

Preamble

This document is primarily intended to convey to Parents how a typical spring day might unfold at Whole Child School. By walking Parents through the main events and rhythms of the day we hope to give you a clear idea of how some of the holistic principles identified for WCS will be put into practice. (For a quick review of the 10 principles, please see page 10 – these were previously published in our TDSB proposal and are on our website).

This document also contains two additional short sections:

- Page 7 – A partial list of differentiators that we believe will distinguish Whole Child School from other schools
- Page 9 – A preliminary list of some of the expectations that we believe will underpin the Parent relationship with Whole Child School

Your comments on this document are welcomed. This document was authored by members of the Whole Child School Organizing Committee. Please contact Stephen Davies or Deb Adelman with your comments.

A Day in the Life of Whole Child School

Introduction

A day in the life of the Whole Child School (WCS) involves supportive parents, exceptional teaching methods and a customized holistic curriculum. What is holistic education? Ron Miller, well known in the field, defines it as follows:

Holistic education is based on the premise that each person finds identity, meaning, and purpose in life through connections to the community, to the natural world, and to spiritual values such as compassion and peace. Holistic education aims to call forth from people an intrinsic reverence for life and a passionate love of learning. This is done, not through an academic “curriculum” that condenses the world into instructional packages, but through direct engagement with the environment. Holistic education nurtures a sense of wonder.

Perhaps the most important words in that paragraph are “reverence” and “wonder.” WCS and TDSB have visions that engage children’s minds, hearts and wills. Let’s see what this would look like during a typical day at school.

A Spring Day in the Life of WCS

8:45 to 9:00 a.m.

On this morning, three teachers are on yard duty, one teacher from WCS, one from the partner school and a kindergarten teacher in the kindergarten playground. The teachers

watch students from both schools play together as parents chitchat and say goodbye to the children. At 8:55, the bell rings and the grade-school children line up at assigned doors. A second kindergarten teacher joins the first, and they gently gather their students while taking attendance. WCS occupies eight rooms in the school, one for each grade [unless we have split grades] and one room for kindergarten. In 2010-2011, WCS will add a room for grade 8 and possibly another room for kindergarten, bringing the total to 10 rooms.

Inside, in the kindergarten room, the assistant or parent volunteer takes the attendance sheet to the office, which is buzzing with activity, as it usually is first thing in the morning. Here, the main office supports both schools, with: (1) a principal and office administrator for the partner school; and (2) an WCS office administrator who reports to the principal and who oversees the safe-arrival program, books occasional teachers, controls petty cash, orders supplies for WCS, and so on.

9:00-10:30

Meanwhile, the grade 2 children walk to their classroom, remove coats and outdoor shoes and go through the morning ritual of preparing for class. Inside, the children immediately find a partner and begin the first task of the day, *Peer Listening Pair*, which they do every day, picking a new partner each day. One child partners with the teacher. In pairs, everyone shares feelings, thoughts, and stories – whatever they like -- for about a minute. The children have been learning how to listen to one another and they “practice” during *Peer Listening*. This is one of the many activities and routines that contribute to a strong sense of community inside the classroom. After *Peer Listening*, the students stand in a circle to sing *O Canada*. (Down the hall, you can hear the grade 5 class playing *O Canada* on the recorder.) After the anthem, the teacher takes attendance and sends two children to the office to drop off the sheet and pick-up the announcements. After the children return to class, they take turns reading the announcements: choir practice at lunch and WCS staff meeting after school. Another student reviews, with the class, the schedule for the day.

Afterwards, they continue singing, the teacher adding two or three songs they’ve learnt and transitioning the children to the next lesson, which is a math poem accompanied by movements. In a hushed voice, the teacher starts to tell the story about the Kingdom of Jewels, and the children become silent, because they know this story, one that the teacher began a couple of days ago. What they don’t know (consciously) is that they are solidly in the math block now. Teaching through narrative is part of WCS’s vision, one of ten key principles.

“A queen and her small army are threatening to take over the Kingdom of Jewels,” the teacher announces, beginning a story about who will win the kingdom. Ultimately, the children must help a character during a quest.

“What’s a quest?” asks a child.

“It’s a search,” the teacher replies. “We’re going to look for jewels today.” The children will find and count all the jewels in the kingdom -- a big quest! -- And the children can do it if they help each other.

“This is what happened,” the teacher continues, providing details as the plot unfolds, leading to a hands-on math activity. The children must find all the jewels, which are hidden in the room (the Kingdom). After the children collect hundreds of jewels, the teacher organizes children and jewels so that the counting can begin. There is only one rule: no counting past ten. All jewels must be bagged in groups of ten, and all the bags must, in turn, be grouped in boxes, to a maximum of ten boxes. One child forgets and puts eleven jewels in a bag. Another forgets what to do with the boxes. Children help them.

