are carried instantly to the brain, where they enhance or interfere with our ability to remain cool and concentrate. (The heart is the body's most powerful oscillator, sending out electrical signals roughly 60 times as strong as those emitted by the brain.)

To summarize: positive, harmonious feelings enhance mental focus, calmness, health, performance, intuition, and the frequency of spiritual feelings. They increase relaxation, alpha-wave output in the brain associated with a calm, meditative state, and synchronize heart-rhythm patterns, respiratory rhythms, and blood pressure oscillations.

When scientists from the Institute of HeartMath taught simple methods for harmonizing the heart's feelings to school children in the greater Washington, DC area, the children's test scores immediately rose.

In the Living Wisdom Schools, the teachers lead the students in practicing heart-harmonizing methods every day. In the classroom and on the playground, the teachers pay extremely close attention to the quality of the children's interactions with each other and their mood. The teachers are trained to nurture a harmonious, safe, expansive environment that is optimized for learning.

---

<sup>7</sup> "Second That Emotion," by Deborah Rozman, Ph.D., Pia Nilsson, and Lynn Marriott, downloaded from [www.pga.com](http://www.pga.com) in 2004. *Gold Digest* readers voted Pia Nilsson and Lynn Marriott to the magazine's list of the top 50 US golf coaches.



## 18. Happiness, Success, and the “Social Brain”

The teachers at Living Wisdom School invest tremendous time and attention to help the students learn how to harmonize their feelings and get along with each other.

The goal is to create an environment that is conducive to learning, where the children can feel safe asking questions, and experience the joy of supporting each other.

Some parents question this approach, feeling that every moment of the child's time at school should be devoted to the academic curriculum. Yet this view may be misguided, as UCLA neuroscience professor Matthew Lieberman explains in his book *Social: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Connect*. It seems children *learn more efficiently* when they are encouraged to connect socially in the classroom, tutoring each other and problem-solving together.

“Being socially connected is our brain's lifelong passion,” Lieberman says. “It's been baked into our operating system for tens of millions of years.”

“Someday, we will look back and wonder how we ever had lives, work and schools that weren't guided by the principles of the social brain.”

Lieberman believes middle school education could be dramatically improved by tapping the brain's social potential. He notes that U.S. students' interest in school tends to wane when they reach seventh and eighth grades, an age when humans become extremely social, and when most schools fail to encourage and nurture this tendency.

“Our school system says to turn off that social brain,” he said. “We typically don't teach history by asking what Napoleon was thinking; we teach about territorial boundaries and make it as non-social as possible. Too often we take away what makes information learnable and memorable and emphasize chronology while leaving out the motivations.

“Eighth graders' brains want to understand the social world and the minds of other people. We can tap into what middle school students are biologically predisposed to learn, and we can

do this to improve instruction in history and English, and even math and science.”



In the Palo Alto Living Wisdom School, the annual all-school Theater Magic presentation engages the children in the lives of great figures from history: not merely the outward facts of wars, treaties, and shifting national borders, but their stature as human beings — their thoughts and aspirations, their hard-fought personal battles, and their powerful message for our own lives and times.

Research suggests that students are more likely to remember information when they take it in socially. Lieberman believes schools could apply this principle by having older students tutor younger ones, as happens routinely in the classrooms at Living Wisdom School.

“If you have an eighth grader teach a sixth grader, the eighth grader’s motivation is social: to help this other student and not embarrass himself,” Lieberman said. “Getting everyone to be both teacher and learner would create enthusiasm for learning.”

*Social* reveals how Lieberman and his colleagues used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to show that neural mechanisms make us profoundly social beings.



“We’re wired to see things and think, ‘How can I use this to help other people that I know?’” Lieberman said. “I can have the most brilliant idea for an invention, but if I can’t convey that to other people in a way that they’ll help me build it and market it to other people, it’s just an idea in my head. If we’re not socially connected, even great ideas wither.”

(This discussion was adapted from a UCLA news release about Prof. Lieberman’s work authored by Stuart Wolpert and posted on October 10, 2013.)



## 19. Two Kinds of Feelings

By J. Donald Walters, author of *Education for Life* and co-founder of the Living Wisdom Schools

How many adults, what to speak of children, recognize the difference between emotion and feeling? Very few. And how many children, consequently, are taught that calm, sensitive feeling is an invaluable tool for the complete understanding of most subjects? Or that turbulent feelings — that is to say, the emotions — and not feeling per se prevent clear, objective understanding? Again, very few.

Few children, again, are taught the extent to which reason is guided by calm feeling, but distorted by the emotions. And few are taught that by developing calm feeling they will improve their understanding of objective reality on every level.

Feeling, when it is calm and refined, is essential both to truly objective and to mature insight. There are ways of clarifying feeling, just as there are principles of logic (already taught in the schools) for learning to reason correctly. Feeling can be clarified, for instance, by learning how to distance feeling from one's personal likes and dislikes, withdrawing one's awareness to a calm center in the heart. Feeling can be clarified by directing the heart's energies upward to the brain, and thence to a point between the eyebrows that was anciently identified as the seat of concentration in the body. Clarity of feeling can be assisted by calming the flow of energy in the spine, by means of certain breathing exercises. These exercises are a priceless contribution of the science of yoga to the general knowledge of the human race. It would be a grave error to ignore them on the grounds of one's unfamiliarity with them.

Only by calm inner feeling can a person know definitely the right course to take in any action. Those who direct their lives from this deeper level of feeling achieve levels of success that are never reached by people who limit their quest for answers to the exercise of reason. Reason, indeed, if

unsupported by feeling, may point in hundreds of plausible directions without offering certainty as to the rightness of any of them.

Children need to learn how to react appropriately. This they can never do if their reaction springs out of their subjective emotions. Considerable training is needed to learn how to harness feeling and make it a useful ally. What children are taught, instead, as they grow older, is that feelings are inevitably obstacles to correct insight. The scientific method is offered as a model. "If you want to see things objectively," they are told, "you must view everything in terms of cold logic." I remember a professor when I was in college who boasted, jokingly, that X-rays had shown his heart to be smaller than normal. This, to him, was a sign of intellectual objectivity, which he prized.

Ignored is the fact that, usually, the greater the scientist, the more deeply he feels his subject. Or that, as Einstein put it, the essence of true scientific discovery is a sense of mystical awe.

Feeling can never in any case be suppressed. Shove it out of sight at one point — where you can at least see it and try to deal with it — and it will only pop up at another, often a place where you least expect it. Many times, when long-suppressed feelings have at last burst upon people's consciousness, those feelings have assumed terrible and unrecognizable shapes. Sometimes they have actually incited to riot.

Right feeling is an important tool for achieving maturity. It must be cultivated, and not merely ignored, suppressed, or treated as something about which nothing "reasonable" can be done.

## 20. How Raw Emotions Interfere with Learning

In his bestselling book, *Emotional Intelligence*, *New York Times* science reporter Daniel Goleman related how the pioneering Russian neuropsychologist A. R. Luria first suggested in the 1930s that the prefrontal cortex was a key brain center for self-control and restraining emotional impulses.

Luria found that patients with damage to this area “were impulsive and prone to flare-ups of fear and anger.”

A study of two dozen men and women convicted of heat-of-passion murders “found that they had a much lower than usual level of activity in these same sections of the prefrontal cortex.”<sup>8</sup>

In 2002, scientists at Duke University used brain scans to verify that raw emotions interfere with concentration, and that mental focus and raw emotions exist in a mutually exclusive relationship. That is, not only does emotion distort our ability to focus, but deliberately focusing attention is an effective way to calm and “neutralize” emotions. As the Duke news release put it, “Surprisingly, an increase in one type of function is accompanied by a noticeable decrease in the other.”

This is interesting news for educators, and for students preparing to take tests, since it confirms the age-old wisdom that deliberately focusing attention tends to calm the pre-test jitters, while uncontrolled emotions are dangerous because they can interfere with concentration and good decision-making. At Living Wisdom School, the students are taught simple meditation techniques that help them focus energy and attention in the prefrontal cortex while studying, preparing to take tests, and dealing with turbulent emotions.

“We’ve known for a long time that some people are more easily distracted and that emotions can play a big part in this,”

---

<sup>8</sup> *Emotional Intelligence*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1995) 314.

said Kevin S. LaBarr, assistant professor at Duke's Center for Cognitive Neuroscience and an author of the study described above.

"Our study shows that two streams of processing take place in the brain, with attentional tasks and emotions moving in parallel before finally coming together." The two streams are integrated in a region of the brain called the anterior cingulate, located between the right and left halves of the brain's frontal portion, which is involved in a wide range of thought processes and emotional responses.<sup>9</sup>

It's easy to test this finding by holding our attention with relaxation in the area of the anterior cingulate, just behind the point between the eyebrows, a practice that tends to soothe troubling emotions and help us feel more calm, positive, focused, and in control of our feelings.

Researchers now suspect that calm feeling (as distinct from raw emotions) and reason work hand in hand. Contrary to a longstanding prejudice of our western culture which assumes that reason is the superior faculty, the researchers are finding that reason is deeply compromised unless it is balanced by the feelings of the heart.

Neurologist Dr. Antonio Damasio studied patients with damage to the connection between the brain's prefrontal cortex and amygdala — the two most important centers of reason and emotion in the brain. He found that when these patients lost their ability to feel, they made terrible decisions in their business and personal lives and became incapable of making even the simplest decisions, such as when to schedule an appointment, even though their reasoning powers were intact.

"Dr. Damasio believes their decisions are so bad because they have lost access to their *emotional* learning.... Cut off from emotional memory in the amygdala, whatever the neocortex mulls over no longer triggers the emotional reactions that have been associated with it in the past — everything takes on a gray neutrality....

"Evidence like this leads Dr. Damasio to the counter-intuitive position that feelings are typically *indispensable* for rational

---

<sup>9</sup> Duke University press release, August 19, 2002.

decisions; they point us in the proper direction, where dry logic can then be of best use.<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, there are risks in trying to make decisions based on feeling alone. Our decisions may be subtly compromised by personal desires and raw emotions — our hearts may not be sufficiently detached to be trusted.

Our feelings are more reliable when we check them against our reason, common sense, and experience. Are our heart's feelings *truly* calm and dispassionate, or are we just telling ourselves what we want to hear? Cool, clear *reason* can help us decide. Our sense of the right decision will more often be correct when we hold ourselves in a state of “reasonable feeling.” It may help to imagine that our awareness is centered in an axis of energy between the forehead and the heart.

In the Living Wisdom Schools, students learn to consult their calm feelings while listening to the voice of calm reason. Learning to access and use these human tools gives them an advantage when it comes to mastering the academic curriculum.

Researchers at the Institute of HeartMath have found that it's surprisingly easy to prove that intuition exists, and that its accuracy increases when we deliberately calm and harmonize our feelings.

In a study of intuitive ability, the subjects were shown images of soothing subjects, interspersed randomly with emotionally disturbing images. Monitoring the subjects' EEG (brain waves), ECG (electrocardiogram), and heart rate variability showed that they reacted emotionally to the images *five to seven seconds before* an image appeared. Confirming the folk wisdom that women are more intuitive than men, female subjects reacted with greater accuracy and sensitivity.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1997) 27–28.

<sup>11</sup> “The Sixth Sense—More and More, Science Supports It,” Gabriella Boehmer, Institute of HeartMath; the study referenced is: “Electrophysiological Evidence of Intuition: Part 1. The Surprising Role of the Heart,” McCraty, R., Atkinson, M., Bradley, R. T., *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, Feb 2004, Vol. 10, No. 1: 133–43; “Electrophysiological Evidence of Intuition: Part 2. A System-Wide Process?” McCraty, R., Atkinson, M., Bradley, R. T., *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, Apr 2004, Vol. 10, No. 2: 325–36.

Surely the message for students and educators is clear: expansive thoughts, actions, and feelings have been scientifically shown to boost brain efficiency and happiness.

At Google, at Harvard, in ancient Indian ashrams, and in the classrooms at Living Wisdom School, happiness and success go hand in hand.

## 21. It's Time We Started Raising Organic Children

*By Nitai Deranja, co-founder of the Living Wisdom Schools*

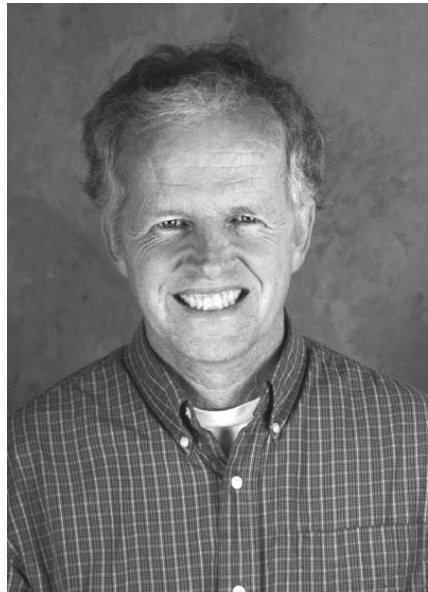
About fifty years ago, a small but dedicated group of people began to challenge America's attitudes toward food production.

The prevailing view was that vegetables should be judged by their appearance — bigger and redder tomatoes were deemed more desirable. So American agriculture adopted chemical fertilizers and pesticides that would support growing great-looking tomatoes.

But a tiny fringe group, which gradually became known as the organic farming movement, pointed out that the real value of tomatoes lies not in their color but their taste and nutritional value, which were being sacrificed to improve their appearance.

It took a while, but people began to listen. A recent study<sup>1</sup> revealed that seventy-five percent of Americans now buy at least some organic food.

Today we face a similar misconception about our children's education. We all want our kids to succeed — no doubt. The problem is how we define "success."



As with the misplaced emphasis on bigger, redder tomatoes, many people now assume student success can be measured in numbers, using standardized tests. These tests are mandated in almost all schools, and they exercise an enormous influence over our children's future.

With such important consequences, it seems appropriate to ask what exactly these tests are measuring. Below are some topics covered in one of the most widely used standardized tests for fifth through eleventh grades.<sup>2</sup> As you scan the list, note the number of items you might be familiar with, and how important this information has been in your adult life. (These items are not taken from the more rigorous "advanced" level of the exam, but from the easier, "proficient" level.)

1. The function of the esophagus
2. The difference between a stereoscope and a laser light with holograph
3. The reason fossils are found in sedimentary rocks
4. The contributions of Hammurabi
5. The differences between metals and nonmetals
6. The form of energy released or absorbed in most chemical reactions
7. The Schlieffen Plan
8. The Tennis Court Oath.
9. The Social Gospel movement
10. The Reconstruction Finance Corporation

The point, of course, is not that the Schlieffen Plan, the Tennis Court Oath, and the Code of Hammurabi aren't useful in certain specialized fields. It's that in using such relatively obscure data to measure the overall effectiveness of our schools, we're making the same mistake people made in judging tomatoes — we're focusing on superficial appearances at the expense of real substance, measured by actual benefits to the individual child.

When we pressure teachers and administrators to make sure every student is exposed to the "right" facts, the end result is that creativity and enthusiasm are replaced with what's been called "dead-ucation."

In a recent *New York Times* article, a long-time teacher questioned the overwhelming emphasis on standardized testing today:

“This push on tests is missing out on some serious parts of what it means to be a successful human. Whether it’s the pioneer in the Conestoga wagon or someone coming here in the 1920s from southern Italy, there was this idea in America that if you worked hard and you showed real grit, you could be successful. Strangely, we’ve now forgotten that. People who have an easy time of things, who get 800s on their SATs, I worry that those people get feedback that everything they’re doing is great. And I think as a result, we are actually setting them up for long-term failure. When that person suddenly has to face up to a difficult moment, then I think they’re screwed, to be honest. I don’t think they’ve grown the capacities to be able to handle that.”<sup>3</sup>

A parent lamented her son’s experience of dead-ucation:

“I saw the light in his eyes extinguishing.... These energetic, engaged, accomplished six-year-olds turned into 12-year-olds who ask, ‘Are we getting graded on this?’ or ‘Is this going to be on the test?’ That flame they had at age 6 didn’t burn out on its own, we smothered it.”<sup>4</sup>

And from an administrator at Peking University High School in Shanghai, one of the winners in worldwide standardized testing by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development:

“Test taking is damaging to students’ creativity, critical thinking skills and, in general, China’s ability to compete in the world. It can make students very narrow-minded. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, China needs the creative types its education system isn’t producing.”<sup>5</sup>

The time has come to ask what an alternative, more “organic” approach to education might look like.

What if our schools shifted at least some of their focus from testing relatively useless facts to include the following measures:

- How to take initiative and exercise creativity
- How to concentrate
- How to cultivate a passion for lifelong learning
- How to be responsible
- How to live healthfully

- How to overcome negative moods
- How to respect different points of view
- How to discern the difference between right and wrong
- How to find peace and contentment within yourself
- How to know yourself and express your highest potential

How many of *these* items have you found to be useful in your adult life?

Which kind of knowledge would you deem more important for your child's success?

Certainly, turning the vast battleship of public education would take enormous effort, but in the long run it probably won't take much more time and energy than the switch from chemical-based food production to organic farming.

The traditional school subjects — “Readin’, Writin’, ‘Rithmetic” — will always be the foundation of a well-rounded education, but our approach needs to incorporate these broader, more nourishing skills.

Much work has been done; we just need to share our resources and insights, and support each other as we make the needed changes.

The fruits of this movement will give our children an enjoyable education and a better guarantee of success.

## References

1. The Hartman Group Study, “Beyond Organic and Natural,” 2/22/2010.
2. Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR), [www.starsamplequestions.org](http://www.starsamplequestions.org)
3. “What if the Secret of Success Is Failure?” New York Times, 9/14/2011.
4. [www.montessorimadness.com](http://www.montessorimadness.com)
5. “How Shanghai’s Students Stunned the World,” [www.msnbc.msn.com](http://www.msnbc.msn.com), 11/2/2011.

## 22. The Super-Efficient Classroom

When children feel that their teachers understand their unique talents and motivations, they are more likely to love school and excel in their academic subjects.

