

## Integrating Integral Education into Teaching at FCS

By Douglas Ross

*Doug has been teaching science to Middle Schoolers at FCS for twenty-nine years.*

Last February I noticed an e-mail from John Gruber, Upper School science teacher and department chair, recommending the Integral Education Conference to be held in August 2008 on Whidbey Island near Seattle where he would be one of the conference faculty. I didn't know much about integral education, but the term "integral" resonated with my life-long goal of creating learning environments that engage all aspects of a student's experience and personality.

**...the term "integral" resonated with my life-long goal of creating learning environments that engage all aspects of a student's experience and personality.**

More importantly, when former students come back to reminisce, those taught by John describe life-changing experiences they had with him. Who wouldn't want to hang out with John and enjoy his magic? John said the conference, which he attended a couple of years ago, was transforming, providing a model for teaching that is "inclusive ...of all of the elements of human experience," (see *Forum*, Fall/Winter 2007-2008), and that was good enough for me. I was able to arrange for support for my attendance from the Fannie Cox Hendrie stipend program.

So this past August, I made my first trip to the beautiful city of Seattle. I arrived early to visit some college classmates, get acclimated to Pacific Coast Time and tour the city on my friend's bike. The day of the conference, one of my buddies decided to take a morning off to drive me to the northern end of Whidbey Island where there is a bridge connection and a nice place to hike overlooking the bay. After lunch he dropped me off at a remote location on the southern end of

the island, the locale of the conference, where I received a warm reception from John and the other staff.

The next morning I scrambled to keep up with my younger roommate as we hiked up the steep half-mile hill between our Japanese style guest house and the conference buildings. I felt like I was at summer camp for teachers since I had my choice of three pre-break

**I felt like I was at summer camp for teachers...**

fast activities. I chose the Feldencrais movement workshop led by the amazing juggler and dancer, Thomas Arthur, who had entertained us after dinner the night before. I chose him, because I could see in the fluid and graceful way Thomas moved that he had something to teach this old wrestling coach about movement and ways of being. My usual approach could be described as "Let's bull through this situation," an attitude that has generally worked for me but has scarred my body with injuries. I made a good choice, and it turned out to be a nice warm-up for the meditative forest walk the next morning with John, which he led for participants, asking us to open our senses, then talk about our experiences.

After breakfast and some delightful singing, we jumped right into the cognitive content. I soon realized that integral education encompassed more than integrating skills and subjects, although that is a likely outcome of an integral classroom. The first speaker immersed us in advanced concepts of integral philosophy based on the groundbreaking work of Ken Wilber whose work not only considers the full spectrum of human development (emotional, intellectual, spiritual and physical), but challenges educators to respect the learners by including them in the process of producing meaningful and useful knowledge.

First, it became clear to me that an integral approach to education, concerned with all aspects of human development, could be characterized as having a Constructivist approach because of the emphasis

**We at FCS are blessed that teaching the whole child has always been valued...**

on the individual's participation in his or her own development. I was impressed to find that Ken Wilber has proposed a most comprehensive model describing aspects of human development. We at FCS are blessed that teaching the whole child has always been valued, so this model is quite relevant to our work. Unlike many schools, we are



Doug, with Earth Force\* student.

(\*An environmental service learning group.)

unabashed in speaking of the spiritual and emotional development of our students and have structures such as our weekly Meeting for Worship, our advisor system and our explicit focus on Life Skills to support these elements.

Secondly, development is an on-going process that continues through adulthood. Furthermore, children who are taught and parented by adults who are actively engaged in their own development tend to progress with more depth and breadth. I believe the children "stand on our shoulders," so it is up to us to be as tall as possible.

**...children who are taught and parented by adults who are actively engaged in their own development tend to progress with more depth and breadth.**

Thirdly, development can be accelerated by viewing events and problems from varied perspectives. Wilber does this explicitly with a number of models, the simplest one being to look at the same situation from the point of view of the individual (the ego-centered "I"),

from a group perspective (the "We") or from a third person or purely objective point of view (the "It"). Growth and understanding are likely to occur as we move from one perspective to another. In fact, we can even develop the capacity to hold multiple perspectives simultaneously.