It will take a couple days to bag and box the hundreds of jewels, but, in the end, a quick scan of boxes, bags and single jewels will provide an exact number – and the children will have saved the kingdom while learning about place value. The imaginative, playful and childlike way that the math concept is taught reflects how most new concepts are taught at WCS. The teachers introduce academic concepts (place value for example) only after most of the children become comfortable with the practice (counting jewels in tens).

This is the first lesson, the “main lesson,” of the day, a time when teachers introduce new concepts in science, social studies, language arts and math. The lessons build from day to day for three or four weeks. Woven throughout are connections to other academic subjects, for the Kingdom of Jewels reaches science, drama, visual arts and music – a trans-disciplinary approach to teaching.

10:30-10:50

At 10:30, the grade 2 children prepare for morning recess, and five minutes later, the bell rings and they walk to the yard. Children from both schools go out for recess at the same time, and teachers from both have recess duty. Two children who are wearing orange vests are “peer leaders;” they are in grade 6 and were trained in conflict mediation. During a conflict, WCS children can take their conflicts to a peer leader or to a teacher. Children from the partner school sometimes approach the peer leaders for help. Today, a WCS parent shadows the grade 6 peer leaders, helping with their conflict-resolution skills.

Parent volunteers are an important part of WCS. They have many opportunities to get involved in WCS kindergartens and primary and junior classrooms -- reading with children and helping during arts programs for example. Building a community in which each student and staff person is known and valued by all is central to WCS.

10:50-11:45

The bell rings at 10:50, and children follow the same entry routine as in the morning. Teachers transition children from grades 1, 2 and 3 into their usual “multi-age groups”

for language arts activities. Multi-age groups involve older children reading with younger children for example, with teacher support. The groups began weeks ago in the three classes and are an integral part of the WCS school day. Each multi-age group contains approximately a third of the class from grade 1, a third from grade 2 and a third from grade 3, depending on children's learning needs. All three teachers have already identified the learning needs of each student and divided the children into one of three groups.

If you were to peak into the grade 1 classroom, where one of the multi-age groups is working, you would see a "peer teacher," a grade 3 student, leading a group of four students from various grades. This tiny group would be one of four in the room (12 in total for the three classes). The groups would be working on reading skills, with each group quietly reading from a set of leveled readers. One group is tackling phonemic awareness while another focuses on semantics, each developing a different reading skill and none aware of all these academic terms.

Meanwhile, back in the grade 2 classroom, the teacher has divided the multi-age children into groups for spelling games and writing exercises. One group is playing the *short vowel game* that teaches the children how to recognize short vowels within words. Another group is brainstorming word families for the *word-family town* that they are building. A third group is playing the *story-making board game*. This game sparks ideas for journal writing. The fourth group is choosing words for a spelling test, and they will later challenge one another to a spelling bee. Spelling tests have become a game.

In the grade 3 room, each multi-age group is reading a different children's novel. One child from each group has been assigned the task of writing comprehension questions for the chapter (with teacher support), questions that their group will answer at the end of the chapter. This class is gradually building the skills to later participate in literature circles, which are groups of children who discuss aspects of a novel.

Lunch

The WCS students who remain at the school for lunch will eat with the rest of the school's students, following the same routines for lunch recess.

12:45- 2:20

After lunch, the grade 2 class gathers in a school garden. One of WCS's ten key principles is experiential education, and the garden is an example of a hands-on activity that's experiential, engaging and fun when children grapple with new concepts. Parents have been helping with the garden and an organic farm that WCS has adopted nearby. WCS classes learn and work on the farm during field trips. Today, two parents help with the garden. The teacher has spread some funny-looking things on the grass and soil: tubes, connectors, pails and a pile of gadgets that have caught the children's attention.

"What's that hose for?" asks one student.

“That’s for the frog,” replies the teacher.

And so begins a story about a frog and a toad that are in charge of watering the school garden... until, one day, the frog got tired of watering and drenched his friend with the hose. Toad was not pleased. The children laugh, but one of them says that frog should not have sprayed toad. The teacher agrees, and explains that after frog and toad had a fight and patched up, they decided that there must be a better way to water the garden.

The children offer suggestions: a pail, a sprinkler, a shower of rain, a stream of water flowing downhill perhaps... With each suggestion, the teacher adds details about water, part of a science unit about energy from water and wind. At some point, the teacher, parents and children decide on the easiest and best way to water the garden – and they begin to put the plan into action.

“What happens if you stop the flow of water in the hose?” asks the teacher.

This is one of many questions that the teacher has prepared to ask the students. It encourages the students to inquire about water and its relationship to energy. The children experiment with the hose. A few make a dam.

