

New, Fun, and Just Plain Cool



Crazy Wisdom Kids in the Community

By Karen L. Totten

If you'd like to be considered for inclusion in the next Crazy Wisdom Kids column, please contact our columnist at: cwkidscolumn@crazywisdom.net. The deadline for submissions for the May thru August 2012 issue is March 1, 2012.

The Progressive Education Consortium (PEC) is a Washtenaw County group of individuals interested in alternative/progressive forms of education, who come together on a monthly basis to discuss how better to represent the schools they serve.

The consortium, which had its initial meeting in March of 2011, is a collaboration among local learning communities and alternative schools, including Clonlara School, New Point Learning Center, Ann Arbor Academy, Little Lake Learning Community, and Rudolf Steiner School. The consortium formed as a result of networking between two of the current members during an education conference early in 2010.

One problem for alternative school personnel is finding like-minded individuals with whom to troubleshoot, discuss problems and issues, and share ideas for finding those populations of school children who are a good fit for alternative programs. In the consortium, members can serve as resources for each other and as sounding boards. As Martha Rhodes, Campus Coordinator at Clonlara Campus School and PEC member, says, "If a student is not a good fit for Clonlara, I can recommend them to one or several of the other schools that I know might better suit his or her needs."

Another major function of the consortium is reaching out to the public through lecture series and other public events that showcase alternative approaches to education. Two lectures will be forthcoming in 2012: One at the Ann Arbor Academy (topic TBA) in January and another in March at Clonlara School.

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Additionally, the PEC is hosting a screening of the film *Play Again*, about the importance for children to have outdoor play and engage with nature. The movie explores the changing balance between "virtual" and "natural" worlds of six teenagers who, like the average American child, spend 5 to 15 hours a day behind screens (TV, computer, and otherwise). The film asks, "What are the consequences of childhood removed from nature?" Showtime is March 1, 2012, at 6:30 p.m. at Clonlara School. Donations will be used to help send students from the various PEC schools to a three-day April conference of the National Coalition of Alternative and Community Schools at The Farm in Tennessee.

While the consortium began as a vehicle for school administrators, Rhodes notes that participation is no longer confined to members exclusively



Dr. Diane Babalas and Abby

from those realms. The PEC members have begun reaching out to persons interested in alternative education, from business and community leaders to anyone committed to the ideas behind progressive educational programs.

For further information on the PEC, contact Martha Rhodes at 734-926-4617.

"I have always loved working with children," says Diane Babalas, doctor of chiropractic, "because their systems have so much adaptability and are so open to change that miracles are commonplace." Babalas is speaking of the change that can occur in children whose nervous systems are affected by stress. Her practice utilizes an approach to chiropractic called Bio Geometric Integration (BGI), which emphasizes light touch and breath work to release tension from all parts of the body.

The gentleness of BGI makes it a great choice for children, says Babalas. Although children often have trouble remaining still, she says that work can still be done on them. Additionally, the treatment is not loud, scary, or painful. BGI deals with alignment, like traditional chiropractic, but also looks at the whole body, to take input from all tissues to help a patient relax.

Behind the practice of Bio Geometric Integration is a philosophy that our bodies are intelligent and know how to heal themselves. Symptoms of stress arise as a signal that we are unable to integrate and release stress from the body. The more stress accumulates, the more we have symptoms.

Stress can be physical, chemical, or emotional in nature, says Babalas, and indicators of problems include physical symptoms. She has treated children

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with gait problems and those injured in falls, and well as cases of torticollis (inability to straighten the neck).

Signs that a child might be suffering chemical stresses include frequent illnesses, allergies and asthma, ADD, and seizures. She has had great results with children suffering from epilepsy staying seizure-free after several adjustments.

One of those miracles Babalas referred to involves a girl who at six months old was a lively child but whose neck was stuck to one side (torticollis). Her parents were considering surgery, but Dr. Babalas was able to relieve the neck spasm causing the misalignment of the bones, and thus the little girl was able to move her neck freely without requiring surgery.

Babalas found her way to chiropractic after years of performance in clarinet during undergraduate school led her to suffer a serious case of tendonitis. She couldn't wash her hair or brush her teeth due to the condition. After some time spent in the "medical model" of care, Babalas found chiropractic. Since it helped her so much, she decided to use her biology minor to pursue a four-year program in chiropractic school. She has been in practice in Ann Arbor for 11 years and using BGI for the last 10 years.

You can learn more about Dr. Babalas, her practice, and BGI at her website, gatewaychiropracticbgi.com, or by calling 734-239-6060. Her practice is located at 210 Collingwood, Suite 100, Ann Arbor, 48103.

Directed by Melissa Palma, the Little Lake Learning Community of Ann Arbor is a green-based democratic education environment for children. The program opened in 2010 and now hosts 14 students ages 4-13. Little Lake Learning Community is child oriented; a place where a child can explore his/her passions and interests, be they trains, sharks, art, or fort building. As Palma says, the role of the advisor (teacher) is to support each child on his or her educational, emotional, physical, and social journey.



Little Lake Learning Community

"When students are motivated by passion or interest, then they learn more efficiently and authentically," says Melissa Palma. This is, in effect, the guiding principle of democratically based educational programs.