A conversation with Nitai Deranja, co-founder of the Living Wisdom Schools.

**Q:** Parents visiting Living Wisdom Schools often question the schools' philosophy. They're naturally concerned that their children receive a first-class education, but they often aren't aware of the powerful links between school success and a child's feelings, particularly during the years from 6 to 12. Parents are often concerned that time spent on feelings is wasted, and would be better devoted to academics.

**Nitai:** The traditional image of a teacher is that he or she will come into the classroom prepared with a good lesson plan. But the risk in sticking too rigidly to a plan is that the teacher may overlook the realities of the individual children — their unique abilities, needs, motivations, and the daily fluctuations of their minds and hearts.

A good teacher will, of course, have a solid lesson plan, but their first concern will be to understand the individual child so as to be able to relate appropriately to their realities.

When a teacher can do that, it's a wonderful boon for the children, because it gives them a sense that the teacher understands their worth and their abilities. It's an experience that most kids aren't having today at school. They're treated as cogs in the school machinery — as just one more anonymous child swimming in the great ocean of students.

The tragedy is that the kids start to identify with being a cog in the system; whereas if a talented teacher is acknowledging their reality, we see that the child comes alive and wants to learn because somebody is investing the time and energy to value and encourage them where they are.



*LWS fourth and fifth-grade teacher Craig Kellogg helps Tima negotiate the complicated process of finding his costume and being in the right place at the right time before a dress rehearsal of the school play.*

My forty years as a teacher have convinced me that this is the indispensable foundation of academic excellence, because you can very efficiently and effectively do amazing things with the kids and the curriculum. It's why I'm encouraging this quality more than ever in my workshops for teachers.

It's a skill that you can develop endlessly. As adults, we know that when we're trying to communicate well at work or have a great conversation with our friends, we need to be able to set our own mental buzz aside and understand where they are.

**Q:** Is it a skill that you look for in the teachers you hire?

**Nitai:** I'll share two stories that happened recently. I gave an online workshop for teachers in Italy, and because I had to speak through an interpreter, I wasn't really sure they were getting the concepts, so I told

them, “I want you to work on this and come back next week prepared to share stories about opening up to children’s realities.”

The following week, a woman said, “I was visiting a friend who has two kids, both about two years old, and I thought, ‘Okay, here’s my assignment. I’ve got to figure out how to relate to their world.’”

When she looked at the kids, she saw that they were chomping very contentedly on their pacifiers. Noticing an extra pacifier on a table, she picked it up and put it in her mouth and sat on the floor with these two little babies. (laughs) And she reported that the kids suddenly stopped what they were doing and looked up at her and got big smiles on their faces, and one of the kids came over and gave her a big hug.

It was a powerful demonstration of how beautifully this principle works at all ages. How can you expect to teach children effectively, if you can’t get on their wavelength?

Another teacher in the workshop works with 12-year-old kids as a math aide. He told us about a boy who absolutely hates math, and how the kid came slouching into the classroom with his hoodie pulled up over his head and walked over and sat down, put his arms on the table, and threw his head on his arms. (laughs)

Stefan, the math aide, watched the boy and thought, “All right, I’m going to see if I can tune into this boy’s world.” So he went over to the table and nudged the boy on the shoulder.

The boy was surprised and said, “What?” And Stefan said, “Could you move over a little?” So the boy grudgingly scooted over, and Stefan let himself fall into the chair, put his arms on the table, and threw his head on his arms. (laughs)

The kid started giggling, and finally he picked up his head and they ended up doing some math together. Stefan said it was remarkable how willing the kid was to work on his math when he realized the teacher could get on his wavelength and sympathize.

During the years from 6 to 12, the classroom should be a place of adventure — it should be a combination of science laboratory, space ship, and theater. At that age the classroom should be an enclosed reality that you can turn into just about anything that will draw the kids into the feeling side of the learning experience.

When a teacher at our school wanted to introduce the kids to the science of the rainforest, he turned the classroom into a tropical jungle.

There were so many plants and trees in the room that you had to brush the branches aside to get in the door. The point is that you aren't just reading about the rainforest, you're having an experience of it. It's a prop that helps the kids *feel* what the rainforest is like, and the end result is that because they can feel it, they begin to care for it, and to be interested in learning about it.

The Palo Alto Living Wisdom School puts on an amazing Theater Magic play every year, where every child in the school plays a part. The kids get completely involved in the self-contained world of the play. If it's about Joan of Arc, or Martin Luther King, Jr., or the Dalai Lama, or Buddha, or Kwan Yin, or Abraham Lincoln, or Krishna, they're deeply studying the history and customs of the time, while they're acting out the lives of these great figures. Most of the kids are picking up each others' lines as well as their own, and it's hugely motivating for them because their feelings are fully engaged. And, again, the result is that they're absolutely lapping up the academic side of the experience.



*First-graders sing a song during a dress rehearsal for a play about the life of Abraham Lincoln.*

We approach the curriculum in the same spirit in our science classes, where each child is playing the role of a scientist and you're doing real-world experiments as you learn. It's a pretend world, which is appropriate

for children at that age when their imagination and feelings are at their peak, and you're building the curriculum on that very powerful force.

When I co-taught fifth-grade, we introduced the kids to the *Ramayana*, one of the world's great teaching epics. It's chock-full of deeply absorbing adventures that carry moral lessons in a very convincing way, and we first introduced the book by reading some of the stories to the kids.

They quickly became interested, so we started acting the stories with them. We also made a quilt on themes from the *Ramayana*, and as a result this great saga became a central part of their lives for the semester. For three or four months, you'd come into the classroom and find yourself immersed in the world of this great teaching saga from India — you were in an altered reality, and not just a bare and sterile classroom.

It's an approach to learning that catches the kids' attention very powerfully. At that age, they absolutely love it when there's a story involved, whether it's a story about math, science, history, literature, or the arts — because they want to experience life, and they have a highly developed sense of adventure, but they aren't old enough to go out and experience real life for themselves. The teacher's job is to scale it down so they can experience it in stories and theater and music and painting.

When they start to leave the Feeling Years at about age 12, they enter the Will Power years of adolescence from 12 to 18. Few people understand that this is the time when you *should* take them out of the classroom and get them engaged in doing real-life things. It's no longer a time for only studying things in books; it's time to introduce them to real life by helping them have their own adventures. In our school, we've gone to Mexico, where we lived and served in an orphanage, and we've gone to India, where we met the Dalai Lama.

Each of the six-year stages of a child's development has its own unique best practices for capturing the children's enthusiasm and interests at that age, and for bringing it to the curriculum.

Maria Montessori, the famous educator, said that when children reach age thirteen, you should put them on a bus and start driving them around and not let them off until they're eighteen. (laughs)

**Q:** You've given examples from Pre-K to middle school and beyond, and when it comes to getting children excited about learning, their feelings seem to be important at every stage. You're saying that the teacher needs to get to know them deeply, and find out what they're interested in, and make use of those natural wellsprings of energy and enthusiasm to help them move forward in their academic studies.



**Nitai:** That's exactly it. When I began teaching, I was intrigued by a document that Paramhansa Yogananda developed for a school that he started in India. He called it the Psychological Chart. It was a way to help you find out, among other things, what the student's deepest motivations are. I'm currently adapting it for a document that we'll call the Student Portrait.

It was a little confusing at first to figure out how to use it, because it covers so many facets of a child's character. But the point is that when a child comes into the classroom, you need to look at the key elements of their life — their family life, their character, their response to being disciplined, and so on. There are twelve categories in all that you can look at, with lots of fine detail, and the insights of the parents can be a great aid in helping you understand the child.

Yogananda used an interesting word: “salient.” You look for the salient characteristic of the child — what is the core motivator in that child? And then you can use that as a key quality to help you work with them.

It might be something that’s coming from the child’s life outside of school, or it might be a special quality of the child’s own nature.

There was a boy in one of my classes who was extremely competitive. It was the boy’s salient quality, and I always had to take it into account, or else it would get out of hand and cause a disruption. But if I accounted for it, we were able to find a way to make school work really well for him.



To keep it fresh in his mind, I would walk out to PE with him and talk about competition, and what it means to win and lose; because otherwise he would go out and be completely focused on winning.

One of my former students who’s now a young adult works as a chef at a famous yoga retreat. In high school, the only salient quality I could find that really captured his interest was food. He was fairly oblivious of everything else, but his eyes lit up the moment you mentioned food. So we were able to work with that quality to make school interesting and motivating for him.

I’ve found that you can use this approach to help almost any child. Sometimes their salient quality will shift — there will be a clear characteristic that evolves into something a little different, perhaps because

of events in the child's life, or some inner transformation. But there's usually one salient quality, and it gives you a very useful clue for zeroing-in on the child's interests.

Knowing each child's salient quality helps break any tendency to think of the kids as cogs in the machine, because every one of us is absolutely unique.

Q: In an earlier chapter, "It's Time We Started Raising Organic Children," you quoted a *New York Times* article. The author lamented that kids today are praised for earning good grades, but they aren't learning about grit and perseverance and enthusiasm, and how to get along with people, and other qualities that are crucial for success and happiness. We've all heard of people who didn't have much formal education, but who were successful because of their drive, initiative, curiosity, and their ability to get along with others.

Nitai: Yes, and it's wonderful that educators today are starting to realize this. It's related to the idea that kids need to be themselves, and that we need to do the things with them that are meant for kids, rather than force them to be conforming to the adult world all the time. So, yes, I completely agree. I scratch my head, because it's hard to understand why people can't see that.

Even at the level of grades and test scores, the research tells us very clearly that happy kids perform better than stressed kids. It seems so obvious — and why did we go the other way? Why did we imagine that by pushing and pressuring we would get more learning?

Q: It seems like not understanding how a car works so you can put the right fuel in it.

Nitai: Yes. (laughs) It's like putting gasoline in an electric engine because you don't understand what it needs to function properly.

Q: I read a book by two co-authors whose previous work I admired, and in a chapter on education, they were ranting that all of this new stuff about feeling-based education is hogwash, and that the traditional ways of teaching are just fine. And never mind if children today are exposed to violent video games, because they're basically good kids and they won't be affected.

I was surprised, because I knew the authors to be rigorous researchers and independent thinkers. But they were captured by this idea, and I realized that they were reacting to the kind of feeling-based education that

is truly going in the wrong direction, where teachers latch onto the idea that feelings of all kinds are good. “It’s healthy for the kids to scream and shout and express their anger openly, and we shouldn’t make them suppress it.” And I realized it’s because they aren’t aware of the difference between raw emotions and refined feelings. They don’t understand that it’s essential to help kids learn to direct their emotions in ways that will support learning and help them thrive as human beings.



*The LWS second-grade classroom rules*

Nitai: People tend to judge any movement on the basis of what’s happening at the fringe. The topics in our Education for Life approach are the topics of life itself, and of eternal truths as we’ve translated them to the world of the child. They are the ideas that describe how life works at every stage. There are endless ramifications to explore, and I’ve been blessed to be able to specialize in the particular application of those ideas in education.

Q: There’s an idea that we know from *Education for Life*, that what all humans are seeking is to experience ever-increasing happiness and to avoid suffering. And when we can tap into that basic human longing at school, it seems to release a tremendous amount of energy in the children.

Nitai: Yes, and it's unfortunate that the education establishment tries to press kids into the same mold while ignoring that very powerful natural drive to be happy.

There are natural laws of how human life works. Those laws are a feature of a universe that is constructed for the purpose of helping souls learn to be happy and successful. And helping children to explore how life works is tremendously important at all ages.

Kids are always doing it anyway, and in some ways they're better at it than we are, because we adults tend to let our thinking processes get in the way.

Children are constantly exploring life and experimenting. What will happen if I throw this ball over that bush? What will happen if I dance in the water? What will happen if I eat this new food? To be a teacher who can value that, and see it as a core feature of an ideal education, puts us in touch with how the process of education works, rather than just artificially trying to redirect behavior.

I tell people, "You want to get into the child's world." And they respond, "Well, I was over there with the kid and they weren't really doing anything..." And I'll say, "Go back!" (laughs) Because they *were* doing something – and maybe they weren't doing anything that made sense to you, but they were doing something that made lots of sense to them, and we need to try to tune in to that.

Q: When I talk to the teachers at the Living Wisdom Schools, they say that if a child is doing art, for example, it can be harmful for an adult to rush up with their own ideas and say, "I really love that!" Or, "That looks like an airplane!" Because you're imposing an idea that might not be the child's own. The teachers tell me that a more fruitful approach is to say, "Oh – you put so much blue in there!" And get them talking about what's coming out of their own inner world.

Nitai: Exactly. That's what motivates me to try to keep spreading these methods as best I can, so that more and more five-year-olds can start their lives in harmony with these principles that will give them success and happiness in life, instead of having to learn them, perhaps painfully, a lot later.

# Meet the Teachers



## 23. A Conversation with Former LWS Second Grade Teacher Kshama Kellogg

**Q:** A defining feature of the Living Wisdom Schools is the emphasis on adapting the curriculum and the teachers' interactions with the students to their special needs in the years from 6 to 12 — the “Feeling Years,” as they're called in *Education for Life*, the book that outlines the schools' philosophy.

Can you tell us how you address your students' need to have their feelings brought into the educational process, and how it's done throughout the school?

**Kshama:** When we talk about the Stages of Maturity that are discussed in *Education for Life*, we're really speaking of how humans naturally develop and grow.

The Foundation Years from birth to age six are the time when children develop their awareness of the physical body and senses. Little children are constantly moving and touching and tasting, and generally getting to know the physical world, and how to live in their bodies. But when they begin to enter the next phase, from 6 to 12, they start wanting to relate to their emotional life, and to learn how to deal with the feeling side of their nature.

It's a very social time, with a major emphasis on learning to relate appropriately to others. With children in the Feeling Years, we as teachers need to devote a great deal of time to help them understand the emotions that may be running through them in various situations. We need to give them the skills to bring their emotions into a place of calm feeling and understanding, and we can do that with a broad array of classroom



practices. First and foremost, by being deeply aware of where each student is in their development, and what their next natural growth point can be.

We do an enormous amount of teaching through storytelling and the arts – the “media of feeling” including music and dance and theater. For children at this age, anything that is heart-opening can become a highly effective medium for teaching the curriculum.

In math, for example, we find that it’s tremendously helpful when they can connect their feelings to the subject. With my second graders, I might bring in stuffed animals to help them relate to certain math concepts. Or we’ll act out the concepts, because it brings math to life in a way that they can connect with and remember. It’s much more motivating and engaging than only using workbooks and the standard manipulative tools.

**Q:** Education for Life says that when we fail to guide children in their emotional development at this age, they will feel that something’s missing, and they’ll be more likely to rebel and tune out of school in their teen years.

The Living Wisdom Schools have shown that this needn’t happen, if the students can feel that their emotional needs are being met, especially their need for inspiration and high ideals. Education for Life laments the practice of cramming children’s heads with facts at this age, to the neglect of teaching them to work positively with their feelings as an important component of their ability to learn.

**Kshama:** In our school, we find that when the teachers are able to connect with the children at the level where they’re naturally growing, the learning flows much more easily and naturally. Children at this stage are deeply engaged in imaginative play and creativity. So it’s no surprise that when we bring their feelings into the learning process, and help them learn to work with their feelings constructively, they resonate with school. When you can find ways to make what they’re studying come alive for them at a feeling level, they begin to experience school as a very interesting place of growth.

**Q:** When you’re creating lesson plans, are you trying to bring the feeling element into them?

**Kshama:** We’re doing it all the time. But first I think we need to make a clear distinction between “feelings” and “emotions.” There’s a very large difference between raw emotions and refined feelings. Our job as

educators is to help the children be aware of their inner states and learn how to transform any turbulent emotions into calm, positive feelings.

It's not at all a question of encouraging them to express their emotions willy-nilly. We're trying to help them understand how to use their feelings in positive, expansive, mature ways that will contribute to their happiness and success.

*Q: Education for Life* points out that refined feelings enable us to tell the difference between right and wrong. We don't decide if something is right or wrong based on reason alone, but by feeling it. The author believes it's a disaster when children aren't taught to consult their calm feelings as a guide to what's right and true.



*Kshama:* Our children receive an enormous amount of support for becoming aware of the difference. The teachers use conflict resolution techniques and other proven tools to help them handle the emotionally charged issues that are bound to come up at school. We help them increase their awareness of what's happening for them at an emotional level, and we help them understand how they can work with that reality and come to a positive resolution.

*Q:* There's a story about something that happened at the original Living Wisdom School years ago. It snowed overnight, and at recess the children got into a snowball fight. Some of the younger kids were crying, so the

teachers got the kids together to build a snowman. Later, the teachers asked them how they'd felt during the snowball fight and while they were building the snowman together. They said things like, "I felt bad when I saw the little kids crying, but it felt great to build a snowman." The teachers recognized a heaven-sent opportunity to draw the children's attention to their feelings of right and wrong.

Kshama: We're constantly helping them work with their feelings in all kinds of situations. We also help them be aware of what's happening for other people in moments of conflict or pain, and we help them develop empathy. They acquire the problem-solving skills to create a healthy and supportive environment, where all of the kids can have a good experience that feels wonderful.



*Cameron and friends*

**Q:** Do you deliberately try to model positive behaviors for them?

Kshama: Modeling is a huge part of the process, but the extremely important first step is to notice what's happening with them.

As adults, we might put our own judgments on the children's actions or emotions — "Don't be angry!" But at LWS, the teachers learn to share

their awareness in ways that will actually help the child understand what's going on and how they can deal with it.

Instead of saying "Oh, you're angry," I might say, "Oh, your face is like this" — where I'm scrunching my eyebrows and making a frowny face. I'm modeling it for them, as a way to help them begin to find a solution.

I'll say, "Your face looks like this — you might be feeling angry." They'll want to look up and see what's happening on my face, and it gives them an awareness of what's happening internally for them. It's giving them a connection to the emotion that goes along with the experience they're having. We're helping them make that connection very consciously, so they can start to find a happier place.

