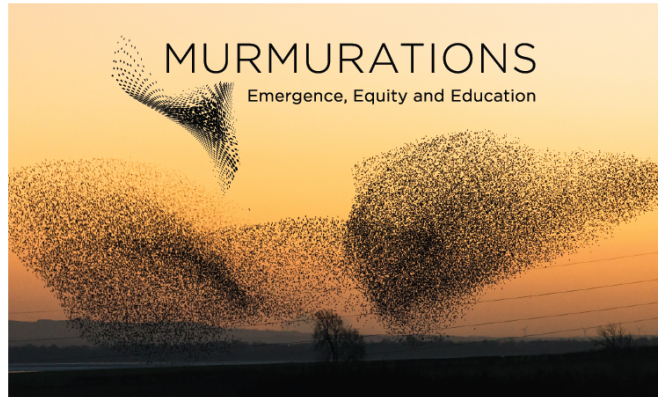


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Murmurations emerged as a project by a community of educators who recognize that education and its results arise from interactions of historical, social, political, psychological, biological and environmental factors. As a U.S. institution, education has most reliably produced inequity. We began *Murmurations* with the intent of dissolving the dynamics that support and re-create inequitable educational outcomes.

We are not separate from the systems we wish to transform.

We invite you to reflect with us, examining the relationship between thought, action and the dynamics of the educational systems in which we participate.

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PROVOCATION

Keywords:
*whole-child, equity,
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Seeing Every Star: supporting the brilliance in all our children

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Abstract

Point of View: I am a white, mother of three children, and the product of a progressive elementary education. I have worked as a qualitative educational researcher for the past 25 years in the areas of equity and arts-integrated and student-centered practices in K-12 education. My experiences have shaped my worldview and deep concern with the ways our current system is damaging the humanity of all our children, particularly our most disenfranchised. My race, socio-economic status, and education have afforded me tremendous privilege and access to resources and advantage. I seek to use my privilege to shed light on what is possible and to show how we can envision a more hopeful, positive, and loving world for young people that truly nurture their spirits, hearts, and minds.

Value of submission: The future of our planet depends upon an engaged, compassionate, brave and thoughtful citizenry. We are not currently on a trajectory to meeting those needs as far too many of our children are stuck in a broken system intended to feed our commerce-based economy rather than nurture our collective humanity. This visioning piece is designed to serve as an inspiration and call to action to do better by our children, especially those most underserved, undervalued and squashed by the inequities in our society.

*This work was completed
without the support of a
funding agency.*



Introduction

On March 24th, 2018 I stood witness to the fire of young people as my children and I attended our local community's March for Our Lives rally run entirely by local high school students. I was struck by the raw passion and energy of the students and the potential captured by this sign in the crowd.



It sparked my thinking about how far away we are from this idea. Many of the students who spoke lived privileged lives that afforded them the opportunities and resources to express themselves with few risks or repercussions. I wondered what it would take to see this kind of passion as the norm in our schools where all students regardless of background could express themselves fully and boldly and be taken seriously. As a researcher and community builder in the sphere of education I think of this question as:

- *What would schools look like if they were based on children's needs and supported young people to fully develop all aspects of their being?*

Situating Myself in the Discourse

We all see the world through the lens of our position and experiences, so I want to situate myself in this discourse. I am a white, middle class, highly educated, Jewish, divorced mother with two college freshman sons and an elementary age daughter. As a child, I went to a progressive, play-based, student-centered K-8 private school which fostered choice and independence. This experience supported my desire to question the status quo and the purpose of schools. For the past 15 years I have worked as an educational researcher at a prestigious university, as well as a consultant to support whole-school transformation through arts integration in some of the poorest middle schools in the San Francisco Bay Area. I have also helped launch a local, grass roots charter school and co-created a mindfulness curriculum for my daughter's school. My position affords me tremendous privilege and access to resources and advantage. I have worked in my life to use that privilege to shed light on what is possible and to show how we can envision a more hopeful, positive and loving world for young people. My professional work has provided me the opportunity to spend time in many kinds of schools and classrooms all over the country, from those that serve the most underserved students in the most underfunded schools, to the most affluent; from schools that are developmental, project-based, student-centered, and equity oriented to those that are adult-centered and standardized. These experiences shape the lens through which I see the world.