The program takes on a theme area of study each semester. In fall 2011, the theme was water. Students explored the subject in their own ways, brainstorming to come up with sub-topics of interest and ways to approach them. The underlying assumption is that advisors don't have all the answers; and in this way co-learning can take place, with all participants engaged in discovery of the subjects. "When students are motivated by passion or interest, then they learn more efficiently and authentically," says Palma. This is, in effect, the guiding principle of democratically based educational programs.

There are no grade levels at LLLC. The children are grouped loosely according to age: 4- to 7-year-olds and 8- to 13-year-olds. The groups work both independently and in concert, sharing group activities such as art or science projects, then breaking apart for other age-oriented studies. On the day I visited, a more structured period of English and math for 4- to 7-year-olds was followed by a group art activity for all the students, where they created holiday ornaments to sell at a school fundraiser.



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At Little Lake, children are free to learn what they like, though not to do so without direction. "It's not in a child's nature to do nothing," says Palma. She finds that students are eager to learn when adults provide the opportunities and support, and step out of the way to let it happen.

Skill sharing is very valued by the program and an effort is made to welcome adults to bring their talents into the program. Palma's, mother, for instance, comes in on a weekly basis for physical education. In addition, Little Lake students go out into the larger community to explore, via weekly Wednesday field trips to various locations around the area.

In recent months, the group visited the Arb; traveled to the Heidelberg Project and the Dossin Great Lakes Museum on Belle Isle in Detroit; drew pictures at the University of Michigan Art Museum, explored the Hands-On Museum, and made use of local public libraries. Palma says, "If you are riding a public bus in Ann Arbor on a Wednesday and see a gaggle of kids, it's probably us!"

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Crazy Wisdom Kids in the Community

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There are rules to follow, as with any environment, but the community of Little Lake has a strong commitment to a group-based approach to governance. Children, parents, and advisors are welcome to attend the weekly All-School Meeting, where the agenda is open to anyone who would like to add a topic of discussion. Everyone has an equal vote and equal say in determining the community's rules. When a change is proposed, consensus is used to make decisions.

This spirit of community extends to conflict resolution as well. Tensions that arise are handled by non-violent communication and peer mediation. Time is spent helping children learn to solve their problems with each other, rather than being told what to do. Palma says, "The role of the community is to help all members address their emotions in a healthy way, which leads to healthier people."

Little Lake Learning Community is open for additional enrollment. "We want to stay small," says Palma, "but we have room for about 30 [total]." To contact the school, call Palma at 734-218-4877 or visit their website at littlakelearningcommunity.org. The school is located at The Episcopal Church of Incarnation, 3257 Lohr Road, Ann Arbor, 48104.

Imagine being able to communicate with your pre-verbal toddler without resorting to guessing games. That's what Stephannie Moore helps parents and children accomplish through a program called Baby Signing Time, an interactive method that teaches American Sign Language through song and play.

Designed for hearing babies between 6 months and 36 months, the program teaches children basic signs for everyday events and emotions. "Children are able to sign much earlier than they can speak," says Moore. She leads them to make signs for key things like hunger, for example, and focuses on nouns and verbs, not the syntax or grammar of ASL.



"Children are able to sign much earlier than they can speak," says Stephannie Moore. She leads them to make signs for key things like hunger, for example, and focuses on nouns and verbs.

Not only does the system lead to fewer tantrums from frustrated children, but there are other benefits as well. According to Moore, research in the field supports the idea that babies who are taught symbolic language tend to have more developed vocabularies as they age. In addition, the interaction between parent and child develops their relationship and enhances bonding.

Moore's own interest in baby signing began after adopting an infant son in 2010 whose biological brother was most likely autistic. She wanted to ensure that her son was equipped with every communication tool at his disposal.

The baby signing program was developed by a singer/musician whose 12-month-old daughter was discovered to be deaf. He wrote the songs used in Baby Signing to help teach ASL to others, so that the world would be more accessible to his daughter. Because the signs in the program are ASL-based, once children or adults learn them, they can be used for children of all ages and abilities to interact.

Moore is not a newcomer to the wonders of music. She grew up playing eight instruments and studied in the University of Michigan's music school. She was headed for a degree in opera at Northwestern when she changed direction and began to explore other options.

For the last 15 years, Moore has been a teacher of private instruction in voice and piano. Her Dynamic Expressions Studio teaches voice and piano to individuals ages five to adult, including special needs and hearing/speech-impaired students. She loves working with children. "They spark my creativity," she says, adding, "The energy of children brings an ability to communicate joy in all sorts of eclectic ways."

For more information about Baby Signing classes, contact Stephannie Moore at Dynamic Expressions Studio. The phone number is 734-417-0760 or you can e-mail her at stephannie@dynamicexpressionsstudio.com. You can also visit the website at www.dynamicexpressionsstudio.com.

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Correction

In the CW Kids Column of our September-December 2011 issue, the Natural Balance Wellness Medical Center was incorrectly identified as "New Balance." We apologize for this error. Natural Balance Wellness Medical Center is located at 1310 S. Main Street in Ann Arbor and can be reached at 734-929-2696 or nbwellness.com.

Photographers Wanted

To take pictures for *The Crazy Wisdom Community Journal*. Moderate pay, wonderful exposure. It's also fun and interesting to meet the people we take photos of: healers, authors, bodymind therapists, yoga teachers, professors, holistic and spiritual types, and other fringe elements! For more information, contact Bill Zirinsky at bill@crazywisdom.net.