

Walden News



8 April 2011

The third quarter at WCS has been exciting. Building improvements have begun! Under the direction and supervision of our contractor Gary Hossen, the project is moving right along. The new building will definitely be ready by Fall of next year, if not sooner.



The meeting with Mike Barr of **Keep Seminole Beautiful** went very well. We have formed a partnership and accepted his invitation to host the

children's section at the Earth Day celebration on April 23rd. We need about 12 adults/older adolescents at all times to coordinate games and activities. We will have a cake walk, Trivia contests, 3-legged races, and jump rope contests, just to name a few possibilities. The goal is to recreate the feel of an old fashioned country fair. Volunteers and ideas on games and activities would be greatly appreciated. Any student that helps will receive up to 10 hours of community service hours through Seminole County, so recruit your friends!

I have also established a relationship with Ken Wright, the Fish and Wildlife Commissioner. He is very interested in our school and wants to help coordinate environmental studies, field experiences and guest speakers.

Professional Development

Professional Development continues on a weekly basis with our focus on grading practices. The teachers and I are working on revising our grading policies to reflect the WCS philosophy of authenticity in all areas of our educational practices. As we continue to review and discuss various experts' views on assessments, our thinking continues to shift towards creating a unique WCS policy on our assessment practices. It has always been our mission to be a best of practice school. It is therefore our responsibility to continuously review, adjust and evolve into a state of the art, student centered, academic institution. Our fourth quarter project is to read Alfie Kohn's



Punished by Rewards. We will read and explore several chapters each week and complete what has been a very successful and educational Professional Development program for 2010-2011.

If you have any ideas or want to "weigh in" on the concept of grades, feel free to contact me by email at drmikulka@earthlink.net.



St. Petersburg

Our journey to St. Petersburg began with a trip to the St. Pete Pier. Whilst here, we went through a small, but very colorful, aquarium tour.

We saw a Moray Eels, Blowfish, and many Yellow Tangs just to name a few of the species. We were warmly greeted by our docent upon arrival at the Holocaust museum. She told us anecdotal stories of her childhood growing up in Germany, and the

craziness that would shortly begin once the war began to grow. She took us through a brief history of the war and Hitler’s takeover. I got a chance to relate some of my own personal experiences of being in the concentration and work camps of both Germany and Poland to the exhibits we were viewing. In my opinion, the students embraced the boxcar used to ferry the Jews and other victims of the Holocaust to and from many different destinations throughout Europe. This was a cultural experience that the students will not soon forget.

Mr. Singer



The math classes are making their final push to the end of the year. While Algebra 1 and Geometry are putting a final polish on some major concepts such as probability and area, Algebra 2 is starting to stretch their minds into complex formulas and 3D graphs. Trigonometry is also starting to push into the unknown with an extensive unit on sequences and series which will take an in depth look at the repeating patterns that surround us. In our Lab/Logic class we will be continuing to explore the science that goes into our everyday life as well as taking a look into what skills we gain as children through the games we play.

Miss Plourde



Having just finished a grueling round of essays, English classes have transitioned to new units. English A and B are working on a sampling of poetry from the Renaissance, including Shakespeare and John Donne, the Restoration (Alexander Pope), the Romantic Period (Lord Byron), the Victorian Age (Alfred, Lord Tennyson), and Modernism (T.S. Eliot). They’re focusing on how poetry evolves and how to analyze poets’ styles. English C has begun a unit on the power of language to code values, particularly using gender studies and fairy tales. We have been looking at the ways language and stories shape culture.

Surprise!



A Midsummer Night’s Dream

For a surprise field trip, Walden visited the Orlando Shakespeare Festival’s production of Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Like all “Orlando Shakes” productions, this one put a spin on the performance. The actors did a great job mixing old-fashioned comedy with contemporary references--the students laughed the whole time.

Walden in the News



“You might expect a school called Walden to have an affinity for the natural world. For some, the name might evoke thoughts of Walden Pond, the serene, wooded retreat of transcendental thinker and writer Henry David Thoreau. This is perfectly fine with educators at Walden Community School in Winter Park, Florida. School founder and director Dr. Carol Mikulka says a day outdoors is a good day, indeed. "When you let students experience flowers, trees, games, scavenger hunts... it increases their motivation to learn. It improves their attention span. They become more engaged!"

Mikulka places a premium on educating children in ways that are age-appropriate and child-centered. She believes America's students will become more successful when they are pushed less. As a practicing psychiatrist, she expresses serious concern about the shift in the country's educational approach over the past thirty years. "Children are always indoors!" Mikulka

laments. She lists loss of recess time, earlier formal schooling, and indoor afterschool programming as part of a shift away from a wholesome balance in childhood. "Their brains just shut down, because the balance just isn't there."

One way Walden seeks a remedy for imbalance is to allow children time to learn outdoors. Walden is a Project Learning Tree school. This national program provides lesson plans, teacher training and other assistance for greater environmental education. Three years into the PLT designation, Mikulka is impressed with the environmental curriculum and its impact on overall literacy. "It's amazing, and it's so relevant. Learning about trees, the environment... that makes them more literate in general. But this learning is about discovery. It's about inquiry and foreshadowing and association and anticipation... the same skills needed to be a strong reader!"

Mikulka is among many Florida educators who value nature as a classroom with wide appeal for a wide array of learners. For students with naturalistic, auditory and kinesthetic inclinations, they have a chance to connect and to excel in ways they might not in a more traditional setting.”

--This from “Naturally Smart.” Read the whole article at www.happyreading.org

We're in Dissertations!

Clair Hockley, of Union College, in a thesis on Modern Education



The Walden Community School (Mikulka, ND) in Winter Park, Florida presents some truly interesting beliefs about education, particularly in terms of Dewey and Thoreau. Of all the schools examined, this school may be the closest to a marriage of Thoreau and Dewey. When reading the “about” tab on the school’s web site, a few words stand out: peaceful, make a difference, communicate, think and reason critically (Walden Community School, ND). And these words, coincidentally, fit Thoreau. When reading the “FAQs” tab on the school’s web site a few words and phrases stand out: conversation and collaboration, student engagement, activities of learning, opportunity, integrated, resources, rubrics,

objectives, and diverse (Walden Community School, ND). And these words fittingly resonate with the tenets of Dewey and Progressive Education...the philosophy fits both Thoreau and Dewey.

But there is more to this school. Dr. Mikulka (Mikulka, 2011) bubbles with enthusiasm and passion when talking about this school and why they do what they do. She speaks of acting upon one’s beliefs and references Thoreau’s Civil Disobedience; she speaks of child centered learning and references Dewey. Dr. Mikulka adds that there are other influences in the school she founded. She speaks of The Schools Our Children Deserve by Alfie Kohn and the progressive ideas that book advocates. The weekly staff meetings are awash in professional growth – staff discussing and collaborating and moving education forward. However, there is still more. Dr. Mikulka includes the importance of developmentally appropriate education and references Piaget. She speaks of developing the whole child, and applicable learning, and of reflection. One might think that Thoreau is of a time long past and that he was not much appreciated in his own time, but Mikulka points to his willingness to, as some might say, beat to his own drum, to not be afraid to be different, and to say what needs to be said, as he did in his essay Civil Disobedience. Dewey is also of a time gone by but his devotion to scientific methodologies are as relevant now as they were when he advocated them. Scientific methodologies push educators and researchers to continue to question, search for answers, find deeper understanding. Like Dewey, Mikulka believes in research and its benefits for children and education. This school, The Walden Community School, seems to have fused the ideologies of Thoreau and Dewey in a model, progressive school.