I wrote this piece not to provide answers but to raise questions and enter into the dialogue about how to support the next generation. Therefore, throughout the piece there are italicized questions intended to provoke discussion and reflection. The future of our planet depends upon an engaged, compassionate, brave and thoughtful citizenry.

This piece is written as a thought piece to expand our vision of what might be possible in the best of all possible worlds for children. Of course there are many obstacles, challenges and limitations to realizing this vision. But I am hopeful that the questions and ideas raised in this piece can inspire us to set our sights on giving our children the kind of school experience that would actually nurture their whole selves.

Currently our schools emphasize an extremely narrow band of students' cognitive development. I question, in this piece, what it might look like to support children's development holistically, that is, to include their creative, emotional, spiritual, physical development. I assert that by attending to children's development comprehensively, schools could support children to know themselves deeply, enable them to connect with others, help them to investigate what excites them and ultimately equip them to become contributors to a healthier, more just and equitable society. I assert that these broader developmental and whole-child purposes of school are more likely to contribute to a more vibrant, just and equitable democracy. I am informed by my diverse past research and experiences including research on public Waldorf Schools, student-centered schools, and arts-integrated schools and the development of a mindfulness curriculum. My intent is to spark an interrogation of the status quo rather than provide recommendations for specific practices or approaches.

Purpose of Schooling

The debate about the purpose of schooling is as old as schooling itself. Whatever our system, it is always perfectly designed for the outcomes it produces. We can ask ourselves:

- *What is our current purpose of schooling and what are its outcomes?*

In the United States, we are increasingly focusing on a market-based schooling system that is more and more privatized and profit-oriented and seeks to produce compliant and dutiful workers to feed our consumer-oriented economy.¹ We are preparing our children to feed our economy not our humanity.

- *What are the implications of market-focused education on the health of our society?*

The results of this approach, when compared to other nations with a greater public investment in education, are declining overall achievement, greater segregation by race and class, greater inequity of access and outcomes, more push-out of lower achieving students, and teacher shortages combined with unequal distribution of knowledge and skills.²

The market-based focus on schooling also produces an overemphasis on ensuring that students have marketable skills in high-profit sectors, such as technology and health care. There are many “popular” programs to support this goal. For example, some programs masquerade as equity-oriented, such as coding for black boys. Is it possible that coders will be the next generation’s version of factory workers, continuing to feed the consumer-based society? What are they coding? For whom?

Another way this happens is through career pathways and academies. Many low-income students are sucked into these types of programs because they offer more hands-on curriculum and applied learning and more qualified teachers than the other schools in their communities. However, students are limited by the focus of the pathway and have limited exposure to other disciplines. These programs also face challenges to maintaining an equitable distribution of students since the types of career focus attract certain demographics but not others. Furthermore, these schools can become training grounds for work rather than a space for exploration and inquiry. For example, one school that I studied had a health professions focus, and students had to wear scrubs to school. While for some students this gave them a proxy of lived experience into a more professional sector than they may have experienced in their home community, it also transformed school into a workplace in which they learn to be cogs in the larger economic system. We can differentiate that notion of a workplace from the idea that the “work” students do in school is real, authentic and valuable and so school becomes a place “of work.”

What does it mean to support children developmentally?

- *What would schools look like if they were designed around children’s developmental needs and stages?*

While this may not initially sound like a radical idea, our schools are currently so totally out of sync with children’s developmental needs that when we interrogate the types of changes in schooling that may result, it can seem quite radical in its application. We can begin to see some of the many ways schools are misaligned with children’s needs when we inquire about the start times of school, the amount of time children are asked to sit passively, the types of tasks children are asked to do in school, the ways we assess student learning, the teaching of academic subjects as isolated subjects, the amount of time children are required to spend on homework and the extreme pressure that many high achieving students are under to get into competitive colleges. Conversely, we see a lack of focus on the amount of time children are supported to connect with each other, engage in creative tasks, use their imaginations freely, move their bodies, engage in cross-age experiences, give voice to their experiences and connect to their communities.

- *How much of schooling is designed around adult needs, convenience and efficiency?*

When we really start to question school norms, structures and curriculum the answer to this question is revealed. Traditional schools were designed around the factory model at the turn of the 20th Century to sort and batch students and move them through a highly

1. Adamson, Astrand, and Darling-Hammond 2016.

2. International Institute for Education Planning, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2017, <http://www.iiep.unesco.org/en/influence-privatization-or-public-investment-education-4035>, last accessed June 29, 2018.

regulated system. Despite research that highlights the out-of-date notions of this model, it persists in most schools. Although I am not endorsing Waldorf schools as the only answer to the misalignment between a developmental approach and a more common efficiency and competition model, their approach is educative of another way of thinking about schooling.