Another example of how we work with their feelings is a situation that comes up in art class. Very often, children are conditioned to seek adult approval for what they're drawing, instead of being encouraged to be alive in their own experience.

A child will come up to you and say, "Do you like it?" And instead of giving them back, "Oh, that's a beautiful painting!" Or, "Oh, how lovely!" Or, "I love it!" you can say things like "Wow! I loved watching you paint that!" You're giving them back their own experience. You're celebrating them doing it, and validating their reality without imposing your own judgment on what they've created. So you're helping them be aware of their feelings, instead of creating a situation where their feelings are devalued and they might be tempted to suppress them, which isn't productive.

I can say, "Wow! Look at all the color you put into your painting!" So I'm not announcing whether I like it, but I'm acknowledging that they've put a ton of color into their piece.

It may sound like a trivial thing, but we find that it's very important. When you give their experience back to them in a way that they can own it, it has huge consequences.

With really young children who aren't adept at drawing, as adults we may try to guess what they've drawn, because we want to connect with them and support what they're doing. But very often what they've drawn isn't at all what we think it is, and as soon as we put our own assumption onto it, it changes their relationship to it.

You can ask them, “Tell me about your painting — what did you do here? Tell me about this part.” It gets them sharing, and it keeps them alive in their own experience of it.

Validating their feelings is a very healthy step toward helping them develop a natural, relaxed self-confidence. It’s a major step toward helping them become happily engaged people.



From age 6 to 12, children have a pressing need to be introduced to inspiring figures that speak to their hearts. There are many educational approaches that use fairy tales and storytelling with children at this age, or that engage them in studying the lives of inspiring historical figures. At LWS, it’s a hundred percent of what we’re doing with our theater program. The yearly all-school plays are about some of the most wonderful role models that are available to humanity — they are about human treasures that can serve as models for all people. We’ve put on plays about

Buddha, Bernadette of Lourdes, Kwan Yin, Jesus, Yogananda, Mirabai, Hafiz, St. Francis and Clare, Krishna, Joan of Arc, Martin Luther King, St. Teresa of Avila, George Washington Carver, Abraham Lincoln, and the Dalai Lama.

Every child has a role in the play, and the learning that takes place is beyond measure. The kids are not only learning about the life of the subject of the play, they’re studying the culture and history of the time in which they lived. By memorizing the words of these great role models, they gain an internal library of wisdom and inspiration that will remain with them for many years.

**Q:** Does a feeling-based approach help the children become internally motivated to learn, instead of the teacher having to force-feed them or resort to a system of punishment and rewards?

Kshama: It creates a safe environment where the children can be who they are and know that there's safety in the relationship with their teachers, and between student and student. It creates a classroom community that's based on respect and kindness and safety, so that real sharing and learning can take place.

It's enormously important for kids at this age, and it's why we devote such tremendous energy to creating a caring classroom and a caring school community - because it's the indispensable foundation for a healthy learning environment.

Q: The atmosphere in the classrooms I've visited is remarkable. When I grew up, the teachers spent lots of time "herding cats," because the kids' energy was wanting to be somewhere else and the teacher had to rope it back into the unfortunate fact that we had to do math or history or English. Whereas at LWS I can walk into Ruth's third-grade classroom, or Lilavati's kindergarten, or Gary's middle school classroom, or Craig's fourth and fifth grade class, and I'll see that the kids aren't rebelling. The kids are enjoying what they're doing.

Kshama: When summer comes, the kids always beg us to keep the school open year-round. Many of them would prefer to be at school, learning and being with their school community, rather than heading off to their camps and other summer programs.

Q: One of the results of these seemingly "extracurricular" activities at LWS - working with their feelings through theater arts and music and field trips and painting - is that you get a very focused atmosphere in the classroom when it's time for academics. In Gary's middle school classroom, I'll see kids sitting around a table doing math, and maybe one of them will say something and they'll laugh, but then they're right back and centered in their work.

Kshama: Mm-hm. It's a question of understanding what a child's motivation is at this stage, and knowing how to work with their reality in ways that help them become happily engaged. It's about giving them many joyful success experiences that will help them grow into a strong sense of their abilities, starting where they are.

The attention that the teachers devote to finding out who each child is, and helping them at their own level in every aspect of their being, and not just academics, contributes tremendously to help them develop a strong

sense of their own identity and their ability to master challenges. It's a joyful experience that carries over very powerfully into their studies.

Whether it's math, science, writing, or reading, we're constantly looking for ways to inspire the children to care about what they're learning, because that's when real learning takes place. And they absolutely love it.

**Q:** In Craig's fourth and fifth grade classroom, I'll see the kids working in pairs, and their body language makes it absolutely clear that they do not want to be distracted or disturbed.

**Kshama:** The students in my second grade class are seven and eight years old, so they're still developing their early writing skills. We use a workshop approach, where we invite them to write from their life experiences and from their own sense of the world as it's developing for them. So it's very real for them, and it provides a safe venue for them to be enthusiastically engaged.



They'll tell stories about their experiences, or they'll draw on their imagination to create wonderful fictional pieces. But it's all about drawing on life as they understand it, and bringing it onto the page, instead of the teacher passing out story prompts that might feel artificial. Giving them ways to bring their own enthusiasm into the process is a wonderful step toward helping them become thoroughly engaged learners.

In science, our goal, especially with the younger ones, is to create a sense of awe and appreciation for the world and the universe we live in, and a feeling of connectedness, so that even as we're learning about science, we aren't just thinking about how we can use our knowledge to make a profit, but we're understanding how everything in the world is connected, so we'll love it and want to take care of it and protect it.

**Q:** Tanaka Shozo, a famous Japanese conservationist of the early twentieth century, said, "The question of rivers is not a question of rivers, but of the human heart."

Kshama: Yes, and we do a lot with nature, because it's hugely important for the students, especially if they're growing up in the city, to make sure they're connecting with the natural world. And when we're doing lab sciences, we're making sure they are coming to life in a way that is interesting and tangible for them, and that helps them make connections outside the classroom so that they can really understand why they're learning it. It's an extremely experiential approach to the curriculum, and as you said, it touches their hearts, so they'll remember and care.

Q: I talked with Gary about his approach to math in middle school. He gives the kids daily problem sets that they work on in class, and he corrects them and goes over every problem with each student individually until he's sure that they've grasped and interiorized the concepts.

They're challenged at the edge of what they can handle individually, with the result that they have an ongoing sense of the joy of overcoming challenges. There are one or two math aides working with the students in the classroom, and it's almost entirely individual tutoring.

The teachers and aides are always checking to make sure the students are working at the upper limit of their abilities, "pressing their edges" and feeling very good about overcoming the obstacles.

Kshama: It's the same approach we take throughout the school. We're giving them success experiences and a depth of understanding, so they can feel they're holding the material in a way that they can apply it to new situations.

In public schools and academically focused private schools, the teachers are often required to cover a certain amount of material within a prescribed time. It means that they're pressured to herd the students through the curriculum together at the same pace. But then you can end up overly concerned with "studying to the test," with the result that there's a very thin layer of comprehension.

Our goal is to take the students as deeply into the material as we can, and give them the support and positive experiences to internalize it and understand the concepts in depth, so they'll be able to use that understanding as a building block to take the next step.

We'll have students working on many individual levels of math in our classroom, and we're always discovering creative ways to support them individually. It's vitally important that they feel engaged at their own level, and not just be spinning their wheels, quickly completing an assignment

and then being bored while they wait for the rest of the class, or struggling because the other students are working on something they aren't ready for.

**Q:** There seems to be a strange magic at LWS, where the attention to the individual is like a jet booster for academic success. If you weren't familiar with the school, you might think, "Okay, the teachers are spending way too much time on the individual child, and they're going much too deep in the academic subjects. They're doing lots of art and theater, and how are the kids going to move ahead at a reasonable pace?"

Yet we continually hear stories of second-graders at LWS doing fourth-grade math, and kindergarten kids using fourth-grade math concepts, and eighth graders testing into second-year or third-year high school math.

Perhaps you touched on the answer: that you don't have one-third of the class being bored out of their minds because you're going too slowly for them, and another third of the class struggling because you're going too fast, and only a third of the class being more or less taught at their level. When you're teaching the individual child, it's more efficient, and the class can move forward at the fastest possible speed.



*Vinca Lu gives her Quality speech at the 2018 LWS End-of-Year Ceremony.*

Several years ago, there was an exceptionally talented girl at LWS who was the only sixth grader in California to achieve a perfect score on the Math Olympiads M exam for eighth grade and below, out of 19,541 students who took the test. She was highly gifted, but at LWS she was able to go at her own pace.

In 2018, another sixth grader at LWS, Vinca Lu, got 23 correct answers on the Olympiad E for sixth graders, scoring in the top 2 percent internationally. And on the Olympiad M test which is designed to challenge eighth graders Vinca (who by age should be a fifth grader) scored 24 out of 25, again placing in the top 2 percent internationally. Her teacher, Gary McSweeney, told me that Vinca received no special preparation for the tests, and that it was evidence of how the advanced students are rigorously challenged in math at LWS.



*Fourth and fifth grade teacher Craig Kellogg poses for a photo with a student after the Year-End Ceremony*

Kshama: The students aren't all punched from the same mold here; they are highly individual, and each one will have areas of strength and challenge. The problem with a cookie-cutter approach, where you're trying to stamp out standardized children with standardized math skills who can pass standardized tests, is that it ignores the inescapable reality of individual differences.

We keep our class sizes deliberately small and the student-teacher ratio low so that we can connect with every student every day and understand where they are and what they need, not only in their academic subjects but in their social and emotional development.

Also, we have a community of teachers all of whom either meditate or have some kind of mindfulness practice. For myself, I find it's a huge contribution to my being able to walk into the classroom and be fully present with my students, able to relate and make connections and have insights about the kind of help each child needs, on a level that's very real and not just superficial.

**Q:** How do you work with students who are coming into your classroom for the first time?

Kshama: Fill them up with love! (laughs) Really, I'm quite serious. On their first day, we welcome them into the class community with open hearts.

We're about to start school now, and most of the students will be returning, but there will be a few new ones, and my job is to welcome everyone into our family and help them feel they are welcome, that they're important, that we're all starting a year-long journey of friendship and growth together, and that we need to be a supportive community for each other so that everyone can grow.

We create lots of experiences for them that are collaborative and that build those connections, and we're always making sure there are lots of opportunities for them to connect with each other one-to-one.

It requires an enormous amount of modeling helpful behaviors and coaching them on the playground so that they'll learn how to make bonds of friendship and how to play together successfully. Those bonds always carry over to the classroom.

It's absolutely crucial to remember that every student is unique. Last year, there was a student in my class who was facing some temporary issues in his personal life. The kids were aware of what he was going

through, and every single one of them rallied around him to create an environment where he could feel supported and blossom. We created special moments where he was connecting one-on-one with the other kids, and moments where we were all supporting him, and we watched him rocket through the challenges.

An important aspect of creating a caring classroom community is that every teacher meets with every student in the days just before the start of the school year. The kids bring their school supplies, and we use that time to set up their desks, help them pick a backpack hook, and do lots of these little practical things, in addition to spending quality time together to make a connection before they arrive as a group on the first day of school.

Whether it's the start of their LWS experience, or if they're returning, it reflects the experience they'll have every day, with a growing personal network of connections with the teachers and students. From the very start, we're encouraging enthusiasm, engagement, and the joy of overcoming challenges at their own pace.

It's fantastically rewarding to see our students thriving, personally and academically, and to follow their successes through their years here and beyond. We're always discovering new ways to help them, and their successes in academics and increasing happiness prove the value of what we're doing.



## 24. A Conversation with LWS

### Kindergarten Teacher Lilavati Aguilar

Although Lilavati taught kindergarten at the time we spoke, she is intimately familiar with the needs of children throughout the Feeling Years, having taught for seventeen years in a public school, then first grade, yoga, and Spanish at LWS.

**Q:** Can you tell us about your background, perhaps going back as far as your childhood?

**Lilavati:** When our sixth-grade teacher asked us, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” I remember unhesitatingly raising my hand and saying, “A teacher!”

I loved school, not so much for the school as for the learning, and I deeply wanted to be a teacher. I got sidetracked for a while, working as a bookkeeper. But when I had kids, I decided that I didn’t want to be a working mom, so I got a daycare license and started caring for a half-dozen kids in our home. When the kids reached preschool age, I started a preschool that ran for three and a half years, and I loved the experience so much that I returned to school to earn a teaching credential. So that’s how I came full circle back to my dream of being a teacher.



**Q:** Where did you start teaching?

Lilavati: I liked being with the littler kids, so I taught kindergarten, then I spent several years as an ESL teacher (English as a Second Language). Running around teaching kids from kindergarten through eighth grade all day was a bit hectic, and I eventually decided that I would prefer something a little more focused, so for the next four years I taught seventh grade at Half Moon Bay, then I moved to Castro Valley where I taught middle school for seventeen years.

When I heard of Education for Life, I was immediately intrigued. I took a wonderful workshop with Nitai Deranja, the co-founder of the Living Wisdom School, and I remember thinking, “I believe this is how education should be.”

I realized there were parts of Education for Life that you could apply very effectively in public school. For example, EFL is very direct and experiential — it’s not just all about learning by reading books. So I became more hands-on in my teaching, giving the kids activities that helped them experience how the concepts they were learning could be applied in real life.

For example, if we were studying the archaeology of Early Man, we would make tools and bows and arrows, and we would bury them so that another class could come along and do an archaeological dig and excavate them.

I found that it was very motivating for them, and that the learning was deeper and more memorable, because kids always learn more when they can experience something directly, rather than just study it in the abstract.

In Education for Life, we’re constantly focusing on the child’s highest potential, and figuring out how we can help them realize their best self. As teachers we’re always asking “What does this child’s best self look like? What is their highest potential as a human being?”

When I was teaching sixth grade, where the Feeling Years end and the Will Power Years begin, at around age 12, I could see how they were starting to make that major transition from being idealistic little kids who loved stories and fantasy play and art, to teenagers who were more interested in challenges to their will power. And, of course, that’s why teaching middle school can be a rough ride. (laughs)

At any rate, even though I was teaching a big class in a public school, I found that I could encourage higher qualities in the kids, like kindness and

even-mindedness and courage, that are essential features of a refined human being.

That's a very strong part of the Education for Life curriculum. You're looking to encourage and nurture their higher qualities, and it's a very powerful way to teach, because it makes them feel that their needs are truly being met on a deep level, and that we aren't just trying to stuff their heads with facts. We're bringing their hearts into the process, and it's profoundly motivating because they feel that we're acknowledging and honoring their reality.

The experience of bringing EFL principles into a public school classroom showed me how helpful it is for kids to give them the non-sectarian spiritual tools of yoga and meditation. With the backing of the school administration, I started a middle school yoga club. We meditated in class, and it was immediately obvious how it was helping them. When you teach kids how get focused and calm before they take a test, by taking a deep breath and relaxing for as little as a minute, the test results show that they actually do better.

The kids could feel the difference, and they loved it, and the parents were supportive, too, although there was some initial concern about whether it was "spiritual," which you have to avoid in public school. But they were won over when they saw how it was helping their kids.

When I left the public school and came to Living Wisdom, I was a little worried about leaving the excellent yoga program we'd put in place — they had started calling it Mindfulness in the Public Schools, and it was going really well. But they brought somebody in to take it on, and I could see that they were doing a good job, so I was able to let it go.

I have to say that I'm happier at Living Wisdom School, because everything just makes more sense. I don't have to be so careful with the vocabulary, because meditation and yoga are embraced as an accepted part of the curriculum, and as useful tools for helping the kids.

**Q:** What was the transition like to teaching at LWS?

**Lilavati:** One thing that stands out is that there's a great deal of collaboration here among the teachers. Before I started, I took the online Education for Life program where you can talk with EFL teachers all over the world. You can try an aspect of EFL in the classroom, and then talk about it and receive suggestions for improving it. There's a ton of online conferencing, and it's a great way to connect.

When I came here, our director, Helen Purcell, told me she was looking for someone to co-teach first grade with Danielle, so that's how I started. I'm teaching kindergarten full-time now, and I love teaching more than ever. I like the kids, and I have a lot of energy for what I'm doing. And even though the first year was a bit of a scramble because I was teaching yoga and Spanish to all of the kids from kindergarten to eighth grade, I had lots of support and it was fun to get to know all seventy-plus students and their teachers.



*At LWS the older and younger kids mix freely  
and play together as friends.*

**Q:** Having taught in public school and at LWS, you're familiar with what it's like for the kids in both systems.

**Lilavati:** One thing that struck me right away is that all of the kids here, especially those who'd been with the program since kindergarten, but also the kids who'd come recently, were kinder. They were also more focused, but it was the kindness and openness that really struck me.

In public school, everyone's a little guarded and the students have to hold their energy back – you hear about cliques, and the kids will have their safe groups, but at LWS you can see that their hearts are open and

that they know how to get along together regardless of the differences in age. The middle schoolers really do take care of the younger ones, and the little ones feel that they can go to the older kids for help or support or fun.

During the year when I taught Spanish to all of the kids, it struck me that they really knew how to be focused, and that they could pay attention, and that they were more centered. I think it's partly due to meditation, because the kids have time every day to settle down and get centered.

Q: Like you, I've noticed the quality of kindness in the kids, how they cooperate, and how there's an absence of putting people down. I'll see them working together in pairs, and it's remarkable how absorbed they are. Teachers with big classes in public schools will often spend lots of time on behavioral issues, but the learning here seems to go more smoothly and efficiently.



Lilavati: Yes, because each child gets to go at his or her own pace. If they're advanced, they don't have to wait for the class to catch up, so they aren't just sitting there getting bored. And if they're struggling and need attention, there's a teacher or an aide or another student who's more than happy to help. But if a student has the ability to race ahead in math, for

example, they won't be held back, because there's support for them to learn at their own level.