Towards the end of the lesson, the grade 3 class joins them. They have brought out their seedlings and are preparing to plant them today. The grade 2 children excitedly describe the different ways to water the garden – and the organic farm.

Over the months, in the process of digging, watering and tending the garden, the students learn more about the earth – not only environmental problems, such as water and soil pollution, but just as importantly, how we are fundamentally embedded in the natural processes of the earth, another of WCS’s principles, one that overlaps with TDSB’s goals in this area.

2:20-2:35

Afternoon recess is similar to the morning one. Some teachers take the opportunity to go to a resource room, which both schools share -- readers, math manipulatives, science manipulatives... More access to resources is one benefit of two schools working together. Teachers sign out the resources on a sheet in the resource room, so that the coming and going of resources is tracked. One WCS teacher oversees the sign-out sheet and the room.

2:35-3:30

This afternoon, in the grade 2 room, the students continue with their recorder and singing lessons. Both schools share the same music teacher, who follows the TDSB’s music curriculum, which is a mix of Orff and Kodaly methods.

“Will we play in front of the school?” asks one of the grade 2 students.

“If we want to,” the teacher says.

“Can we present the French folk song and dance?”

The end of the day is a good time to get a glimpse of WCS. Walking down the hall, you can hear the grade 2 children singing a French folk song. The grade 4 class is in the gym playing a yoga game. One of WCS’s principles is developing the body-mind connection through movement and awareness techniques, and yoga is one of the many activities practiced.

Once a month, the school assembles at the end of the day to share what they have learnt. Or they gather simply to celebrate a cultural or seasonal festival.

3:30 Dismissal is the same as rest of the school

After 3:30

WCS parent committees meet after school or at lunch. As in many TDSB schools, the committees work in partnership with the teachers to enrich the curriculum through field trips, open houses, parent–teacher conferences, ecological-literacy committee, community-appreciation events, choirs, and parent-teacher events, such as volleyball games or potlucks.

The Parent Council, especially the head of the council, is responsible for addressing concerns that parents might have about WCS and channeling concerns to the appropriate people.

Differentiators meaningful for teachers, parents, students and the principal

School property

- WCS classrooms occupy a separate floor or section of the school except for the kindergarten, which is in the kindergarten wing.
- The bulletin boards are filled with WCS artwork: water-colour paintings of plants from a grade 3 biology unit; pencil-crayon sketches of animals from a grade 4 lesson about mammals; and drawings of cubes, spheres and pyramids from a grade 5 math block.
- A hallway wall is covered with a huge quilt, called Images of Canada, pieced together by students and parents. This is an example of one of the many craft projects in the school.
- It is typical to hear students and teachers in their rooms singing, playing recorder and reciting poetry or plays.
- In the fall and spring, students, parents and teachers can be seen tending the garden.
- In every classroom plants grow that the children have potted, watered and tended. Parents play a key role in the plant program.

Staff

- The WCS administrator is the face of the school for parents, teachers and students.
- Teachers may stay with the same group of children for two or three years.
- Teachers memorize, tell and re-tell some stories rather than read them from books, creating an oral storytelling feeling among children
- Teachers work as a team to deliver a holistic curriculum to all grades.
- WCS teachers have specialized training in one or more of the following areas: music, visual arts, drama, outdoor/environmental education programs, storytelling and/or taught or trained in a holistic approach to education.
- The principal's responsibilities with relation to WCS are the same as for other teachers: hires and evaluates WCS teachers; meets monthly with WCS Parent Council; signs off on report cards; oversees correspondence to parents; approves schedules for duty, prep coverage and staffing; and other leadership duties.

Students

- Students assess their progress and identify areas for continued growth. Children are encouraged to set their own educational goals through a learning contract system.
- Students contribute to a portfolio that follows them through their time at the school. They put their best work into these portfolios.
- Student leaders in the schoolyard wear orange vests and help to resolve conflicts.
- Community building is central to WCS. Classes have routines and rituals to support this.
- Students learn in age-specific and multi-age groups.
- Children move in the classroom for hands-on activities, group work, movement activities and music rather than always sitting at desks.
- Peer teaching; children teach children.

Parents

- Parents work with teachers to help with ecological, visual-art and other projects in the school.
- Parents are strongly encouraged to join one of our four committees: Ecological Literacy, Arts, Festivals and Fundraising, Math and Science (development of inquiry-based learning).