The Waldorf model is built on its founder, Rudolph Steiner's comprehensive theory of child development that divides the stages of child development into seven-year phases. At the heart of this theory is respect for children, not as partially-formed adults but as their own beings. A teacher from one of the three public Waldorf schools we studied in Sacramento explains, "We talk about receiving children with reverence, that there is something special about every child that enters here."³ An example of the developmental approach is visible in how kindergarten is designed to ease children into school life.

Children can bring slippers to wear in the classroom at school and boots for outside play. The classroom is home-like with a kitchen, imaginative play spaces, and vast outside spaces. In contrast to widely held notions of children's developmental needs in preschool and kindergarten, Waldorf-inspired kindergarten is decorated in muted colors, it is not a text-rich environment but a subdued environment. There are many spaces for children to physically engage with open-ended play objects in their environment.³

First and second grade are viewed as a time of heightened imagination. While many of today's schools emphasize preparing students at this age to excel on standardized literacy assessments requiring a laser-like focus on literacy through decoding, Steiner's philosophy proposes that children develop literacy skills by practicing storytelling before they learn to read and write. According to Steiner's child development theory, in this phase children develop their capacity for imagination. For this reason, much of the instruction focuses on sparking the child's imagination through storytelling, drawing, and singing. The focus at this age is on children being

inwardly active, creating their own images for stories. Developing a student's ability to mentally visualize a story plays an essential role in the student's later ability to move towards the concrete world of words. Stories are also intended to connect to children's feelings, because it is believed that what resonates with children's feelings will be remembered and integrated rather than just presented as disconnected facts that may be quickly forgotten as is more common in educational approaches.³

While teaching reading later is quite controversial, our research revealed that it could have quite a positive influence on some students and free up the school day substantially to offer a more diverse curriculum rather than trying to fit every child into a rigid structure for which they may or may not be developmentally ready. One graduate of a public Waldorf school shared that she did not learn to read well until the end of third grade. This student, who eventually attended UC Berkeley, would likely have been labeled as poor at school, given remedial work, and perhaps persuaded that she was unintelligent had she attended a different school. She describes how she benefited from the gentle approach of her school:

First grade was learning all the letters. So we'd take maybe like every week or every couple of days we'd pick a new letter. We'd learn the sounds. We'd draw a picture with the letter and then a picture of something like an animal that started with the letter....And then in second grade we moved on to learning things like all the vowels and beginning to read. We had reading groups so those kids who were more advanced were in one reading group and those kids who needed more help were in another. I learned to read at the end of third grade, where I could actually read really solidly by myself, and then after that I just absolutely loved reading because I was given the time to actually find it for myself. I wasn't forced to sit down and read...I never felt like I was

stupid because I couldn't read and all the other kids [could]. It was just I could move at my own pace. After really learning to read I was reading Harry Potter and I was going through lots of books.³

Further descriptions of other developmental stages can be found in the footnoted citation. Some question whether this approach is in the best interest of low-income students; I believe that imbedded in that concern is lack of understanding of the strengths that all children can bring to their education. Examining the Waldorf approach reveals the pressure put on students to perform and demonstrate proficiency at an early age, rather than focusing on their own exploration and discovery.

- *What could schooling look like if adults let go of the notion that we are in a race to prepare children to compete with each other for the best jobs?*

There are equity implications to this approach as well. Those schools that serve the poorest children and majority children of color are more likely to take a drill and kill, basic skills approach to teaching and are least likely to feel they have the political leverage to engage students' developmentally because of the pressure they are under to have their students perform well on standardized tests. Their students require greater preparation to perform well on these tests and so test prep tends to dominate the school day, resulting in disengaged students who have internalized a sense of failure. Not only does this phenomenon exist for students in low-income schools but also for low-income students and students of color in suburban middle-class and affluent schools, where these students specifically are targeted as needing "intervention" or a different "track" of classes. This broken system serves to reproduce the status quo and does nothing to give students a voice over their own education.

What does it mean to support children creatively?