When I co-taught first grade with Danielle, we had some very gifted children. One little girl was starting fourth-grade math, and one of the boys was doing third-grade math. He was into inventions and figuring out how things work, and we were able to give him time to explore on his own or with the other students, with plenty of support from the teachers.

**Q:** How do you get to know the kids so that you can begin to help them individually?

**Lilavati:** You start making connections from the very first day. Eye contact is very important — making sure that when they come into the classroom they're acknowledged. It might be with a hug, a handshake, or something else that says, "You're here. I see you. You see me. We're connected. Let's have fun today." It happens at the start of every school day.

Also, as teachers we're given the time and freedom to observe each child and see what sparks their interest, and when you see that twinkle in their eye, you have the freedom to notice it and encourage it.

**Q:** Can you describe a typical school day?

**Lilavati:** Kindergarten is quite different from the other grades, because the kindergarteners haven't really entered the Feeling Years. They're still in the Foundation Years from birth to age six, when they're working on their gross motor skills, gaining their balance by playing on the jungle gym, and so on. So they require a lot more play time, and at this age they're learning by playing in the sand, building things with blocks, digging in the dirt, and running around.

When I co-taught first grade, we would start with a fun activity to raise their energy and get them focused. They could decide if they wanted to play with Legos or draw, so they had some power to choose, with an underlying structure. Then we would have Circle Time and sing a few songs and chants, and we'd meditate a little and do a little yoga and stretching. It was the time for everybody to get centered and connected at the start of the school day.

After Circle Time we would go for a walk to get some fresh air and oxygen into their brains before we settled down to do math. All of the grades do math first thing in the morning, and you can feel the math energy running through the school. (laughs)

Then it's time for snacks. And again, everybody's on the playground together — the kindergarteners are right there with the eighth graders, and yes, they really do play together. It's fun to see a giant eighth grader and a tiny kindergartener playing basketball, and how the eighth graders are supporting them. We've had some really good basketball players among the little guys, and it's amazing to watch them. (laughs)

After snacks, we usually have language arts. In kindergarten we emphasize reading and phonics, but we also do Writer's Workshop, where the kids can write about something that interests them. They write some amazing poetry and stories, and their best work is published in the school literary magazine at the end of the year, so they get to experience what it's like to be a published author!



In the afternoon, they'll have electives like Spanish and singing, and core subjects like science, social studies, and art.

**Q:** We haven't talked about the Feeling Years specifically. What are your thoughts on teaching kids in that stage of their lives?

**Lilavati:** I've been giving a great deal of thought to that question. At around age six, sometime between kindergarten and first grade, the children are transitioning from the Foundation Years to the Feeling Years. As I mentioned, kindergarten needs to be very playful and physical and hands-on, but in first grade they're starting to awaken to their social world.

At the start of kindergarten, and earlier, there's a lot of what I call "parallel play," where they're playing together but they're really just sitting side by side and playing.

But they're also starting to interact a little more in kindergarten, and you can see how the social-emotional component is starting to come in, and how they're playing together in a more meaningful way. I spend lots of time thinking about how to get the kids to connect in positive ways, and how to encourage that.



One of the key things we do at LWS to encourage cooperation, kindness, and helpfulness is to notice it and point it out to them. If a child is doing something that expresses a higher feeling, by showing kindness or being helpful, we'll point it out so it doesn't go unnoticed, and they'll learn how those positive attitudes work and how they feel. I might say, "You put away the blocks after you were done! That was so helpful!"

During our summer camp I watched two little boys who wanted to use the drinking fountain. It was a great big concrete thing with a water spout on top, and one of the boys climbed up so he could reach the water, but then he couldn't push the button to make the water go; and when the other boy pushed the button for him so he could take a drink, I walked up and said, "Wow! You pushed the button so he could get a drink! That was so helpful!" They both smiled real wide, and then the little boy got down

and gave the other boy a great big hug and said, “You’re a good friend!” It was so adorable — you could feel the warm fuzzies all around. (laughs)

When they help each other, and you point it out to them, they’ll notice how they’re feeling and learn that it makes them feel happy. Or you can ask them, “How did that feel?” so they can articulate it for themselves.

If they grab a toy and the other child starts crying, they might be surprised. “Why are you crying? All I did was grab the toy!” You can ask them to stop and think about it. “How did that feel? That didn’t feel so good, huh? Well, how can we go back and make it better?”

Just as you have to teach them reading, writing, and arithmetic, you have to teach them how kindness works – how it feels when you’re kind, and how it feels when you aren’t kind. So there’s a great deal of teaching that really needs to happen, beyond the academics.

**Q:** Does it create a better learning environment when you’re addressing those issues of feeling that could otherwise become a distraction in the classroom — for example, if they’re arguing, getting angry, or just wanting to act out, and they don’t know how to manage their energy in a positive way?

Lilavati: Yes, that’s exactly why you need a school like this, where everyone feels safe and connected, because it frees their brains so that they can use what we call their “executive skills” in the prefrontal lobe. When children feel safe, connected, and loved, they’re much more free to learn.

**Q:** Do these behavioral things weave together with what you’re trying to accomplish with the curriculum — in math, science, and language arts?

Lilavati: They do. It’s something I’ve definitely noticed here. We’re always devoting a great deal of attention to helping the kids get back to a place where everyone is feeling positive. If there’s some kind of kerfuffle between the kids, an altercation of some kind, you make sure to address it right away, and you make sure it’s a learning experience for them, not a punitive experience, so that they can see what doesn’t work and how it feels; then you can help them correct it and understand how that feels.

You might say, “Let’s rewind the situation. What *could* you have said? You wanted the block. Okay, instead of grabbing it, what could you say?” And if you do it every time something comes up, you end up with a safe, connected environment, so that when math comes around the kids feel completely free to concentrate.

**Q:** How does learning take place at Living Wisdom School? In math, for example, what is the instruction like? How is it different from what would happen in a classroom with thirty kids?



*Middle school teacher Gary McSweeney tutors sixth-grader Vinca.*

**Lilavati:** In math class, again, there's constant individualized learning. Also, we make it very experiential, so it's not just all workbooks and lecturing. You have to make it more than a brain exercise; you have to make it a positive experience that engages them fully.

When I taught first grade, the kids were learning about money and we had them make art that they could sell. We gave the kindergarteners some real money and invited them to come in and buy the items. The first graders had to tell the "customer" how much the item cost, and accept the money and make change. So, while they were learning about money they were also learning math. It was a fun experience and very real for them, and they learned a tremendous amount because it was so completely hands-on. We do lots of those kinds of activities to make learning a real-life experience for them.

**Q:** Mahita, the former LWS kindergarten teacher, described how the kids were using fourth-grade math concepts in kindergarten.

Lilavati: Yes, because it's allowed. At LWS they can go as far as they are able and want to, and they don't have to wait for the other kids.

Q: What are your connections like with the kids?

Lilavati: When I taught Spanish in all the grades, it was a wonderful way to make those connections because I met everyone, and now they all know me.

I was impressed by how open the students were toward me, even at the beginning. They are so open to the people they meet. "Oh, here's a new person, I wonder what they're like." Rather than, "Oh, here's a new person, better watch out until I know what's going on with them." Which is what you're more likely to find in some other schools.



*Paula and Milan.*

Q: Is there a different feeling between public school and Living Wisdom School, in terms of not having the state looking over your shoulder and expecting you to meet a set of prescribed standards? The kids obviously need to be achieving at a certain level, but how does it compare with the pressures of teaching a state-mandated curriculum?

Lilavati: We have very high expectations around academics. We look at the Common Core standards, to make sure the kids are keeping up, but the simple fact is that so many of our kids are going far beyond Common Core, because of the individual instruction.

We make assessments, but not with the nervous feeling, “Oh gosh, how are they going to perform?” — because most of them will be going so far beyond the test standards. Our focus is on “How high can they go?” As opposed to “Are they going to meet the standard?”

We’re constantly looking at their highest potential, and finding ways to encourage them to push their limits. How high can they go and still maintain a certain comfort level? Again, rather than “Oh my God, we have all these tests we have to give them.”

**Q:** If a child is working at the upper level of their comfort zone, how would you work with them?

Lilavati: Again, it’s individual. I’m thinking of a little girl who’s in first grade, but she’s doing third-grade math. She was working with measurements and she was kind of pushing her edges, because she was very interested and she loves math, but she wasn’t comfortable with measurements. She was working on an assignment to measure her classmates to see how tall they were, and make a little graph. And because she wasn’t sure how to use a yardstick or a tape measure, it was stretching her limits. But she really wanted to go there, and because we had two teachers in the class, I had the freedom to spend a whole period explaining tape measures and yardsticks.

Socially, she was fine with going up to the other kids and saying, “Can you come over here so I can measure you?” The kids thought it was great fun, but she was at the edge of her learning when it came to converting inches to feet, and dealing with tools that had metric measurements on one side and inches and feet on the other.

At Living Wisdom School the children are always pushing against their limits, not because we’re pushing them, but because they want to learn, and because it’s calmly rewarding for them when they’re able to go at their own pace. For us as teachers, it’s just a matter of helping them. That’s true for Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies — we’re challenging them constantly, but the challenge is always very individual, so they’re eager to learn because we’re helping them go one step farther starting at their own level, and that’s very rewarding.

**Q:** In other words, is your role to help the kids have success experiences?

Lilavati: Yes — that’s my job! (laughs) Really, that’s what I think a teacher is supposed to do.

In many schools you're restrained from doing that, if you're with thirty kids, or you're teaching in a middle school and seeing ninety to a hundred and twenty kids every day. You do your best, but you can't possibly give your complete focus to each child in that kind of situation.



*Appearances can be deceiving! These children aren't just having fun putting on the annual LWS all-school play. They are deeply engaged with lessons in history, geography, language arts, communication skills, presentation, self-control, concentration, diction, public speaking, acting, singing, memorization, and not infrequently, math and science.*

As a teacher here, you have time to get to know each child and make a real connection, and to get a deep understanding of what brings their energy up, what they're interested in, what their passion is, and what their talents are. And then you can help them build on their talents and inclinations and help them overcome their special challenges.

There was a little girl in first grade who was very much into princesses. She was a fantastic artist, and she made beautiful drawings. But math? Not so much. But I knew that I could say to her, "The princess had six shoes, and she bought four more shoes. How many shoes does she have?" You could bring her interests into the part of the curriculum that was a challenge for her.

The Feeling Years are a very open time for learning, especially about higher values. It's why we're very careful when we're choosing books for

them to read — we're always picking books that are going to be uplifting and will support their positive feelings. The Theater Magic program very powerfully fulfills that need for them, too, because it's about an inspiring person or a saint whose life story uplifts the children.

In my first year, we produced a play about Paramhansa Yogananda. It was so much fun, and of course the kids are amazing. Every child in the school plays a role, and their maturity really shines. Even the littlest ones are so professional about what they're doing — they want to know their lines and their cues, and they're very serious because they want to get it just right. Their enthusiasm comes from deep inside them. It's not something we have to press on them.

With the kindergarteners, it's a little different. At that age, it really is more like herding cats, because they're still focused on learning to deal with their bodies and senses. But with the first graders it's a bit easier, because they're entering the Feeling Years, so they can be more focused on their interactions and the inspiration of the play. And by the time they get to middle school they're completely focused and very receptive to the learning that comes from such a huge, expansive learning experience.

I just want to add that I feel immensely blessed to have found Education for Life and to be able to work at Living Wisdom School. I go to work every day knowing that all of the teachers are not only trying to help the students be their best selves, but that they are bringing their own highest self to their role as teachers, and into every part of their life.

It helps that every teacher, no matter what their background, has a spiritual practice of some kind, where they're learning to center themselves so that they can teach from a deep, intuitive calmness.

LWS is a safe environment for the teachers, as well as for the children. If a lesson plan isn't working, or if an encounter with a student needs more attention, we can always find help. We can go to one another and know that we will be thoroughly supported and connected. Just like the kids, we also need to feel safe and loved so that all of our creativity and wisdom can flow into our teaching. We are very fortunate to have this jewel of a school in our area, and I hope that more and more families will find us and recognize what an exceptional place for learning and growth it is.

## 25. Rose Atwell: LWHS Alumna, Teacher, Actor, Chef

A conversation with a Living Wisdom TK-8 School teacher and alum.

**Q:** What was it like to be part of the first graduating class of the original Living Wisdom School High School in 2001?

**Rose:** One of the beautiful things I especially remember from my years at LWS and LWHS is the Service Adventures.

Our school motto was “Service, Adventure, Self-Discovery.” Once a week, we would serve at a women’s shelter or a home that took care of the elderly, or a school for kids with special needs. Reaching out and serving was a highlight of the week for us, because it made our lives so much more meaningful, and it gave us a sense that we could play a helpful role in the wider community, even as young people.

For me, the particular strength of the program was that it allowed us to have adventures and explorations as very young students, along with a very strong academic program, side by side.

Our first year, we traveled across Mexico in a bus, and it was a huge adventure. I remember how we got stranded in the desert temporarily when a flash flood blocked the road, and how we got stranded in the mountains in the snow. It was a super adventure, and I remember totally loving every moment of it. These were high school trips, but I have equally fond memories going back all the way through the earlier grades at LWS.

When it came to academics, my experiences were equally fantastic, because you had so much one-on-one attention that you really couldn’t slip behind. You were working so closely with your teachers every day, and whatever needed to be addressed would always be dealt with right away.

Even when we were travelling, it didn't interfere with academics. I remember taking a final exam in algebra on the flight home from Italy. So it really didn't matter where we were, because we could have these amazing adventures and get really good grades and go to college, and even if it didn't look a certain way, with a box around it like a traditional high school, it was wonderful.



*Rose is an enthusiastic gourmet vegetarian cook. Here, she leads a weekend workshop.*

After graduation I ended up at UC Santa Cruz, where I had a great university experience and received a wonderful education, so there wasn't a conflict between the way we were learning at LWS and the way I approached my studies at a top-flight university.

The teachers at LWS challenged each of us to go at our own best pace with the curriculum, and we had wonderful specialty teachers. That was a beautiful thing about the school, that people from the surrounding community who had gone deep in their fields were ready to share their wisdom and experience with us.

At LWHS we were part of a large community of really smart adults. We had a plethora of highly educated, well-rounded specialty teachers who were enthusiastic about giving us deep information on a variety of subjects outside of what we were learning from our core teachers.

Traveling at a young age was a tremendously important experience for us, because it helped us develop compassion and a strong sense of wanting to be useful in the world, and the confidence that we could truly help.

Here in Silicon Valley, we have one of the best living standards on the planet, and to learn to see other realities and understand the bigger picture was invaluable — to be able to travel and experience other cultures, and share in the happiness that comes from serving.

**Q:** You were accepted by UCSC which has high admissions standards — how did that come about?

**Rose:** The story began in my junior year, when our teacher and school principal, Nitai Deranja, took the whole school to Italy for six months. Of course, it was awesome! (laughs) Then I enrolled at Santa Rosa Junior College, because I had adult friends in the area that I could live with.

After a year of junior college, I was accepted at Dominican University in San Rafael. I thought that Dominican might be a great place, because it was a small school with a beautiful campus, and I felt it might be compatible with my spiritual life; also, they had a condensed four-year program for teachers. But the school wasn't what I expected. It had a much narrower belief system than I was used to, so I left and returned to Santa Rosa JC, which is one of the top junior colleges in the country, and I believe I got a better education there than anywhere else. The school is well-endowed, thanks to the legacy of Luther Burbank, the great botanist who lived in Santa Rosa in first half of the 1900s, and I felt that it had a special blessing, a Burbank blessing, and I had a fantastic experience there. Then, after two years, I applied to a number of UC schools, and I chose Santa Cruz.

**Q:** Who wouldn't?

**Rose:** (laughs) Yes, it's beautiful. But, honestly, Italy was the most amazing experience of all. The six months I studied there were one of the most incredible blessings of my life. I was able to go to a school where all the things I loved and that were most dear to me, and most filled with growth for me, were combined in a single place where my personality, my heart, and my soul were deeply nourished.

**Q:** Where did you live in Italy?

**Rose:** In Assisi, at the Ananda Europa community. I did some work trade hours, serving in the kitchen and learning lots of practical skills. I'm a part-time cook now, and for several years I managed a group kitchen and

taught cooking workshops, because it's something I love and that I discovered working in the large retreat kitchen in Italy.

I'm also a singer, and we had an amazing experience in Italy, touring all over Italy with a choir and singing to large crowds in huge cathedrals. At one point, all of the other sopranos got sick. The director had heard me sing solos from the oratorio that we were performing, so about an hour before the performance the other choir members were saying, "Rose can sing that solo!" So I sang my first solo at a big Italian church that was filled with people, and there was a huge blessing in it.

My schooling with LWHHS, and most particularly during the Service Adventures was absolutely wonderful. I took tests in buses and taxis as we traveled from place to place (laughs), but the focus of the school included many aspects that were profoundly meaningful and growth-filled for me.

It was such a different educational experience, and I absolutely loved it. I fondly remember traveling all over Italy while we were learning at the same time. I took three hours of Italian every morning, and I ended up learning Italian very functionally. I totally loved the Italian culture, which is very beautiful to me.

**Q:** Was it a major adjustment to go from a small private high school and a rural junior college to a major, formal university like UCSC?

**Rose:** Actually, the transition from high school to junior college was the major adjustment — not academically, but because I was very interested in yoga, and I wanted to deepen my spiritual life. My spiritual life was very important to me, and it was very deep, but then I had a session with a Vedic astrologer who said, "You're going to be out in the world for a time." I remember protesting, "Oh, no!" But he said, "You'll be fine. This is important. You have to balance your interests and get some experience in this way."

It was hard, because I'd been totally immersed in a spiritually uplifting environment, and now, here I was, out in the world where I couldn't relate to anyone my age. Then, at Dominican University, I finally decided, "No way!" and I came back and adjusted to what was best for me to do.

Entering UCSC was another big adjustment. It was a challenge. I knew that it was something I had to do, but it felt like I had my feet planted in two boats, and for a while it was very hard to hold a deep yoga practice in that environment, so I was very conflicted.