My participation in the Integral Education Conference is a good example of these points in action. Regarding the first, the FCS philosophy promotes a broad approach to growth for our students, and our practices support these values. As for the second point, the encouragement I received to attend this conference is characteristic of the remarkable commitment the School makes for faculty development, as expressed through the Clayton Farraday Mastership Program, the Cox/Hendrie funds for science, math and technology, as well as generous support for masters degrees and faculty conferences. Our curricula encourage multiple perspectives, and our school schedule builds in the weekly Meeting for Worship for individual and corporate reflection where we can emerge with deeper and broader perspectives (point three).

**Our curricula encourage multiple perspectives...**

How was I to incorporate my conference experience into my teaching when I returned in the fall? First of all, I had been refreshed by the nourishment received from master educators in an exquisite natural setting. I was to try out new means of expression and enjoy being in the roles of student, listener and observer. Considering the full range of my students' development and the importance of explicitly guiding them through multiple perspectives was to strengthen my teaching.

In the fall when I first take my students to our outside lab at Indian Creek East in Morris Park, I usually allow them to explore the area before we begin our water monitoring. This fall, I added a wonderful activity that brings all three perspectives of I, We and It together. The

**The students silently examined and passed natural objects across a circle as a means of eliciting a sense of connection within our class while inspiring awareness, awe and appreciation for our natural world.**

students silently examined and passed natural objects across a circle as a means of eliciting a sense of connection within our class while inspiring awareness, awe and appreciation for our natural world.

The summer week went by quickly, and before long I found myself taking the beautiful ferry ride across the bay back to Seattle. I was refreshed and stimulated, ready for a new group of eighth graders. I have memories, teaching ideas in a powerful framework, and the inspiration of fellow educators. The last evening one of these educators recited lines from a poem that reminded me of my sacred role as a teacher in helping humanity over the next evolutionary hurdle. We are all assisting the next generations in getting over this hurdle together, working in partnership with each other and our students, exploring the spiritual reality of the natural world of which we are part. It is the only way we can succeed.

### *For the Children*

*The rising hills, the slopes,  
of statistics  
lie before us.  
the steep climb  
of everything going up,  
up, as we all  
go down.*

*In the next century  
or the one beyond that,  
they say, are valleys, pastures,  
we can meet there in peace  
if we make it.*

*To climb these coming crests  
one word to you, to  
you and your children:*

*stay together  
learn the flowers  
go light*

Gary Snyder from *Turtle Island*\*

\* *Turtle Island*, the title of Snyder's book of poems, was a Native American reference to North America



## **Girls Rock**

By Megan Schumacher

*Megan has been teaching English to  
Upper Schoolers for six years.*

Children are impressionable. I do not speak as a teacher here, but from my own personal experience of having been a child once. Ever since I can remember, I have loved music. As a child, I can remember playing my 45s on my record player for endless hours. I had some great songs in my collection, too, including "I'm a Little Teapot" and a song that was all about spinning in circles. That's what I would do as the song played, spin and spin until I was going to be sick and could stand no longer, and when the song was over, I would play it again. I loved music so much that on my first "date," when I was all of seven years old, I made the boy whom I had invited over to my house listen to the entire soundtrack of *Mary Poppins*...the poor fellow. I can still remember turning to him while listening to "Feed the Birds" and explaining to him that it was the best song on the album because it made me cry.

**With a love of music at such a young age,  
it should come as no surprise that music class  
was a subject I always looked forward to...**

With a love of music at such a young age, it should come as no surprise that music class was a subject I always looked forward to, but it was a bittersweet love affair. There was this cloud that always hung over my head dating back to my early years of elementary school. It all began in first grade, when I found myself sitting between two boys, Nick and Mike. Nick and Mike were perfectly lovely boys, and sitting between the two of them wouldn't have fazed me, but sadly I had discovered the reason behind my seating arrangement. It turned out I did not have a particularly pretty singing voice for a six-year-old girl, but surprise, surprise, Nick and Mike had beautiful soprano