It is commonly understood that solving our looming societal problems requires creative thinking, yet we do not give our children many opportunities to develop their creative muscles in school. Supporting children's creativity is not just about an arts education or problem solving. Important research out of Harvard's Project Zero reveals that learning in and through the arts develops a different set of capacities than other disciplines, including the ability to persist through challenges, reflect, observe closely, develop the skills of a particular craft, and envision a future product not yet created.⁴

Furthermore, in some schools exploration in art is the only opportunity children have to explore and play in a less judged space in school, where the focus is more on exploration and expression than demonstration of mastery. What can be learned from this about how children learn?

- *What would it look like for children to have space to explore and play without having to constantly demonstrate proficiency or mastery in all disciplines?*

Children are born creative.

- *How can we continue to support children to explore artistically?*

I have had the privilege of serving as an evaluator of transformative work taking place in some of the poorest middle schools in Oakland, California. The School Transformation through the Arts (STTArts) project, is an effort to provide deep learning experiences to teachers in these schools through a 90-hour, three-course sequence and two years of coaching and ongoing professional development in arts integration, culturally relevant pedagogy and alternative types of assessment⁵. In these schools, which take a love-based approach to school transformation, arts integration is viewed as a political act to save lives and engage in cultural transformation and social justice work. By valuing teachers and their inherent

3. Friedlaender et al. 2015, <https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/library/publications/1386>, last accessed June 29, 2018

4. Hetland et al. 2007.

creativity and love for their students, this project has begun to transform classrooms as safe spaces for student exploration.⁵

The following are some quotes from STTArts teachers regarding their experience with the project.

“STTArts has allowed me to witness the brilliance in my students using meaningful assessments and activities that allow for various entry points of learning and understanding. I am able to scaffold and differentiate in ways to support all students regardless of grade level proficiency.”

“STTArts has really expanded the way I think about learning (or understanding) and curriculum. It has also reconnected me to my own art and helped me to bring more of myself in the classroom. Since doing STTArts, I feel like this has been one of my most powerful and fun teaching years. It is almost as if joy has been reinjected into my craft and I am able to actually engage in the work better.”

“And then on another level, I’ve done a lot of creative writing this year. Like, the most ever, and STTArts has really brought me back to that in my own artistry as well. I’ve been painting again and writing again, and my students have been doing the same. And I’ve been sharing a lot of my stuff with them. Yeah, they’ve been writing some pretty powerful stuff.”

“Another instance I have is around like what I think continual like judgment-free art making has allowed for some students who haven’t seen success in a lot of other areas, academically. English is not their strong suit, writing and reading and math and calculation – like none of those things are their strong suit. But I had a student, super high reading level. So then we go to break, the student with the high reading score is literally pouting against the wall, outside. And another student, who’s reading at a first, second grade level, comes out and he’s like, “Dude, what’s wrong with you?” And he’s like, “Stupid art, I don’t want to draw it.” And he’s like, “Well, you know what those artists say, like you can’t be mad at it, you can’t judge it. It’s art, you just do it.” But you have like a student who has seen very little success, like always self-defeating towards himself, like really step up and be encouraging to someone else. But I think it just really spoke to what creating a safe space to create – not without criteria, but without judgment – what that could do for young people.”⁶

The arts and creativity are often viewed as add-ons, non-essential to learning. But what we have seen with the STTArts project and similar arts integration work is that the arts can serve as an entry point to deeper learning through expanding students’ way of accessing, seeing, understanding and demonstrating their learning. This is a particularly important equity tool for students who are not proficient in English and those who are not engaged by other academic subjects.

Learning in and through the arts can also serve as a powerful tool to give students a voice, to share their experiences, reality and insights, acting as both a vehicle for communication and advocacy for greater social justice.

5. Alameda County Office of Education - Integrated Learning 2018, <https://sttartsacoe.org/>, last accessed June 18, 2018.

6. STTArts 2017.

What does it mean to support children spiritually?

This is a topic many don't want to touch. By spirituality I mean nurturing the spirits of children rather than its connection to organized religion.

- *What would it mean for schools to embody the kind of Hippocratic Oath that doctors take? What would it mean to do no harm?*

When we engage in this line of thinking, what might that mean for how the classroom is set up? How and when are students assessed? What systems are in place to manage conflict resolution and discipline?