**Q:** What were you studying?

**Rose:** I had originally planned to study liberal arts and literature and get into teaching, but I ended up taking so many theater classes at the junior college and loving them so much that I ended up majoring in theater. Theater is a form of community, when it's done properly, and I loved that aspect.

I enjoyed my junior college theater program more than anything else. At Santa Cruz, there was a clique of students in the theater department who wanted to get ahead, and I wasn't attracted by that. I was taking theater to get a teaching credential and because I loved it.

The junior college drama department was very different. It was built around community theater, so there were people in their sixties acting alongside us, just because they loved theater. Then you had the first-year college students, and a few people who were deeply serious about theater as a career, but we were all part of a family, and I enjoyed that aspect very much. I wasn't concerned about getting accepted by Juilliard, as some of the others were, because theater for me was about self-expansion and fun.

**Q:** What are you doing now?

**Rose:** I'm a teacher. I teach music, theater, and PE at the Living Wisdom School in Palo Alto, and I teach cooking and yoga and meditation to adults. These are all things I love to do.

**Q:** Do you feel that your life has come full circle?

**Rose:** In a way. I'm eager to build on what I've learned, and to assimilate new ways of sharing and learning, and to keep growing. I could probably go deeper in the arts, but I would also love to incorporate nature and sustainability more in my teaching, and explore how we can care for our planet and learn to grow our own food. That feels very important to me.

All in all, I would give Living Wisdom my highest personal recommendation to parents and who are looking for a great school where their kids will absolutely grow, academically and personally. So here's my personal shout-out: "I recommend Living Wisdom School!"



## 26. Can the Arts Help Children Excel Academically?

A Professional Musician Shares His Thoughts

When David Eby isn't teaching music to children at the Living Wisdom School in Portland, Oregon, he's a professional cellist with The Bodhi Trio, the Oregon Symphony, and the Portland Cello Project.

David also teaches cello at Lewis and Clark College. He leads the Advanced Strings at Oregon Episcopal School, and he's a Teaching Artist for the BRAVO Youth Orchestra, an El Sistema program that brings classical music training to disadvantaged youth. David lives in south Portland with his wife Madhavi, their daughter Caitlin, and their Manx cat, Maggie.

(Visit [www.davidebymusic.com](http://www.davidebymusic.com), where David shares his insights on meditation for musicians and the spiritual healing power of music for our lives.)

David has taught in the Living Wisdom Schools for more than sixteen years — initially for two years in Portland, then twelve years at the original Living Wisdom School at Ananda Village near Nevada City, California, and now again in Portland.



**Q:** David, let's have an informal conversation about the role the arts can play in helping kids be happy and successful in school and in their lives.

Have you given much thought to the role of the arts in children's development, particularly during the "Feeling Years" from 6 to 12?

**David:** My daughter Caitlin is in sixth grade now, and she's performing with the Pacific Youth Choir in Portland. They sang Mahler's Third Symphony recently with the Oregon Symphony, and it was a spectacular, high-powered event — Mahler can be pretty heavy, but she was moved to tears by the beauty of it.

Caitlin gets a great deal of joy from music, theater, and writing, and she's very passionate about it. She grew up in the Living Wisdom Schools and now attends the Arts and Communication Magnet Academy in Portland. I've taken her to choir practice since she was a tiny tot, so she knows our entire repertoire inside and out. (laughs)

In my own life, the arts have been a foundational theme. When I first picked up the cello at age six, I immediately knew with a solid intuition, "This is my instrument!" Music was a constant throughout my childhood, and playing cello and singing gifted me with many incredible experiences.

It was during those wonderful years from six to twelve that my heart was most open and that I was able to experience something greater than myself through music, call it a higher inspiration, God, or my own highest potential. I believe the name doesn't matter so long as we recognize the amazing things music can do for us.

There are two aspects to music. There is, of course, the purely physical, sonic experience. And then there's the interior, subjective response. The sonic experience is what the sound waves are doing to our bodies.

Many studies have shown that music, especially playing a musical instrument, builds important connections between the two hemispheres of a child's brain, and that when the child is having a musical experience many areas of the brain become engaged.

Music touches a number of brain areas simultaneously. When we're performing, the whole brain lights up in a striking way that we can see on scans. Those effects happen also when we're passively listening to music, but to a lesser degree, and even when we're just thinking of music that inspires us.

So there are those purely physical effects, but there are also other, "energetic" impacts. By energetic, I mean effects of sound that can touch us in deeper ways. They are what moves us to say "Wow! Oh my, that piece

really moved me!” Or “That music struck a chord with me — I really resonated with it.”

It’s something I think we can safely say lies beyond our ability to perceive intellectually, and beyond the simple effects of sound waves on our body and brain. There’s something deeper than the physical beats and sound waves that music can awaken in us.

Unfortunately, a great deal of popular music today is nothing more than computer-generated sounds, beats, rhythms, and special effects that are designed to impact our brains as sensual “ear candy.” And while it can get our energy moving and excite our emotions, when it’s over it just dumps us back out on the curb again.

I’m deeply intrigued by a kind of music that does the exact opposite — a music that bypasses the mind and draws us inside to touch on something larger than the little ego, and that we instinctively recognize as a very real higher part of ourselves.

**Q:** Are there levels of uplifting music? For example, music that can raise our mood, and other music that can take us to higher places?

**David:** I’m convinced it’s true. I once coached at a music camp where an amateur quartet played a Schubert piece. It was lovely — Schubert wrote some incredibly inspiring pieces, and some of the Schubert songs have a powerful ability to cheer us and make us smile and feel that life is good. But I believe there are even higher levels. Brahms said that when he composed music he would come in contact with a divine presence that was “superconscious” — he used that word — and that it was from that level that he received his inspiration.

I’ve found that music is a kind of road map for my life, like a source code that can capture inspiration and the wonderful consciousness that great composers can enter and bring down into their works.

We’re given these dots on a page, and when we perform them there’s a light that goes on at some point on the scale of inspiration. Then you can play the notes, and if you can carefully tune into the present moment and be completely focused and receptive, you can bathe in a ray of that great light. You can become immersed in the same inspiration that the composer experienced. And if they received it from a high place — for example, a Handel clearly did when he composed the *Messiah* — you can feel it touching your soul.

It's like a drug that's concocted from a very effective prescription for bringing your consciousness into a happier place. It starts with the realm of pure ideas — the dots on the paper — and then you use your energy to create a sonic vibration that moves those ideas into a place deep within us.

For me, it's like nature — it's one of those rare precious things in our lives that can awaken a remembrance of a beauty buried deep in us all, and an understanding of where our truest fulfillment comes from.

Our greatest fulfillments never come from anything material. When you hear music, can you put your finger on it? Can you capture it? It's played, and then it goes away. It's completely immaterial, yet it's one of the greatest gifts God has given us, because it can take us into a kingdom inside where our universal birthright of happiness is already perfectly present and eagerly waiting to fill us.

**Q:** While you were growing up, and in your career as a musician, was there a point where you felt there was a ceiling on the inspiration of the kind of music you were playing?

**David:** (laughs) First of all, when I was in the Feeling Years from six to twelve I was a complete music snob! My teacher had to pull me aside and say, "David, I'm afraid I have to give you an unsatisfactory grade, because your attitude has been really, really bad in music class." I wasn't quite present enough at that age to be able to snap out a sassy reply — "Yeah, well — this music is *horrible!*" (laughs)

But it was. It was totally, totally uninspiring! At the same time, I was deeply moved by the folk songs of the 1970s, especially the tunes from Godspell and others. My Dad is a Presbyterian pastor, so I grew up with an awareness of the inspiration of Spirit, and I had many experiences that reassured me: "As long as I have music, everything will be okay."

I had some amazing inspired experiences that carried me through high school. But then, toward the end of college, after a great deal of formal training, I woke up one day in a kind of panic, wondering, "My gosh, what have I done with my life?"

I thought, "I'll end up playing in an orchestra surrounded by miserable, cynical, jaded musicians, of whom there many, and uninspired conductors, and an audience that's dwindling, and music that, for the most part, isn't inspiring at all."

There's lots of inspired music, but orchestras often have to program "new music" to win the grants that support the inspiring stuff, and it's very

unfortunate that in our contemporary music we have a great deal to learn about inspiration. Today it seems that the more atonal and outrageous it is, the better the music is regarded. It certainly can be powerful, but not always in a good way. Uplifting? Hmm, I don't think so.

So I put my career on hold in my late twenties, and I went off in search of the lost inspiration — and, interestingly enough, I eventually found it.

At first I was looking for a way to serve society through music, because I felt it would at least be heart-opening and fulfilling. So I joined a troupe of storytelling musicians who were performing for children in the Feeling Years from six to twelve. We took popular stories and set them to music, and we would act out the characters while we played, like the Pied Piper of Hamelin.

I remember playing the Mayor of Hamlin for a season — I would strap the cello to my body and we would play and sing and enact the story, and for a long time I felt inspired, because it was serving the needs of young children who desperately needed upliftment through the arts.

But then after a time I began to feel that it was too much “art for art's sake,” with no true higher purpose, so I began working with the Suzuki Method, which is founded on a beautiful concept of nurturing children who may never become professional musicians, but who will be human beings with beautiful hearts. But it wasn't long before I realized that I wanted something more.

I wanted to be surrounded by people who weren't only practicing good teachings, but who were looking for Truth writ large, because I knew that there was a level of music that could truly touch my soul, and it was the kind of music I was longing to explore and perform. And that was when, thank heaven, I became a music teacher at Living Wisdom School in Portland.

I had quit professional music at that point, and I dove headfirst into teaching those kids in the Feeling Years, and it was the hardest job I've had, because it took tremendous energy to manage the kids and connect with them.

I had a class of all girls and one very shy boy who was overwhelmed and wasn't able to put out much energy, so for the first two years I had the typical, terribly difficult, soul-searing experience of being a novice teacher.

Then we moved to Ananda Village, where I taught music at the original Living Wisdom School for twelve years, and it was a very, very successful, incredibly fulfilling experience.

**Q:** Here in Palo Alto, the directors and teachers at the Living Wisdom School often have trouble persuading parents that engaging kids in the performing arts has a profoundly positive effect on their academic performance because there's a strong component of feeling in the learning experience, and it needs to be cultivated as a cornerstone of the academic curriculum.

One of the students is an extremely gifted young classical pianist. He just finished third grade, and you can see that he's totally focused and engaged when he's performing, and that it carries over to his studies and his interactions with the other children and the teachers.

In your teaching, have you noticed that young children's lives are improved by the time they spend with the arts?

**David:** Without the slightest question! One of my first students in Portland was Keshava Betts, who's in his late twenties and plays cello very inspiringly.



Keshava realized as a very young child that whenever he was feeling low, he could pick up the cello and play and he'd feel better – and that's a huge gift. Being able to access such a powerful tool to raise our consciousness is one of the most priceless skills we can learn.

One night many years ago, I came out of a terrible opera rehearsal, and as I drove through the rain I felt utterly drenched by the misery of it all. And decided I might as well practice singing a solo that I was scheduled to perform, from an oratorio called “Christ Lives.” It was just a way to pass the time on a miserable drive, and I wasn't expecting any great change in

my consciousness. But then — *whammo!* — I felt such a tremendous current of joy that I actually had to pull over to the side of the road to avoid being dangerously distracted. I thought, “What in the world just happened?! I don’t understand this. How did this happen?” (laughs)

The song was very simple — it stayed within the octave and wasn’t sophisticated at all, yet it left me wondering, “How did this move me so powerfully? How was it able to change me in an instant?”

It helped me understand that music can hold a vibration of consciousness, and that when we wander into an inspired piece of music, it suddenly feels as if we’ve walked into a beautiful temple. When we walk into a holy place we feel uplifted, and when we walk into a holy song the same inner change occurs.

It’s why I feel it’s such a profound responsibility to provide uplifting music for children. At the school in Portland now, I am constantly witnessing how, whenever the children walk into these pieces, it changes them. I feel it’s very important to provide those opportunities for them to explore the higher places in themselves.

It’s not something you can drive into them. “Now I want you to *feel!*” (laughs) You can’t force it, and the same with adults, there are adults who love listening to the music, but maybe they have a hard time tuning into the inner experience, and it’s a joy to help them find that happiness.

I’m working with a music education program called El Sistema that was started in Venezuela in 1975 by an educator, musician, and activist, José Antonio Abreu. It brought intense classical music training to the slums, the *barrios*, and it transformed the society, to the point where 80 percent of the doctors and lawyers and educators came up through this system as children. And that’s an amazingly statistic!

We’re working with children in an impoverished area in north Portland, and it’s hard to measure the changes in just the last three years, but we’ve seen an incredibly positive development of personal skills, confidence, and social maturity.

**Q:** These inner changes are starting to be documented by science. It’s been shown, for example, that in the presence of expansive feelings of love, kindness, and compassion the heart’s rhythms become extremely harmonious, and those harmonious vibrations have powerful effects on the body and brain. They’ve found that in school districts where they’ve taught

heart-harmonizing methods, including methods that use music, the children's grades improve.

**David:** A wonderful thing about music is that it brings the children into an uplifted, happy place in themselves, without having to nag them into changing. (laughs) They don't need a teacher or parent yelling at them, "Change your energy!" And the kid is going, "I don't know how!" But if you get them performing uplifting music, it puts them in the right cycle effortlessly.

It's been great fun to have the children perform only very high kinds of music for a period. I was amazed by how the kids never tired of it, and if they wanted to learn new songs, we were fortunate to have hundreds of pieces to choose from.

Through music young children are able to tap into a higher awareness that will stay with them, without having to struggle to quiet the mind. We would sing positive, uplifting songs that they loved — like "Mañana, Friends," or "A New Tomorrow" or "If You're Seeking Freedom," and it was amazing to see how their mood would change.

# The Education for Life Curriculum



## 27. Happiness, Success, and the Curriculum in Grades TK-8

The Education for Life curriculum encompasses six areas. Each area embraces a special body of learning, together with personal qualities and attitudes that lead to a happy, successful life.

### 1. Our Earth/Our Universe

These activities expand the students' awareness of the physical world. We give them a vision of the orderliness of the universe, appreciation and reverence for our place in the world, and an awareness of our shared responsibility for the well-being of the planet and of all creatures.

Our Earth / Our Universe helps the students understand the countless ways all life is interconnected. They move between hands-on observation and immersion in the academic subject matter, driven by a sense of adventure as they discover the mechanisms through which all aspects of the physical world are linked together.

“Science” can evoke images of people with withered hearts studying meaningless minutiae in sterile laboratories, and that’s unfortunate, since the sciences as taught in the Living Wisdom Schools are rated by the students as being among their most interesting, engaging, and fruitful subjects. It’s why we call this very special part of the curriculum “Our Earth – Our Universe.”

Our Earth – Our Universe embraces all branches of science, yet it suggests their connections, the orderly oneness of the cosmos, and the sense of awe before the wonders of creation that Einstein said is the essence of scientific discovery.

Instead of limiting our students to participating in life’s wonders as secondhand observers, we invite them to feel themselves part of the great mystery by giving them direct experiences. Our Earth – Our Universe encourages them to see the particular and universal in relation to each other. For example, we may ask them to ponder how physical laws

provide a model for many areas of their lives — how Newton’s law of motion suggests a universal principle of action and reaction that operates in our relationships, and in the consequences of our thoughts and actions.

From a lifeless catalogue of facts, Our Earth — Our Universe lifts them into a view of reality that they can connect with in heartfelt and inspiring ways.

The separate sciences are not taught as compartmentalized disciplines, but as a unified totality that can be viewed from different angles. The discipline of scientific inquiry reveals in all nature a dignified coherence that mirrors the goal of education itself: true maturity. It’s easier to relate to diverse realities, when we can see them in meaningful relationship to one another, and finally to ourselves.

Our Earth — Our Universe embraces all branches of science: physics, astronomy, chemistry, biology, general science, botany, geology, and anatomy.

**Our Earth / Our Universe develops the following positive qualities:**

Attitudes of care. The Japanese conservationist Tanaka Shozo said, “The question of rivers is not a question of rivers, but of the human heart.” We help our students feel their place in nature and their connection with all living things. Feeling connected engenders attitudes of caring.

We encourage the students to interact with the physical world with appreciation. We help them understand the underlying structures of the cosmos with a curriculum that is designed to elicit their enthusiasm, through guided discussions, field trips, and science fair projects. We help them understand how they can apply the scientific method in creative ways to express their understanding of fundamental principles.

**Curriculum for Our Earth / Our Universe:**

Interdisciplinary (overview)	science	Biology
Botany		Geology
Anatomy		Physics
Astronomy		Chemistry
Ecology and sustainability		

## 2. Personal Development

In the Living Wisdom Schools we nurture three areas of personal growth: physical, mental, and spiritual; and we help each student grow toward realizing their unique, individual potential in each area.

We give our students tools to pursue their inner growth. We help them understand their unique learning style, and we tailor the curriculum to stimulate their enthusiasm for academics and personal achievement.

**Personal Development cultivates the following positive qualities:**

**Perseverance.** We help student to experience the joy of overcoming challenges by analyzing obstacles and applying the right tools to find solutions and achieve their goals. Daily success experiences of success develop their self-confidence to welcome challenges as opportunities to experience the joy of mastery.

**Self-control and joyful self-discipline.** Learning to control their own physical, mental, and emotional energy opens portals for the students to understand and relate appropriately to others' realities. In a climate of calm self-restraint and respectful appreciation, attitudes of kindness and compassion flourish.

We help the students develop joyful self-discipline by teaching them how to be calmly aware and mentally focused while completing their academic work and interacting with others.

**Subjects that foster growth in Personal Development:**

Physical education	Sports
Health and hygiene	Mental skills such as concentration, memory development, and organization
Math computation skills	Any subject matter that involves memorization
Long-term projects	Learning new tasks such as CPR, typing, etc.
Developing and applying positive personal qualities such as gratitude, contentment, honesty, servicefulness, and responsibility	Self-Expression and Communication

## 3. Self-Expansion and Communication

Learning to express ourselves effectively is essential for academic achievement and for our ability to interact meaningfully with others.