Expectations that underpin relationship with parents

- Parents have many opportunities to volunteer and are strongly encouraged to volunteer in WCS classrooms. Volunteering in the classroom will depend on the needs of each teacher. Teaching doesn't flow from the top down in WCS; parents and teachers exchange ideas and support each other to a great degree.
- Parents are expected to play an active and supportive role in all aspects of the school.
- The curriculum will be reviewed and endorsed by a team of educational experts in the field of holistic education. In addition, the curriculum will align with the Ontario Ministry of Education guidelines.
- WCS runs what is essentially an enriched music program and shares the music teacher with the partner school, with primary and junior choirs. It will run a musical performance once a year. All these programs will be open to students from both schools.
- WCS runs an enriched visual arts and drama program. On Thursday afternoons, students, parents and teachers participate in the "Thursday afternoon project," which could involve the entire school. Each child chooses from a wide range of craft and art projects.
- Field trips, nature hikes, camping, farming, biking are some examples of our outdoor education program.
- Both schools share other special staff – the librarian and physical education and French teachers.
- TDSB alternative schools do not offer special education and additional support resources for students.
- WCS's approach to assessment and evaluation: see WCS Assessment Approach document
- Entry into WCS is done by a lottery system. 1/4 of the spots will be reserved for children under our equity policy. Any openings for grades SK-8 will be done by the order they are on the wait list. Families who do not get a spot through the lottery will be placed on a wait list, but you must contact us again in the fall to confirm your desire to stay on the list.
- The Advisory Board meets monthly: WCS has brought together a team of experts in holistic education who are committed to supporting WCS in as we bring this expression of holistic education into the public system.

Ten Key Principles for Development of Whole Child School Curriculum

Whole Child School's holistic curriculum will be based on 10 key teaching and learning principles that are central to our holistic approach:

Arts-Integrated Education: Artistic, hands-on projects will be integrated into academic subjects in a way that engages the whole child – head, heart and hands – all at once rather than independently. Research shows that children learn best through a combination of artistic and aesthetic education.

Experiential Education: Hands-on activities are engaging and fun for children to explore and grapple with new concepts. When children are provided with open-ended, hands-on experiences they have the opportunity to discover the concept on their own and take ownership of their learning.

Community Learning and Teaching: Whole Child School will use the "class teacher" model, in which one teacher stays with the same group of children for two or three years. This structure helps create continuity and gradual transition from home to school community. Whole Child School will also work outside the classroom to build our larger student/parent/teacher community through community events and festivals.

Subject Connections: A natural connection will be made between school subjects producing an integrated curriculum. Teachers present new academic material during the "main lesson" at the beginning of the day. Several subjects are integrated around a broad theme with one subject being the main focus of a three to four week lesson block. The teaching and learning of academic material is built from one day to the next and the understanding of the subject gradually deepens over the course of the lesson block. Central to each main lesson block are the arts, as it is the artistic sense that helps to connect the different subjects.

Teaching through Narrative: Throughout all the grades, stories are told to the children in a storytelling format. Using narrative provide children with a conceptual framework within which they can orientate themselves and understand their experiences. Teachers will primarily share content in oral form, especially in the earlier grades. Teachers will inspire students to identify with historical characters in stories historic simulations, drama, role-playing and storytelling.

The Use of Imagery: Using imagery ("mental pictures") is an essential element of the Whole Child approach. When presenting facts teachers will strive to present information with both pictorial and emotional elements. Our goal is to present learning to children in a way that fills them with wonder and enthusiasm. We will employ several visualization techniques to help facilitate cohesiveness in the classroom, motivate student interest, and support creative writing. The use of metaphor will encourage the student to draw connections between ideas and subject matter; it will encourage the student to see patterns, provoke inquiry and stimulate the creative process.

A "Living" Classroom: Teachers and students, together, will create learning experiences from a variety of sources. Teachers will use a wide variety of materials and resources, including prepared worksheets, texts, maps, diagrams, drama, music, poetry, multimedia and living things. Students will use blank journals to write and illustrate what they have learned and observed.

Earth Connections: Students reawaken to the natural processes of life by connecting to the earth. The curriculum will teach students not only about environmental problem solving, but more importantly, how we are fundamentally embedded in the natural processes of the earth. We will provide hands-on experiences with the earth's processes through activities such as a community garden. Ecological literacy will help students see the connections that are inherent in the environment, learn the basic laws of ecology and its impact on our day-to-day lives.

Community Connections: Fostering community will be a significant priority in WCS's curriculum. In the classroom, we will use cooperative education, the use of small groups in which students learn to trust each other and work together, to encourage community. Positive interactions and conflict resolution will be taught, supporting students to provide positive feedback to each other, make decisions and solve problems. Students will also connect to the surrounding and global community through community service activities or social change programs.

Body-Mind Connections: The curriculum will stress a natural connection between body and mind. Students will be encouraged to explore the connections between their body and emotions, and to develop a sense of what their bodies have to say. A priority will also be placed on healthy, positive communication and mindfulness in all actions – being aware of what one is doing, while doing it. Techniques employed to stimulate the mind-body connection in the classroom will include drama, creative movement, dance, performance and role-play, yoga, meditation and relaxation.