Some examples of what is possible come from the STTArts project and the research on Waldorf schools. In one of the STTArts middle schools, students who are resisting participation in structures that feel limiting to their natural inclinations are directed to the restorative justice room where they begin by processing their emotions through artistic expression as a way to help calm themselves and understand the situation from a different perspective. While in the restorative justice room they work with a teacher to process what happened and learn from the experience.

In our research on the public Waldorf schools we observed teachers interacting with their students in ways that diverge from how many teachers are trained to perceive their role. The teachers we observed were uniformly soft spoken and non-judgmental regarding their students. We rarely heard a teacher praise a student; he or she is more likely to make a comment that reflects a factual observation and recognizes the student's effort, such as "you took a lot of time with that drawing." This is the kind of comment that is now recognized as supporting a growth mindset and contributing to student success.⁷ Even as students are reciting memorized verses, the teacher will not respond differently to the well-prepared student compared to the student struggling to remember the words. This lack of expressed judgment implies a level of faith in the child that they will progress without an evaluative stance, either positive or negative, from the teacher. The modulated and calm voice extends to the way the teachers manage classroom discipline. In Waldorf-inspired classrooms there are no point or reward systems for compliance. The teachers rely on the predictability of routine and rhythm with set practices for transitions, like the use of songs to move children from one activity to the next. They also emphasize classroom unity to support a calm and cohesive learning environment. These myriad practices are demonstrations of a deeper orientation towards children that they will develop at their own pace and on their own trajectory and that they are not flawed or incomplete adults but whole beings.⁸ This approach serves to preserve the spirit of the child.

In the mindfulness program I co-created, we encouraged children and their teachers not to label their emotions as good or bad but as expansive or confining. As educators we are always so eager to help children "feel better" and "be happy." Ironically this can have a spirit-crushing impact on children as they quickly learn that parts of themselves are welcome and others are not because they make us as adults uncomfortable.

In these examples the spirit of the child stays intact and has space to thrive.

- *What would it look like to accept children just as they are, just as they come to us, angry, sad, happy, engaged, or disengaged with the goal not of changing them but understanding them?*

Unfortunately, those schools serving the poorest children and predominantly children of color often struggle the most to find qualified, well-trained, and experienced teachers who know how to support the spirits of their students. And even the best teachers are under extreme pressure to deliver on narrow academic goals and feel unsupported to attend to the spirits of their students. Through the STTArts project we learned the trauma that teachers themselves are working under in under-funded, under-supported, and often dysfunctional systems to support children who experience daily trauma themselves.⁹ Teachers' spirits

7. Dweck 2006.

8. Friedlaender et al. 2015, <https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/scope-report-waldorf-inspired-school.pdf>, last accessed June 30, 2018.

9. Alameda County Office of Education - Integrated Learning 2018, <https://sttartsacoe.org/>, last accessed June 30, 2018.

need to be supported for them to be able to support the spirits of their students. We have to attend to the adults in a system to expect them to be able to attend to the children.

- *How can we support the spirits of teachers so they can bring joy to their teaching and their students?*

What does it mean to support children emotionally?

Mindfulness and social emotional learning are in vogue in schools. But often the motivation for these programs is situated within the old construct of preparing children for the competitive race of academic and career success and prosperity. The belief is that children who can regulate their emotions and focus more effectively will experience a greater ability to achieve academic success.

- *What if we supported children's emotional development for the purpose of their human development rather than academic success?*

Without attending to students' emotional development, societal inequities can be replicated in deep ways. In our research on student-centered schools we found that low-income students, many of whom live with trauma in traumatized communities with daily injustices of poverty and racism, feel overwhelmed by the real barriers in their lives. For many students, even making it to school in the face of limited access to transportation, violent neighborhoods, a lack of quality physical and mental health care, and inadequate housing and food is a major undertaking. They are in survival mode and are unable to envision themselves becoming adults or with fulfilled lives. The educators in the schools we studied recognized the importance of social-emotional skill development to help the students transform their mindset and persist through obstacles. The schools, to varying degrees, make this skill development and the development of strong adult student relationships a key component of their school design. This focus can include specific practices and cultural norms. "The deep relationships formed between teachers and students in these schools give many students the courage, support, and skills to persist through challenges and disappointments."¹⁰ The common practices in the schools include advisory programs, rituals and a culture of celebration, student voice and leadership opportunities, and connections to parents and community. Undergirding each of these practices are the explicit expectation that a core component of teachers' jobs is to build relationships with their students. It is through deep relationships that students can develop their social-emotional skills.