Recognizing the importance of these skills, we carefully and consciously help our students develop clarity of thought and creative self-expression.

We help them learn to express their ideas and feelings verbally and in their schoolwork.

Our students develop writing skills that give them a tremendous advantage when they enter high school. Our graduates routinely thank us for giving them a head start in writing well-thought-out, creative papers and research reports.

Language Arts at Living Wisdom School conforms to our school's focus on teaching young students to be enjoyably immersed, enthusiastically engaged, and creatively insightful.

The students receive intensive help with vocabulary development. Through constant feedback, encouragement, and hands-on instruction in copyediting and rewriting, we teach our students to write and speak in a manner that communicates clearly to the reader or listener — a rare and extremely important skill for success in business, technology, and academia.

**Lessons in Self-Expression and Communication foster the following positive qualities:**

Honest, objective introspection

Clarity of thinking

Clarity of expression

Creativity

We measure the students' growth in this area by the clarity of their written and oral communications, the originality of their work, and the degree to which it reflects honest thinking and enthusiastic engagement.

**Subjects that foster growth in Self-expression and Communication:**

Mathematics	Writing mechanics
Creative writing	Interpretive dance
Music composition	Music interpretation
Computer programming	Creative problem-solving
Engineering	The use of the voice as a vehicle for self-expression in speaking and singing
Public speaking	Insights for developing creativity
Visual arts	Drama
Vocabulary development	Foreign languages

#### **4. Understanding People**

The elementary years from roughly age six to twelve are the time in a young person's life for refining the ability to feel. The quality of instruction therefore has huge repercussions for the student's life in high school and beyond, since feeling is the faculty that enables us to tell right from wrong, and to act rightly, with respect and empathy for the realities of others.

Our practical approach to helping the students develop these important life skills permeates their every day at Living Wisdom School.

The primary medium for students to learn to be aware of their feelings and direct them in positive, expansive ways is the arts. We therefore encourage the honest expansion of the students' calm, perceptive feelings through theater, music, the visual arts, and by observing and guiding them as they learn to interact and communicate meaningfully, with awareness of how their words and actions may affect others.

We employ effective conflict resolution methods that transform disagreements into experiences of personal expansion.

We help the students discover how they can achieve what all human beings everywhere desire most deeply: increasing happiness, and freedom from suffering, by becoming aware of the actions and attitudes that lead to lasting happiness and inner freedom for themselves and others.

The ability to understand others opens portals for insights into ourselves. Our students discover the rich rewards of learning calmly, without judgment, from their own successes and missteps, and those of others. Through their daily interactions, they learn these lessons up close and in three dimensions, with lasting positive effects for their character formation and for developing a strong sense of values. As their understanding grows, they gain a deepening ability to empathize and feel compassion for others – and themselves.

#### **Lessons in Understanding People foster the following positive qualities:**

The ability to understand the underlying impulses and motivations behind the actions of others

The ability to recognize similarities between others' motivations and their own

The ability to translate other people's experiences into wise insights to guide their own lives

The ability to enjoy positive interactions, by drawing on their understanding of behaviors that create harmony, cooperation, and happiness for all

Growth in this area is evidenced by the skill with which the students interact harmoniously, and the choices they make. We can also monitor growth in this area through the insights they express in their discussions and schoolwork.

**Subjects that foster growth in Understanding People:**

The study of other cultures and their customs and beliefs	Geography
History	World religions
Psychology	Travel
The study of the lives of great people	

**5. Cooperation**

We teach our students practical skills for cooperating with others. They learn from their own experiences that cooperation is an enjoyable and productive way to work.

The ability to cooperate will come more easily to some students than others, but the environment and culture at LWHS ensure that every student will experience the joys of working and playing in an atmosphere of self-expansion, harmony, and inclusiveness.

The students are given endless opportunities to practice cooperative attitudes and gain skills that will be invaluable in all areas of their lives — in their career, relationships, and in raising their own children.

Our instruction is practical. We are focused on understanding the needs of the individual student and adapting our instruction accordingly. The teachers give extremely careful attention to observing the student's nature and tendencies, and to helping them rise to their own best level of academic and personal performance.

The roles we may be called upon to play in our lives as students, employees, partners, and parents will inevitably involve other people. Where harmonious relationships lead to greater happiness in every area, a lack of harmony is bound to erode our happiness and success. Refined cooperative skills will make our interactions with others far more satisfying and successful.

**Lessons in Cooperation foster the following positive qualities:**

The ability to be flexible and not overly attached to our own opinions and desires

A genuine caring for the well-being of others

An ability to compromise gracefully without compromising our principles

An ability to learn from others

Flexibility in our thinking

We will be able to observe the student's growth in this area in the harmony and effectiveness of their interactions with others.

**Subjects that foster growth in Cooperation:**

The study of human cooperation in the contexts of history, science, literature, economics, the arts, business, etc.

Supportive leadership

Listening skills

Etiquette

World language and culture

**6. Wholeness**

We achieve an inner sense of wholeness when we can bring our five Tools of Maturity into a harmonious balance of body, heart, will, mind, and soul.

This area of study focuses on how the separate curriculum areas blend and overlap each other, and how each enhances the others. For the individual student, Wholeness reflects how their experience of Education for Life has helped them become a well-integrated, mature young person.

**Lessons in Wholeness foster these positive qualities:**

When we're facing challenges, Wholeness helps us draw on a diverse range of personal qualities and identify external resources to solve the issues at hand.

Wholeness increases a child's ability to face each situation by looking at it from a variety of perspectives and discerning which is/are the most appropriate to the present circumstance.

Wholeness is reflected in our ability to look past the small, separate details of a situation or a person and see the big picture.

We can monitor children's growth in this area by observing their actions and their results. When interacting with others, or when facing challenges,

are they able to respond in ways that bring about positive change? Do they habitually apply the skills most appropriate for the people and situations before them? Do they demonstrate a commitment to living by their highest ideals?

**Subjects that foster growth in Wholeness:**

The following academic subjects influence the students in ways that cross domains. They will frequently expand the student's awareness by helping them be more energetic, creative, insightful, sensitively aware, and happy.

Music

Meditation and other centering practices

Art

Literature

Philosophy

Religion

Nature studies

# Meet the Living Wisdom School Family



## 28. Meet the Parents: Esther Peralez-Dieckmann

Esther Peralez-Dieckmann has more than 25 years' experience in workforce and economic development, human services, and policy advocacy. A respected community leader, she has earned numerous distinctions for her leadership and work on behalf of women, children, and families. She is currently Executive Director of Next Door Solutions to Domestic Violence in San Jose.



**Esther:** I feel that the approach they take at Living Wisdom is very practical, because everybody wants their child to be loved, to be safe, and to want to go to school — and we haven't had any issues with our children not wanting to go to school, because they've been very excited every day about going to Living Wisdom.

When it comes to how we educate our children, my stance is practical. We all want our children to be able to get a good job and be very happy in their work, and as somebody with nearly thirty years' experience in the public, private, and non-governmental sectors, one of the first things I look for, and that I believe we need in the workforce, is people who can think critically, people with empathy, people who understand the needs of others, and who know how to work with other people, and who can deal with adversity.

You need lots of personal skills to have a good career and stay in a good job, and I feel that those are among the skills my children have acquired at Living Wisdom, including the ability to know yourself, to be loved and appreciated for your differences and for all the things you are, and to have the chance to explore and figure out who you are, what you love, and what's your passion. All of the steps, all of the activities, and all of the outings at Living Wisdom have been carefully designed to accomplish just that.

I've been thinking a great deal about resource allocation, because we know that the economy is not great right now, and organizations and businesses are having to deal with severely limited resources. And I believe certain skills the children learn at Living Wisdom will be extremely valuable in the years ahead.

I'm thinking of when we took all of the Living Wisdom students on a camping trip to Malakoff Diggins, a Gold Rush mining site in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains.

It looked like we might run out of food at one point. We were close to civilization, so it's not as if we were endangering the children, but we were camping for three days, so we had to keep an eye on our food. I was impressed by how the kids pitched in and cooked, did the dishes, and generally accepted the situation and cheerfully pitched in. When I think of the nine years our family has been with Living Wisdom, I realize that all of those activities and experiences have had a tremendous relevance for helping our children learn to thrive in the real world, and that there isn't a price you can put on that.

If you're looking at Living Wisdom as an option, I can say that you really should look at the total educational experience, and how you can raise children who'll never want to stop learning. Because that's really the way to advance in a career: by being always eager to learn, while loving the process and knowing how to think of others.

We're trying to solve the problems that are affecting our world, and we urgently need thinkers like the students that are coming through Living Wisdom.

## 29. Meet the Parents: Jack Dieckmann

jjJack Dieckmann serves as Associate Director of Curriculum at the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE).

Jack completed his doctorate in mathematics education at Stanford in 2009. He also teaches methods and language courses in the Stanford Teacher Education Program (STEP). He has worked as a public high school math teacher, a professional developer, and an education research associate.



**Jack:** We're the parents of Joseph, who's a student at Living Wisdom High School, and we've been with Living Wisdom for more than nine years. Our daughter attends the K-8 Palo Alto Living Wisdom School.

Given that my professional field is education, I spent a great deal of time trying to find the right school for Joseph. I visited and studied a wide variety of schools, I interviewed the people, and I shadowed and observed. And then I came across this jewel of a school, Living Wisdom School of Palo Alto, and I couldn't believe it. I really could not believe that such a school existed, because I had never seen anything like it, and I had never personally encountered a school like this in all my years in education.

We enrolled Joseph at LWS with Kshama as his first-grade teacher, and it was fantastic. I couldn't believe that I could leave my child, the most precious thing in my life, leave him there and feel totally confident that he would be loved, supported, and that he was going to grow and be nurtured. I've had that feeling all the way through, including his time at Living Wisdom High School, where I know that I'm leaving him in good hands and that he's not only going to be challenged with a rigorous curriculum, but he's also going to add meaning to his life.

Public schools do their best, but as a parent who taught math in public high school I know that they are large systems, and that the learning is very

often first and foremost about how to obey rules, how to follow, how to be passive, and how to do the homework that's handed to you. The poor students do the best they can, but there is no sense of agency or active learning or finding their place in the world, or finding meaning in what they're doing. Adolescence in particular is such a difficult time, and those are exactly the kinds of questions they should be asking.

Living Wisdom offers a unique program that I wish all students everywhere could benefit from, because they are giving the individual student a chance to understand who they are in relation to their world, and not just be sort of college-ready.

That's a big term now, "college-ready," but many students, including those who go on to college, and even those who get good college grades, don't know why they are there, and they don't know the horizon that they're moving toward, because they're just following the rules.

I'm very happy to say that our experience of Living Wisdom High School has been the opposite — that we are not raising a passive rule-follower, but somebody who is trying to understand his place in the world, his purpose in the world, and who is very actively contributing to that purpose.

# Testimonials for Living Wisdom School



## 30. Living Wisdom Graduates Enjoy Varied and Exciting Careers

**David Kretzmann**  
**Motley Fool Investment Analyst**



I attended the original Living Wisdom School from kindergarten through eighth grade, and I graduated from Living Wisdom High School in 2010. I entered Berea College in Kentucky, where I graduated in 2014. I studied business administration and was elected student government president two years.

After graduating, I became an investment analyst at The Motley Fool, a private financial and investing advice company based in Alexandria, Virginia with over 300 employees worldwide, which is where I am today, helping individual investors and evaluating companies and recommending stocks.

When I reflect on my time in the Living Wisdom Schools, I see it as an experience where I learned how to live a good, successful and happy life, recognizing that academics are important, but what really matters when you're in junior high and high school and you're coming up into adulthood

is learning how to live your life — how to be happy in what you do, make friends with what you do, and be joyful in everything you do.

I've carried the lessons from Living Wisdom School with me each day, whether it was in college or now in my career. I'm really grateful for what I got out of Living Wisdom School, and I recommend the experience to anyone.

**Mirabai Deranja Commer,  
Professional Tango Dancer and Dance Instructor**



Mirabai graduated from the University of California at Santa Cruz with a BA degree in Astronomy. She now has a thriving business as a tango teacher and performer in the San Francisco area and in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

**Shyama Helin  
Project Manager, ID Branding**



I work with an award-winning advertising and branding firm. I'm married and we own a home in the north end of Portland, Oregon. I graduated from the University of California at Santa Cruz in 1995 with a major in Fine Arts.

I attribute my ability to communicate effectively to my Education for Life

experience at Living Wisdom School. The small classes and close relationships with teachers and fellow students helped me build strong bonds and gave me the tools to know how to work cooperatively with others.

As a team leader on high-stress projects in my work environment, I consistently rely on the centering and affirmation skills I learned at EFL. I remain closely connected with many of my school friends.

**Kai Girard**  
**Mountain Guide, Alaska Mountaineering School,**  
**American Alpine Institute, National Outdoor Leadership School,**  
**and Outward Bound**



My early memories of Living Wisdom School include outdoor pursuits that were many and varied. From exploring rivers and caves, to canoe trips and making fires in the rain with our teacher, going to school in the foothills gave us the opportunity to be outside in so many ways.

I connected with outdoor sports starting in high school, and in an even bigger way in college at Seattle University, where I progressed from a rock climber to a raft guide and a trip leader. I now work as a wilderness educator for some of the best companies in the industry.

Being paid to explore, experience, and share the wilderness while participating in fun and challenging activities is certainly a great perk, but

the real treat is exploring, experiencing, and sharing the process of personal growth as a facilitator and educator.

Organized classes can convey a certain amount of information, but direct experience, where you're held accountable to a high standard by nature itself, really makes the lessons stick, and the most impactful learning often comes from the realization that you arrive at upon returning to the outside world. Classes may be convenient, but they remove the accountability of direct experience, where you're forced to use your integrity and will to survive.

I might never have realized this perspective if it were not for the teachers and educators I encountered at Living Wisdom and later.

The chance to try with your hands and your heart is not commonly given in most schools. The chance to try while being inspired and supported by self-assured, competent leaders is a unique and powerful way to find your interests, your abilities, and yourself. The leaders at Living Wisdom School were the ones who inspired me to know the impact we can truly have on our own lives and the lives of others. They are my role models, and now the wilderness is my classroom.

### **Keith Ross, Commercial Pilot**



Keith flies for MC Aviation, based in Santa Monica, California. He graduated in 2005 from Embry Riddle Aeronautical University with a major in aeronautical science and a minor in meteorology. He was interviewed by Susan Dermond, director of the Living Wisdom School in Portland, Oregon and Keith's fifth-grade teacher.

**Susan:** What do you remember about your experience at Living Wisdom School?

**Keith:** It was all fun. I entered in fourth grade and attended LWS through eighth grade. Of course, like any kid I enjoyed the field trips best. But I remember all of the personal interactions and the friendships with teachers and students.

**Susan:** What do you think were the advantages of the education you received at LWS?

**Keith:** The small class size. It meant that we got lots of individual attention. I remember the caring of the teachers and the encouragement to be who you are.

**Susan:** Was high school difficult after Living Wisdom School?

**Keith:** No. I graduated from high school with a 4.0 grade-point average.

**Susan:** Did you notice any differences between yourself and the other kids you met in high school and college that you attribute to your training at LWS?

**Keith:** Oh, yes. I feel that I've really found myself, mentally, spiritually, and career-wise, and I feel that I did it at a younger age than most people.

**Gita Matlock**  
**Leadership Coach ([GitaMatlock.com](http://GitaMatlock.com))**



Gita attended Education for Life schools from pre-school to eighth grade. She has worked in non-profit fundraising for thirteen years, after earning a bachelor's degree in International Studies and a master's in Nonprofit Administration.

**Q:** What do you see as the advantages of Living Wisdom School?

**Gita:** I learned life skills and tools to succeed both in higher education and life. The meditation and centering practices taught me to focus and be

calm. The relationships with adults helped me transition very easily into the working world, and the values stick with me in all my decisions.

**Q:** Was high school difficult after attending LWS?

**Gita:** No, it was very easy. I knew all I needed to know about how to get my work done and communicate with my teachers and classmates. Most of us who came from LWS ended up in the honors classes in our high schools.

**Q:** Did you notice any difference between yourself and the other kids you met in high school and college that you attribute to your education at LWS?

**Gita:** Yes! Many of the kids couldn't relate well to adults and lacked a sense of self. Each of my friends from Living Wisdom School shares two major things in common with the others: a strong sense of self and an interest in giving back to the world.

**Simon Hermann**  
**Financial Institution Specialist at the**  
**Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC)**

Simon graduated Summa Cum Laude from California State University at Chico with a double major in Business and Economics. He now works as a Bank Examiner for the FDIC.

Simon travels around northern California, working with teams that analyze banking institutions' capital, assets, management, earnings, liquidity, and sensitivity to market risk.

It's a job that requires considerable flexibility, since he constantly needs to change roles and responsibilities from bank to bank, weekly or monthly, depending on the current assignment.

Simon says his work involves "the review of banks' sensitivity to market risk. This review includes reviewing the assumptions and outputs of statistical models and simulations. How non-maturity deposit accounts react to changing interest rates is a large part of most model assumptions and is often measured through some form of regression analysis. I also need to understand the economy that our banks operate in."

## 31. More Testimonials for the Living Wisdom Schools

### Student Testimonials

We started meditating every morning before school, and I found that it quieted the pools of my mind which on some days were already boiling over by the time I arrived. At Living Wisdom School, I learned that I can choose to be happy, and it led to another idea: that no one can make you unhappy, nor can you blame your unhappiness on other people, because it's you who decide to be happy or not. — *Rewa B., Oberlin College*

\* \* \*

I am a senior at U.C. Davis, graduating with honors this June in Genetics and minoring in French. I now have my own research project, studying the evolution of centromeric proteins, which I am hoping to have published in a scientific journal. I am also in the process of writing my honors thesis and will present it at the U.C. Undergraduate Research Conference in May.