One example of supporting students social emotionally is found at Life Academy in Oakland.

It builds its culture of care, trust, and confidence by creating school community rituals and rites of passage that push students out of their comfort zone, to be honest about their victories and struggles, and to give them an anchoring memory of their potential for success. For instance, toward the end of their 10th-grade year, students at Life Academy take a class trip to Yosemite. For most students, camping itself is an unfamiliar experience, but it is also the farthest away they have been from home, and for many of them, the first time they have been outside Oakland. On this trip, students must push themselves and depend on each other to complete unique challenges in unfamiliar surroundings; this experience gives them a new perspective of themselves and their peers. For example, students are asked to complete "a 9- or 10-mile hike and up two waterfalls, which is pretty ridiculous" in the words of one student. In one of the rituals of that trip, students are asked to write on paper their "rocks, the burdens they carry with them," and crumple each of the sheets into the physical shape of a rock. All rocks are placed in a row, and students stand on one side. The accompanying teacher asks them to step over the rocks if they feel like they can move on to the 11th grade despite those burdens. A teacher describes the emotionally powerful reaction: "There were a number of students in response to all those questions who didn't feel they could step

over them, that stayed. And so we asked their classmates to help pull them over the row of rocks, to explain how they were going to help them graduate. It was really emotional. It took a long time, because there were a lot of kids that were on the side of "I don't think I can graduate," but there were also a tremendous number of kids who said, "Yes you can." Even kids who don't talk during the day, they said, "I know we're not super close friends but I've seen you do this specific thing in math class or I've seen you do this," and so they pulled them over. In the past we've had teachers advocate for kids. This year we just facilitated, and the kids did everything: "No, you're coming with me; I will pull you across the line to graduation," and that was really beautiful.¹⁰

This emotional event focuses entirely on the students' beliefs about themselves and each other. It not only builds a stronger sense of mutual support and community but also serves as a reference point back at school: when a student struggles, the recollection – with reminders from teachers and peers – builds the student's confidence in himself and the feeling that others are supporting him.

- *How can we support children to build their self-knowledge and understanding and support each other to create a safe and loving community?*

It is in such communities that students can find their voice, to pursue their interests, advocate for their needs and work together to fight injustice.

What does it mean to support children physically?

Students learn in kindergarten that sitting still is rewarded and being active is punished.

- *How can we engage students in their natural physical rhythms and support them in knowing and loving their bodies?*

We all know kids that when we ask them what their favorite time of the school day is they say recess. Kids are so hungry to move their bodies; it is their natural state. We have invented all kinds of fancy contraptions for kids such as pedals under desks and squishy pillows to sit on to meet their physical needs, but instead we could just incorporate movement throughout the school day in much more authentic and healthy ways. One example of how to do this comes from the Waldorf classrooms we studied.

In a fifth-grade classroom, we observed the teacher began the day with song, verse, and a short set of stretches. After a bit of sustained silent reading, he took his students to the blacktop, where he incorporated multiplication with movement activities and then did a jogging loop around the black top with them. This was all done between intellectually demanding tasks, in order to help focus the students and lower their anxiety.¹¹

We observed teachers integrating movement in other classrooms as well. Teachers spontaneously lead students in physical exercises when they felt their energy flagging. Teachers used physical activity not only to break up sedentary cognitive focus but also to help deepen cognitive growth.

For example, in a third-grade classroom students practice cupping a ball, letting it drop, and catching it with both hands while saying their spelling words. The teacher explains: [Students who] are having a really hard time with their bodies are not able to spell at the same time that they're doing the ball. And the goal is that you feel enough in control of your body and your actions that your brain can do something else. Teachers carefully observe each student's ability to integrate physically and cognitively and continue to give them opportunities to practice as long as they need it and value each capacity equally.¹¹

10. Friedlaender et al. 2014, <https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/scope-pub-student-centered-cross-case.pdf>, last accessed June 30, 2018.

- *How can we think differently about the role that movement can play in students' learning?*

While Waldorf schools tend to serve middle class and affluent students, we learned in our research that their approach was effective with all students.¹¹ Because low-income children often have fewer opportunities to be outdoors and in nature and have little access to healthy foods, it is particularly vital that these students have ample opportunities to move their bodies and experience nature and a connection to nature.

What does it mean to support children's cognitive development?

Of course, developing children's physical, emotional, spiritual and creative development supports their cognitive and academic development. These capacities are deeply intertwined. In this final section I focus on interrogating what we mean by academic cognitive development.

"If we taught babies to talk as most skills are taught in school, they would memorize lists of sounds in a predetermined order and practice them alone in a closet." —Linda Darling-Hammond

As we have transitioned in the last 20 years to higher stakes assessment systems, schools have been compelled to teach more to the test. Although the implementation of Common Core has broadened and deepened the kinds of thinking and performance tasks students are required to demonstrate mastery over, the lowest income schools remain under the greatest pressure to perform well on the tests. These schools often have narrowed their curriculum to merely teaching literacy and numeracy, thus greatly limiting the opportunities for cognitive development of their students. These schools often suffer under extreme pressure to perform on tests and lack examples of other ways to engage students. Our research on student-centered schools provides some examples of alternative approaches to deepen and broaden students' cognitive development. We found that some essential instructional practices that other schools can adopt to create deeper learning environments include:

- High expectations for every student (rather than differentiated expectations based on external variables like family education, ethnicity, etc);
- rigorous, inquiry-based instruction and group learning opportunities that support the development of deep understanding of content as well as problem-solving and collaboration skills;
- a shift in teaching orientation from task completion to mastery, enabling students to learn at their own pace and to revise their work until they can demonstrate deep understanding;
- authentic and performance-based assessments that enable students to demonstrate their learning and be meta-cognitive about their own learning processes; and
- relevant curricula that connect and expand upon what students know and care about.

These kinds of practices are often reserved for students in affluent schools or upper tracks, who enter high school well-prepared, self-confident, and motivated because they have been trained to respond to external rewards and punishments. Additional supports are necessary to adopt these strategies in schools serving students who lack basic academic and language fluency skills and academic self-confidence and may have a critique of the educational system. To support these students, the schools in our study adopted in-class and out-of-class strategies to support students' ongoing academic development. They include:

- Advisory programs that match teachers to a small group of students for whom they are responsible over multiple years to provide the infrastructure of personalized academic support and function as an in-school family;

11. Friedlaender et al. 2015, <https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/scope-report-waldorf-inspired-school.pdf>, last accessed June 30, 2018.

- community rituals and rites of passage that allow students to be recognized for their unique accomplishments and support their confidence and motivation to pursue their dreams;
- instructional strategies that are customized to students' strengths, interests, and needs and enable them to find pathways to understanding;
- social-emotional skill development, which provides students with the tools to navigate the adult world.¹²

Equity as Our Guidepost

We are facing monumental challenges in our present and our future such as violence sparked by inequities of tremendous proportion and the decreasing habitability of our planet. Nurturing and supporting the creative muscle of our children is essential to our very survival.

Unfortunately, most schools in this country, particularly those that serve the most disadvantaged children, are not structured to support children holistically. Schools that embody the conditions to nurture creative development need to be places where children and teachers have space to explore, discover, take risks and engage in learning in broad and holistic ways. Because the dominant culture pervasively oppresses some and rewards narrow pathways to adulthood, schools need to also be places that give voice to student experience and critique of all forms of oppression.

In fighting to fully support our children more holistically we must not lose sight of equity as our guidepost. The path to a holistic school experience for low-income, students of color is much steeper and rockier. It will take an overt, intentional effort to ensure that our most underserved, undervalued, invisible, and precious children feel as cherished as our most affluent.

- *How can we create schools where the words of one Waldorf teacher can be true for all teachers and students?*

*It's an education where the teacher strives to find out what is the potential of each child? What did they come here for onto the earth... and how do we help them to reach their highest potential? And not knowing what it is, we need to introduce them to everything that's out there, and we do that through images and through music and through art, visual and performing. We want to find out what it is that each child can be passionate about and then how they can contribute hopefully later on in life. We want to guide them into being good people.*¹³

Diane Friedlaender, 2018

12. Friedlaender et al. 2014, <https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/scope-pub-student-centered-cross-case.pdf>, last accessed June 30, 2018.

13. Friedlaender et al. 2015, <https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/scope-report-waldorf-inspired-school.pdf>, last accessed June 30, 2018

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