I was originally interested in medical school, but am now applying to Genetics PhD programs such as the Marie Curie Institute in France. I attribute my love of learning and confidence in myself to my foundation in Living Wisdom School. I was taught that we really do have the autonomy to choose our own happiness, and I try to remind myself of this every day. However, it is curious how many students I see in college refusing to do this. — *Hadley*

\* \* \*

The way I view people and the world around me has changed dramatically. When other people are teasing or making fun of somebody in a joking way, I can easily tell how that person is feeling about it, even more than just by seeing the look on their face. I can tell if they are not finding it funny or if they are actually hurt by it, even if they are acting as if they are fine. None of my friends understand when something like that is

happening, and when I talk to them about it, they look confused and say that they had no idea, or that they didn't mean for it to be hurting the person — and I believe them, but it just shows that for some reason I am more aware about other people and my surroundings than most of the kids my age. — *William P.*

\*\*\*

In math at LWS, everyone gets to work at their own pace. The children who are ahead learn to help the children who are behind them, and no judgment is passed about where a child is in the math book. Everyone is very supportive of each other. Now in high school it seems natural to me to help others when they are behind me or need help.

LWS gave me the confidence to be able to handle the outside world. Because I had teachers who always believed in me, I learned to believe in myself. They pushed me to always do my best, and this increased my capacity to do well in school and in life. Basically my best got better. I don't know what the exact statistic is, but most Americans' number-one fear is public speaking. The way I see it, public speaking is not restricted to speeches in front of large groups of people. Raising your hand and asking a question in class is public speaking, and sadly, some children are afraid to do this. They are afraid they will look stupid or people will think they are dumb because they didn't understand something. LWS taught me to get over the fear of public speaking when I was very young. Now I am much more comfortable speaking in front of large groups of people. — *Genyana A.*

\*\*\*

During Freshman Orientation I observed that I noticed things other kids did not. I think I have a different level of awareness. I was also taken aback when teachers strongly encouraged freshmen not to be afraid of them. I thought, 'Why would anyone be afraid of teachers?' — *Mara S., Georgetown University*

\*\*\*

I just received my acceptance to Stanford. Seriously, without LWS this never would have happened. — *Peter A., Stanford University*

\*\*\*

I am writing to say thank you. You taught me many things in my two years at Living Wisdom, but the most important, by far, was how to use common sense. In the theater business (and frankly, in any business), there is always a delicate balance between doing what you're told and acting instantly upon your own judgment. We memorize our lines and blocking, but if something goes wrong we have to ad lib — we have to think on our feet and act accordingly. I owe my ability to do these things almost entirely to you, and for that I am most grateful. — *Rose F., San Francisco Conservatory of Music, San Francisco Opera Chorus, and Gilbert and Sullivan Lamplighters*

**Testimonials from Education Professionals**

The work you do with the teens on a daily basis is so meaningful for them, helping them grow internally and learn who they are, especially during the turbulent adolescent years. — *Physician, Palo Alto, California*

\* \* \*

If you could put what you are doing in the public schools, it would change the world. — *School Superintendent at initial accreditation visit to Living Wisdom School*

\* \* \*

This school is the best-kept secret in Northern California. — *WASC official at renewal visit*

\* \* \*

Education for Life...is an exalted call for change, based on deep insight into the potentials of every human being. It tells us how to nurture creativity, wisdom, and intuition in each child, and how to tap their unexplored capabilities. — *Jay Casbon, Ph.D., Dean of the Graduate School for Professional Studies, Lewis & Clark College*

\* \* \*

I marvel at the spirit of Living Wisdom School. I embrace its visionary ideal, and I celebrate its remarkable accomplishments. I urge us all to spread the word on how special a place it really is. — *Michael S. Katz, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus, San Jose State University, Philosophy of Education, Past President of the North American Philosophy of Education Society*

\* \* \*

This is a wonderful school. — *Keith Devlin, PhD, co-founder and Executive Director of Stanford University H-STAR Institute*

**Testimonials from the WASC Accreditation Committee,**

The committee members offered the following observations following their visit to Living Wisdom High School of Palo Alto in the fall of 2021.

“LWHS has a highly collaborative and interdisciplinary faculty culture.”

– Chris

“Some of your strengths are the use of personalized learning plans and the high degree of student feedback and how it is incorporated into informing instruction.” – Chris

“You offer your students great opportunities, especially on campus but also off campus. Some of the things students did off-campus really made a difference in their lives.... The opportunities (at LWHS) are tremendous.... Through creative mentoring and partnerships, the LWHS students were able to get involved in things they wouldn’t be able to experience in larger schools.... The (educational) ideas you have are working very well, and you can be quite happy and proud.” – Yanik, former public school superintendent

“The interdisciplinary work among the faculty was notable and impressive... There were lots of synergies in your work.” – Chris

“Students, parents, and alumni consistently noted and appreciated the value of the education they are receiving. They valued the feedback they are getting from the school and the teachers.” – Chris

“A strong sense of community, collaboration, and partnership is the first thing that we noticed, and it ran throughout as a thread in our experiences observing the school! It is clear that in this small and tightly knit community, everyone is dedicated and driven by the mission and vision of the school, as well as the powerful educational philosophy.” – Melissa

**Testimonials from Parents**

I highly recommend Living Wisdom High School that just opened last Fall. I am incredibly impressed by their academic team, personalized learning plan, blended approach, and focus on providing an education for life. We have only been there for a few months, but I am happy to answer questions about our experience and why we chose this school for our high schooler.

When my husband and I noticed that our once exceptionally bright, enthusiastic, and talented daughter was struggling (emotionally, socially, and academically) in our top-rated public school, we knew we had to pull out all the stops in order to help her.

We'd already tried a very disappointing local private school when she was younger. Thus, we knew that putting her in another typical private school is not the answer. What she needed was something truly extraordinary. Thankfully we found Living Wisdom School.

It's been about five months since our daughter started Living Wisdom School, and honestly, we have never seen our daughter this joyous, appreciative, and happy with herself – and so motivated to learn and to give her best as a student.

I have also never seen such dedicated faculty: The teachers intimately get to know each and every student. They recognize the beauty and strength of each child, and they **REALLY** invest in each child. In another word, they give and give – and they don't hold back.

The educational philosophy and approach of LWS are both highly intelligent and amazingly evolved. As a former UCLA psychological researcher and a psychotherapist, I notice that everything they do is meaningful, purposeful, thoughtful, conscious, love-centered, and extraordinary. Furthermore, the proof is in the pudding – our daughter is absolutely thriving in every way possible.

I am convinced that this remarkable school is the best-kept secret in the Silicon Valley, and we will forever be grateful to have found this priceless gift. I highly recommend LWS to all parents who want their kids to truly succeed in life, as measured by their level of joy and positive contribution to the world. It just doesn't get better than this.

Our daughter is blossoming like never before! Thank you! – *Anadi G., parent of a 9th grader*

\* \* \*

Our three daughters started at the Living Wisdom School five months ago. They were studying in a private French school in Berkeley for five years and the transition was worrying for us, especially for the older girls. We have only one word to express how we feel right now: gratitude.

The girls unequivocally declare that this is the best school ever. They love the time and attention the teachers and administration give to them and their particular needs and interests.

My oldest who was always afraid of math now says she needs no help from us when she does her homework. Our middle daughter, who barely read a book five months ago, now will not stop reading.

In a competitive place like Palo Alto, it was a priority to give our daughters an excellent education, but also to impart values about how to live and how to comport themselves. We wanted them to develop a love of learning as a lifelong process, and we wanted a stress-free, supportive environment.

I feel that this is happening every day at Living Wisdom School. I am looking forward to our daughters growing up into intelligent, articulate, and overall good citizens in a global world.

I've been an honorary aunt/grandmother to many Living Wisdom School children. Some of "my kids" are through college now, and it's worth noting how many of the students credit their success in life now to what LWS gave them.

Education is so information oriented now — teaching to the test. It's ironic when the world is changing so fast, that information is obsolete before the degree is earned. Success today is how quickly you can learn, how easily you can adapt, how creatively and joyfully you can respond. The emphasis on pure academics — to the detriment of creating well-rounded individuals — makes even academics difficult to achieve. Develop the whole person and learning comes effortlessly. That's what happens at LWS. Cutting-edge research in education is looking more and more like Living Wisdom School.

\* \* \*

As an education researcher, I see that the rest of my field is just now becoming aware of the pivotal role of self-regulation and executive function.

Living Wisdom School has a rich tradition of equipping students with content AND the tools to become self-directed learners. When you know HOW to learn, you can learn almost anything.

A natural question that some parents have is this: can children have a loving, joyful learning experience in school AND still be prepared for life?

The answer is yes. Last spring's survey of LWS graduates showed that alums have an average grade point average of 3.85. Living Wisdom School graduates have gone to Stanford, many of the UC campuses, Cornell, University of Michigan, NYU, Georgetown, Oberlin, Bowdoin, London

College (UK), University of Bremen, Germany, University of Washington, San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and many more.

The school is a wonderful community, preparing students not only as learners but as happy, productive, fulfilled people.

Living Wisdom School provides a safe and nurturing setting to learn and grow both emotionally and academically. The academics are appropriately challenging while taking into consideration every child's unique learning style. Not only has my son received an excellent education, he has grown personally by being part of a community that fosters kindness, collaboration, and joy in learning. He will graduate from Living Wisdom this year, well prepared for the years ahead and fondly remembering the time our family spent as part of this wonderful school.

We have had two children in LWS. To sum it up succinctly — it's the type of school that we as parents always wanted to attend ourselves. Just on the surface level, the school has:

- 1) A very low student to teacher ratio
- 2) Highly customized instruction
- 3) A curriculum that simultaneously addresses core academic requirements and supports healthy emotional development

But beyond the surface the school is much more:

1. The creative expression in the yearly play about a historical spiritual leader brings the school community together and consistently inspires audiences to pursue life with understanding and courage.

2. A warm and inviting environment that accelerates a student's self-growth and encourages individual expression

We could say a lot more, but it's difficult to share in a short review. We encourage you to contact the school and speak to a parent. They can share more details.

\* \* \*

Our son went to LWS after a really difficult year and a half at a local Palo Alto school. The difference in the quality of the teachers, the calming atmosphere, and the love and genuine caring shown by the teachers was instrumental in turning his life around. His comment on returning from his first day at LWS was, "I can be who I am, and don't need to pretend to be someone else."

Our son received an excellent education at LWS, was well prepared, and made an easy transition to a much larger school. What sets this school apart is its willingness to allow the students to learn at their own pace. In so doing, the school fosters a love of learning. This has made our son's academic life joyful and given him an edge. We could not recommend Living Wisdom School more highly.

\*\*\*

LWS is an incredible school. We are Palo Alto parents who have tried the local schools, and feel that this school is giving our two children an amazing education. The academics are excellent and we find that the life skills our children are learning are helping them grow into great young adults. Our children have gained confidence, are more focused, are better able to navigate through conflicts, are more emotionally mature, and just seem happy. The teachers are very dedicated, accessible, and are inspiring role models. LWS is the school I would have wanted to go to when I was a child.

\*\*\*

This is a remarkable school. I truly believe it is the best gift we have given our sons in life. The academics were great; both sons are getting As at a rigorous high school now. Most impressive, though, is not the academics but the priority and emphasis the school places on teaching and training the children to get along well with others. The teachers' dedication to this is truly inspiring. When I volunteered for lunch and other duties, I saw teachers do conflict resolutions between kids whenever there was any upset — even just unkind words. They taught the kids, even the youngest ones, to look each other in the eye, take turns telling their feelings, and listening. The kids learned true maturity, how to empathize with others, and how to include others in their play. This is true leadership training. Many schools offer living skills and leadership classes, but few take the time to apply them in the heat of conflict.

\*\*\*

LWS has been truly transformative for my son. The small class size and level of dedication among the staff could not possibly be beaten anywhere.

\*\*\*

This is a wonderful school. Students learn so much more than just the academics. They learn compassion, understanding, and finding joy in learning.

\* \* \*

My two sons attended Living Wisdom School, and it was a wonderful experience for them. They learned to relate to other people of all ages, young and old, with compassion and empathy. The school was a vital part of their emotional development. Today one is at Cornell University, the other at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. Sending them to LWS was one of the best things I could do for them.

\* \* \*

We have a joyous, enthusiastic, and very sharp “firecracker” of a daughter in LWS. I already had a sense that this is an unusually thoughtful and emotionally intelligent school when I first met with the director and got a tour of the school years ago. Hence, we had a high expectation of the school’s curriculum and culture, teaching methodologies, and the staff when our daughter started school there. Amazingly, this school has managed to exceed our expectations in every level. — *Tess N., Menlo Park, CA*

\* \* \*

I am a Palo Alto violin teacher who has had the privilege of teaching eight children in past years who have attended the Living Wisdom School. These students started with me in fourth grade and the last child is graduating from high school this June. These children, throughout the time I taught them, have been exceptional in their attitude, in their loving interactions with other students, and have achieved exceptional levels both in school and on the violin.

In the past, I attended the performances of my students at Living Wisdom, and I believe it has been LWS that has helped make all of these children so well-rounded, grounded, and relaxed. When children at Gunn and Sacred Heart are behaving in such self-destructive ways, the students from Living Wisdom are providing their friends with guidance and helping them to recognize their self-worth. — *Denise C., Palo Alto, CA*

\* \* \*

My daughter scored 1500 out of 1600 on the SAT for Math and English. The SAT now has three parts, and out of a total of 2400, she scored 2150. She had a perfect score on the PSAT in Math. She has also been recommended for enrollment as a National Merit Scholar and has a four-point GPA.

She chided fellow students as they mocked their teacher who had his back to them. 'That would never fly in my old school,' she said. And they stopped. — *Mother of an LWS graduate accepted at U.C. Berkeley*

\*\*\*

There are few things I can recommend without any reservation. Living Wisdom School is one of them. It is the best-kept secret in Palo Alto. I cannot say enough good things about this school, but let me name a few of the highlights that made us choose the school for our son.

1. Size — The school is tiny. This allows a truly individualized approach where the teachers know every child and their needs in a deep way.

2. Academics — The small size allows self-pacing. Our son is consistently 1-2 years ahead of grade level. At the same time, in areas where he needs help he gets intensive and dedicated support.

3. Multiple-age classrooms — this arrangement groups younger kids with older peers that they can emulate. We love this about the school and it works VERY well.

4. Emotional Learning — The school practices no religion. Most teachers live at the Ananda Community, but Ananda does not play a day-to-day role at the school. They teach a philosophy of kindness, love, and emotional honesty that is rare today. The children are taught yoga, meditation, and kindness. The teachers practice what they preach and live this approach in the classroom.

5. Teachers — The teachers are dedicated to the children and the philosophy of the school. They know each child very well and form deep bonds with them.

If you want to raise an independent, kind, self-aware child - you owe it to yourself and your child to look at Living Wisdom. — *Ben R., Palo Alto, CA*

\*\*\*

If you are considering a private school, I would highly recommend Living Wisdom School (LWS). We love so many things about the school, it's hard to pick just a few to mention here:

1. Their main philosophy is Education for Life. They want their children to love learning, and this is not just words!

2. Each child can go at his/her own pace with learning. At the same time, the teachers are very careful. Their goal is to keep the children interested in the subjects, not to jump grades.

3. The teacher/student ratio is excellent.

4. The teachers are amazing.

5. In most schools, only the most gifted students take the Math Olympiads and AMC 8. In contrast, at LWS all students take these challenging tests. Last year, my husband and I were at the graduation ceremony, where they were announcing the results: it turned out that the girl who got the best score in California was an LWS student (she achieved a perfect score of 100% — the only perfect score by a sixth-grader in the state). We were very impressed. — *Lana S., Redwood City, CA*



## 32. Final Thoughts: On Choosing Your Child's School

Many schools with a heavy academic focus, perhaps aware of the growing demand among parents for a more balanced education, are now claiming to offer a blend of academics and joy. We sincerely hope these claims are true! But, ultimately, we feel that parents should make their own comparisons. Request a tour of the schools. Speak with the teachers. Above all, observe the children. Then visit a Living Wisdom School and choose for yourself. We've been practicing the Education for Life methods for a long time!

A second factor to consider in choosing a school is how the teachers are trained. The Living Wisdom Schools are extremely selective in the teachers they hire. Teacher training is long and rigorous. Impressive academic credentials alone are not sufficient; they must be accompanied by highly developed skills in understanding all aspects of the child — body, heart, will, mind, and soul — and a high degree of expertise in guiding each child to take the next, natural step in the unfolding of their individual success and happiness.

New teachers spend a year interning with another teacher, absorbing the culture, language, and methodology. They also take a three-month intensive course in yoga that includes instruction in Hatha Yoga and basic meditation techniques.

Last, but far from least, every teacher in the Living Wisdom Schools is expected to have a lifelong commitment to a personal spiritual practice, whatever their religious affiliation. This is an extremely important requirement, as it enables the teachers to understand that happiness is an internal quality, that it is the indispensable foundation for success in school and life, and that its source is Spirit.

Prayer and meditation help the teachers form a soul bond with each child. By offering themselves daily to the highest source of love, wisdom, and joy, the teachers are able to serve as channels for those qualities to help

the children, and to help them form their own inner connection with that source.

# Appendices



## Appendix 1. Education for Life Resources

- The book, *Education for Life*, presents a revolutionary system that teaches children to flower into full maturity. (<https://livingwisdomschool.org/education-for-life-the-book/>) Read online, download a PDF, or order.
- *Head & Heart: How a Balanced Education Nurtures Happy Children Who Thrive in School & Life*. The companion volume to this book. (<https://livingwisdomschool.org/academics-living-wisdom-school/>) Read online, download a free PDF, or order.
- Education for Life Website. Comprehensive information about the Education for Life approach to transforming schools. (<http://www.edforlife.org/>)

### Education for Life Schools:

Palo Alto, CA

<https://www.livingwisdomschool.org>

Nevada City, CA

<http://www.livingwisdom.org/>

Portland, OR

<http://livingwisdomportland.org/>

Seattle, WA

<http://livingwisdomschoolseattle.org/>

Assisi, Italy

<http://www.livingwisdomschoolassisi.com/>

Ljubljana, Slovenia

<http://www.sola-lila.si/>



## Appendix 2. Education for Life and the Living Wisdom Schools

As of this writing, in mid-2022, there are six thriving Education for Life Schools in Palo Alto and Nevada City, California; Portland, Oregon; Seattle, Washington; Ljubljana, Slovenia; and Assisi, Italy.

(You can find brief descriptions of the schools online at this page: <http://edforlife.org/about/#schools>.)

The term “Living Wisdom School” refers to schools that follow the Education for Life philosophy, and that were founded under the auspices of Ananda Sangha. (The first school was started at Ananda Village in 1972.)

Thanks to the success of the Living Wisdom Schools, the good news about this inspiring broad-spectrum approach to academic excellence has spread to organizations that have started, or plan to start their own schools that will be based on the Education for Life philosophy and methods, but that will not be formally associated with Ananda. These schools can generally be referred to as “Education for Life Schools,” but they are not, strictly speaking, Living Wisdom Schools.

Because this book is based on the experience of the original schools, the terms “Living Wisdom School” and “LWS” are used throughout.



## Appendix 3. Research that Supports Education for Life

To obtain a PDF copy of this book with clickable links, visit the website of the Palo Alto Living Wisdom School: [www.livingwisdomschool.org](http://www.livingwisdomschool.org). In the PDF, you can follow the links to the articles in the list below that support the principles and practices of Education for Life.

Most education research focuses on how teaching methods affect academic performance, but forty-five years of experience have shown us that practices that enhance a child's inner development can powerfully contribute to their academic success.

(If you come across supporting research, please let us know. You can send us a message at [www.livingwisdomschool.org/contact](http://www.livingwisdomschool.org/contact).)

### Teaching/Academics

Education for Life online teacher development: <http://edforlife.org/courses/>. For teachers-in-training, and for continuing teacher education.

[Active Focused Learning Approach](#). *Quotes:* "I'm not really held back anymore, just sitting in class waiting." "There's not a lot of lecturing, which makes it easier to stay focused." "I really like working with other students." Students spend more time working in groups. The strategy is getting more students to achieve better results in class.

[Longer school day and year failed to improve test scores](#).

[Task to Aid Self-Esteem Lifts Grades for Some](#).

[Crisis in the Kindergarten: Why Children Need to Play In School](#) (PDF)

[The Heart in Holistic Education](#). (PDF) Educational programs based on new scientific discoveries about refined feelings lead to improved emotional stability, cognitive functioning, and academic performance.

[Tutoring Tots](#). MSNBC News feature.

[10 Ways to Improve Schools Using Coaching Principles](#). An important article by Tony Holler, a public high school honors chemistry teacher and football and track and field coach (Plainfield North HS, IL). Living Wisdom School has followed Tony's 10 recommendations throughout its 40-plus-year history, and because we're very clear that they've played a large part in our success, the principles are engrained in our school's philosophy.

[We're destroying our kids – for nothing: Too much homework, too many tests, too much needless pressure](#). A *Salon* article argues that we've gone overboard on academics, destroying the enthusiasm in kids that's essential for academic success. The result? "Children are born curious, and it's pretty easy to facilitate that, to groom it," says Vassar College neuropsychologist Abigail Baird. "We're doing the opposite. We're squishing their desire to learn new things. And I think that's a crisis."

[Impact of Homework on Academic Achievement](#) (PDF).

[Going in circles puts students on path to better choices](#). *Quotes*: "The goal is not so much to punish as to get students on paths to make better choices, to understand the impact of what they do, to deal with people better"... "We've become more like a family and not just kids who go to school together," said freshman Leah Brito. "We've grown up big time in the last few months." "One result of the new approach is that kids are giving more thought to the effect what they do and say can have on others," she said. "In eighth grade, the he said/she said stuff was horrible when many of the students were together at Audubon middle school," Brito said. "This year, there is much less of that."

[Is Test Prep Educational Malpractice?](#) In many elementary schools there is little or no time for non-tested subjects such as art, music, and even science and history.

[Preschool Controversy – Academics or Play?](#) *Quotes*: "People who attended play-based preschools were *eight times* less likely to need treatment for emotional disturbances than those who went to preschools where direct instruction prevailed. Graduates of the play-based preschools were three times less likely to be arrested for committing a felony."

[Why I pulled my son out of a school for 'gifted' kids](#). In this *Mashable* article, a mother tells how her son thrived after she transferred him out of an elite academically oriented elementary school in New York City. "If you are privileged enough to be selective about what schools your children

attend, please consider how they are learning and not just what they are learning. School isn't only about cramming as much as possible as quickly as possible into their little brains."

[Pressure Cooker Kindergarten](#). *Quotes*: "Kindergarten has changed radically in the last two decades in ways that few Americans are aware of. Children now spend far more time being taught and tested on literacy and math skills than they do learning through play and exploration, exercising their bodies, and using their imaginations. Many kindergartens use highly prescriptive curricula geared to new state standards and linked to standardized tests. In an increasing number of kindergartens, teachers must follow scripts from which they may not deviate. These practices, which are not well grounded in research, violate long-established principles of child development and good teaching. It is increasingly clear that they are compromising both children's health and their long-term prospects for success in school.... Kindergarten has ceased to be a garden of delight and has become a place of stress and distress.... Blindly pursuing educational policies that could well damage the intellectual, social and physical development of an entire generation.... There's ongoing concern about American children catching up with their counterparts in countries such as Japan and China. Specifically in areas such as science, math and technology, schooling in those countries before second grade is "playful and experiential." And youngsters in Finland, where teens consistently score high academically, also attend play-based kindergarten and start first grade at age 7 rather than age 6."

[School starting age: the evidence](#). An article on the website of Cambridge University. "In England children now start formal schooling, and the formal teaching of literacy and numeracy at the age of four. A recent letter signed by around 130 early childhood education experts, including myself, published in the *Daily Telegraph* (11 Sept 2013) advocated an extension of informal, play-based pre-school provision and a delay to the start of formal 'schooling' in England from the current effective start until the age of seven (in line with a number of other European countries who currently have higher levels of academic achievement and child well-being)."

[What Americans Keep Ignoring About Finland's School Success](#). The Scandinavian country is an education superpower because it values equality more than excellence.

One in Five Girls in Upper Secondary School Suffers From School Burnout. *Quotes:* “A sense of optimism during university studies along with high self-esteem tend to predict job engagement ten years later on, while an avoidance strategy tends to predict work-related burnout.... The more encouragement the students got from their teachers, the less likely they were to experience school burnout.”

Explaining Math Concepts Improves Learning. *Quotes:* “Teaching children the basic concepts behind math problems was more useful than teaching children a procedure for solving the problems — these children gave better explanations and learned more,” Rittle-Johnson said. “This adds to a growing body of research illustrating the importance of teaching children concepts as well as having them practice solving problems.”

Social Skills, Extracurricular Activities In High School Pay Off Later in Life. *Quotes:* “High school sophomores who ... [had] good social skills and work habits, and who participated in extracurricular activities in high school, made more money and completed higher levels of education 10 years later than their classmates who had similar standardized test scores but were less socially adroit and participated in fewer extracurricular activities.... ‘Soft skills’ such as sociability, punctuality, conscientiousness and an ability to get along well with others, along with participation in extracurricular activities, are better predictors of earnings and higher educational achievement later in life than having good grades and high standardized test scores.... Schools are increasingly cutting...activities that foster soft skills in order to focus almost exclusively on achieving adequate yearly progress on state-mandated standardized tests.”

Students Benefit From Depth Rather Than Breadth. *Quotes:* Teaching fewer topics in greater depth is a better way to prepare students for success in college science. Teachers who “teach to the [standardized] test” may not be optimizing their students’ chances of success in college science.

Task to Aid Self-Esteem Lifts Grades for Some.

Teacher Teaming. (Teachers routinely engage in “teaming” at Living Wisdom School, thanks to the integrated curriculum and school environment that encourages teacher collaboration.)

Teaching Resilience With Positive Education.

Ten Steps to Better Student Engagement. *Quotes:* Students who have been shamed or belittled by the teacher or another student will not effectively engage in challenging tasks. To learn and grow, one must take

risks, but most people will not take risks in an emotionally unsafe environment.

[Creating Positive Classroom Management.](#) (A teacher developed creative ways to encourage positive attitudes and behaviors in younger students. The method and theory are very similar to the “Rocks in the Basket” game used at LWS and described in [this video.](#)) *Quotes:* “I’d spent years offering students rewards (stickers, tickets, tangibles, intangibles) for good behavior and I’d come to realize how they were often self-defeating.... One change I had already made was ... I would celebrate ‘great work’ by reading aloud the child’s name and stating what they had done well. Often their classmates would give an actual round of applause — which was lovely.”

[Learning and Motivation Strategies Course Increases Odds of College Graduation.](#)

[Recess Makes for Better Students.](#) *Quotes:* Study finds getting enough of it [recess] each day helps kids perform better in classroom.... Children learn as much on breaks as they do in the traditional classroom, experimenting with creativity and imagination and learning how to interact socially.... Conflict resolution is solved on the playground, not in the classroom.... The more physical fitness tests children passed, the better they did on academic tests.... Walks outdoors appeared to improve scores on tests of attention and concentration.

[Algebra-for-All Policy Found to Raise Rates Of Failure.](#)

[Lectures Didn't Work in 1350 – and They Still Don't Work Today.](#) A conversation with David Thornburg about designing a better classroom.

## **Physical Education**

[Physically fit students do better on tests.](#) *Quotes:* “Physically fit students ... are more likely to do well on ... tests and have better attendance.... Fit students are less likely to have disciplinary problems.”

[Schools use mind-body relaxation techniques to help kids fight anxiety.](#) *Quotes:* “Mind-body relaxation, including yoga, can improve self-esteem and boost grades and test scores.... Regular exposure to the [relaxation] training boosted students’ work habits, attendance, and academic performance.”

[Physical Activity May Strengthen Children’s Ability to Pay Attention.](#) *Quotes:* “Following the acute bout of walking, children performed better

on the flanker task.... Following acute bouts of walking, children had a larger P3 amplitude, suggesting that they are better able to allocate attentional resources.... The increase in reading comprehension following exercise equated to approximately a full grade level.”

[A Fit Body Means a Fit Mind](#). Quotes: “Cardiovascular exercise was related to higher academic performance.... Regular exercise benefits the brain, improves attention span, memory, and learning ... reduces stress and the effects of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder.... Aerobic exercise pumps more blood throughout the body, including to the brain. More blood means more oxygen and, therefore, better-nourished brain tissue. Exercise also spurs the brain to produce more of a protein called brain-derived neurotrophic factor, or BDNF, which Ratey calls ‘Miracle-Gro for the brain.’ This powerful protein encourages brain cells to grow, interconnect, and communicate in new ways. Studies also suggest exercise plays a big part in the production of new brain cells, particularly in the dentate gyrus, a part of the brain heavily involved in learning and memory skills.... [Many] schools are cutting back on PE and reducing recess hours. It’s a huge challenge with budget restraints and No Child Left Behind.”

## Joy in Learning

[The Joyful, Illiterate Kindergartners of Finland](#) (*The Atlantic*), by Tim Walker, a former teacher based in Finland. He now cares for his two young children and writes regularly at [Taught by Finland](#) and [Papa on the Playground](#). Research and school experience show that play time is crucial for children’s academic and social development.

[How to Parent Like a German](#). German students excel, yet in German schools academics are balanced by other kinds of learning.

[Stay Focused: New research on how to close the achievement gap](#) (*The Economist, UK*). A review of [How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character](#), by journalist Paul Tough, a former editor at *New York Times Magazine*.

[Psychologist explores how childhood play influences adult creativity](#). Sandra Russ’s new book, *Pretend Play in Childhood: Foundation of Adult Creativity*, reveals how high-achieving innovative adults use methods learned in childhood play to help them achieve success.

[Most 1st Grade Classes Not High Quality](#). Quotes: “Only 23 percent of classrooms could be judged to be of ‘high quality’ in both their instructional practices and social and emotional climate.”

[Happiness Contagious as the Flu](#). Posted on the LiveScience website. At Living Wisdom School, we create a joyful, caring environment among the students. When a new student arrives, he or she immediately feels supported and positively affected. Parents routinely comment that soon after their children enter LWS they seem happier than at their former school.

### **Meditation, Breathing, Yoga, Affirmations**

[Meditation Program in the College Curriculum](#). *Quotes:* “[Meditation] produced significant freshman-senior increases in intelligence and increased social self-confidence, sociability, general psychological health, and social maturity.”

[Self-Affirmation Can Break Cycle of Negative Thoughts](#). A report from the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

[Meditation in the Treatment of ADHD](#). Meditation-training showed significant decreases in levels of impulsivity [and significant improvements in] selective deployment of attention and freedom from distractibility in the behavior of the children.

#### [How Meditation Can Give Our Kids an Academic Edge](#)

[Meditation seen promising as ADHD therapy](#). *Quotes:* “The effect was much greater than we expected.” — lead researcher Sarina J. Grosswald, a cognitive learning specialist in Arlington, Virginia.... The children also showed improvements in attention, working memory, organization, and behavior regulation.

[Faith rites boost brains](#). Even 10 to 15 minutes of meditation appear to have significant positive effects on cognition, relaxation, and psychological health.

[Schools use mind-body relaxation techniques to help kids fight anxiety](#). *Quotes:* “Mind-body relaxation, including yoga, can improve self-esteem and boost grades and test scores. Regular exposure to the [relaxation] training boosted students’ work habits, attendance, and academic performance.”

#### [Silence is Golden \(Mindfulness Meditation study\)](#).

#### [Smacking Hits Kids’ IQ](#).

[Smiles Predict Marriage Success](#). Many parents report their children smile more after attending Living Wisdom School.

[Vedic Science based Education and Non-verbal Intelligence](#). An increase in student problem-solving ability was found.

[Meditation and Assertive Training in the Treatment of Social Anxiety](#).

[Meditation Effects on Cognitive Function](#). Meditation practice produced significant positive effects.

[Meditation Improves Leadership Behaviors](#). *Quotes*: “Subjects who learned [meditation]... as a self-development technique improved their leadership behaviors.”

## **Social Skills**

[UCLA neuroscientist's book explains why social connection is as important as food and shelter](#).

[Psychosocial stress reversibly disrupts prefrontal processing and attentional control](#).

## **Music**

[Adolescents Involved With Music Do Better in School](#). Music participation has a positive effect on reading and mathematics achievement for both elementary and high school students.

[Adolescents Involved With Music Do Better in School](#).

[Music Education Can Help Children Improve Reading Skills](#). *Quotes*: “Children exposed to a multi-year programme of music ... display superior cognitive performance in reading skills compared with their non-musically trained peers.”

[Music Training Linked to Enhanced Verbal Skills](#). *Quotes*: “Music training ... may be more important for enhancing verbal communication skills than learning phonics.... potential of music to tune our neural response to the world around us.... Music training may have considerable benefits for engendering literacy skills.... (Musicians have enhanced subcortical auditory and audiovisual processing of speech and music.)”

## **Other Articles and Papers**

[It's Official: To Protect Baby's Brain, Turn Off TV](#) (from *Wired* online). *Quote*: “A decade ago, the American Academy of Pediatrics suggested that parents limit TV consumption by children under two years of age. The recommendations were based as much on common sense as science, because studies of media consumption and infant development were themselves in their infancy. The research has finally grown up. And

though it's still ongoing, it's mature enough for the AAP to release a new, science-heavy policy statement on babies watching television, videos or any other passive media form. Their verdict: It's not good, and probably bad."

[The Human Brain: Wired for Values.](#)<sup>9</sup> This article was published as a sidebar to an article in *Mothering* magazine that strongly praised Living Wisdom School.

[Lack of Playtime Killing Joy of Learning.](#)

[Smart and Good High Schools.](#) A "Report to the Nation" from the State University of New York.

[The Heart in Holistic Education.](#) (PDF) *Quotes:* "Educational programs based on new scientific discoveries about the heart lead to improved emotional stability, cognitive functioning, and academic performance."

[After Abuse, Changes In the Brain.](#) *Quotes:* "Affectionate mothering alters the expression of genes in animals, allowing them to dampen their physiological response to stress. These biological buffers are then passed on to the next generation. [There is] direct evidence that the same system is at work in humans."

[Loneliness Spreads Like a Virus.](#) At Living Wisdom School, feelings of connectedness and joy spread like a virus.

[Positive Action Program.](#) The program focuses on helping students be aware of which behaviors are positive and will increase their happiness in the long term.

[National education standards can end up hurting students.](#)

[Self-Control Is Contagious.](#)

[Nature Makes Us More Caring.](#)

[College prep math failure full study.](#) (PDF) *Quotes:* "This study indicates that artificially pushing children beyond their current capability is counter-productive."

[Studies Reveal Why Kids Get Bullied and Rejected.](#) The researchers' recommendations for teaching children social skills uncannily reflect how LWS teachers practice conflict resolution during playground time.

[Mothering magazine praises Living Wisdom School.](#)

[Education in the Age of Energy.](#) Human awareness is becoming less materialistic and more energy-aware. How will schools adapt? Living Wisdom leads the way.

[National education standards can end up hurting students.](#)

[Nature Makes Us More Caring, Study Says.](#)

[When Friends Make You Poorer.](#) *Quotes:* “Students tend to gravitate to a major chosen by more of their peers. And the students whose choice was driven by their peers were then more likely to end up in lower-paying jobs that they didn’t like.”

[Kids Get Worst SAT Scores in a Decade.](#)

[APA review confirms link between playing violent video games and aggression.](#)

[Exposure to TV violence related to irregular attention and brain structure.](#)

[School Starting Age: The Evidence.](#)