



# EAGLE EYES

Volume 19, Number 2

News From Summer 2011 Trimester

## PHYSICS OF MOUNTAIN BIKING – AN EXAMPLE OF EAGLE ROCK'S EXPERIENTIAL CURRICULUM

*by Student Raphael Brussel Smith*

Racing down hills at breakneck speeds, climbing the most excruciating inclines, and dodging through obstacle fields of trees and boulders - all on a mountain bike. Few people would believe that I did this twice a week for a high school class earning physics credit. In *Physics of Mountain Biking* students epitomized the idea of experiential learning. In the classroom we learned from the textbooks what inertia, acceleration, and friction are, the next day we experienced all of these concepts firsthand on a mountain bike in and around the Estes Valley.

In this class, we started off by learning the basic Newtonian physics principals, how to make simple graphs, and about the law of conservation of energy. We learned how different gear ratios might make it easier or harder to pedal your bike, and how energy cannot be created or destroyed, only change in form. We learned how the food we ate supplied our muscles with energy, allowing us to transfer

energy to turn the pedals on our bikes, which in turn gave the wheels energy to carry us. We carried on to learn how graphs could be used to as visual displays of motion, elevation, and acceleration.



On ride days we would discuss which basic physics principles would be most applicable to the trails we were riding, using what we learned in the classroom to make us better mountain bikers. For example, if there were a long straight downhill section of trail, we would discuss how acceleration would play a part in our ride.

Whenever students wrecked or went over the handlebars we would talk about how inertia played a roll in the accident and how to avoid such occurrences in the future. In the same manner, when students experienced excessive skidding, we discussed how friction and force were demonstrated. After every ride, we graphed the entire ride, showing acceleration, elevation, or speed over time.

In a traditional high school setting, I would be taught all of the previously named physics principles out of a textbook and maybe the occasional lab experiment. Here at Eagle Rock not only did I learn physics, but I had the opportunity to experience physics. As students I found that being able to experience inertia, force, acceleration and energy allowed me to grasp these concepts to a much fuller extent. There is no substitute for experience as

To learn more about Eagle Rock's innovative curriculum visit [http://www.eaglerockschool.org/our\\_school/academics.aspx](http://www.eaglerockschool.org/our_school/academics.aspx)

### Save the Date!

*Eagle Rock's Twentieth Anniversary Celebration*

*Saturday, June 22nd, 2013*

*Mark your calendar. Details to follow.*

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and Professional  
Development Center

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## EAGLE ROCK PRESENTS "SAID AND MEANT"

by Student Jeffrey Pomeroy

Eagle Rock students took the stage for three nights performing "Said and Meant." The play is ten short acts and five actors who play up to eight roles each. "Said and Meant" was originally developed in Grand Rapids, Michigan, by college students, but first performed by Kalamazoo College. The Eagle Rock School summer production had three performances, July 28, 29, and 30.

"I have been in a play before but never performed," said actor Marwan Johnstone. "I do not have much history behind acting. It's especially harder for me because English is my second language. The cast of Eagle Rock students are building the set and dealing with costumes, so we are acting and directing the summer production at the same time."

Reigan Wilkinson, another actor in the production, said, "The biggest surprise of doing the play was how much I had to expand my comfort zone."

The group thought they had everything in order, until a loss of an actor shocked everyone. The cast recuperated and divided up the parts from the departed actor. Wilkinson has taken on two more parts, which happen to be the two biggest parts, on top of what she already had to memorize.



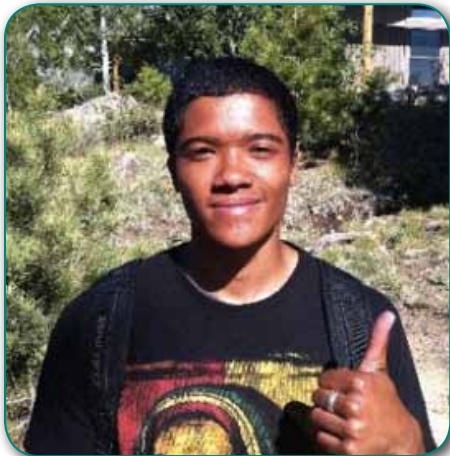
Berklee City Music Network made an appearance on Monday, July 25, to see the dress rehearsal. It was also the first time the actors were going to perform it live in front of an audience. Before the show started, Isaac Leslie, director of "Said and Mean," gave some words of encouragement and gave some feedback on how to make the play run a lot smoother. The actors said they were a little nervous before the show, but once the show started, they nailed it and the house was rocking.

Eagle Rock School has done many plays in the past, but never with so much enthusiasm and style. Even with all their struggles and frustrations of learning the lines and a cast member leaving, the show must go on.



## EAGLE ROCK STUDENT RECEIVES SCHOLARSHIP TO VISIT SOUTH KOREA

*Portions being reprinted with permission from the June 15, 2011 edition of the Estes Park Trail Gazette*



The Council on International Educational Exchange, a world-leader in international education and student exchange, has just announced the acceptance of **Julian Smith** to a prestigious scholarship to South Korea from August 9 through August 22. Eagle Rock School student Julian Smith is one of 100 high school students selected to participate in the third annual South Korea scholarship program for high school students, which is referred to in Korea as the Korea-U.S. Youth Network.

Students will be hosted by Yonsei University, South Korea's oldest and most acclaimed university, located in Seoul, South Korea. Participants will attend academic lectures, tours and cultural excursions throughout the program, with the intention of fostering understanding and diplomacy between the United States and South Korea.

CIEE has partnered with the Korea Foundation, a nonprofit organization aimed at promoting awareness and understanding of Korea throughout the international community, and to enhance goodwill and friendship through the implementation of various international exchange programs.

Smith will set off on August 8 to represent the United States and Eagle Rock School & Professional Development Center. The program begins in one of five U.S. gateway cities, where students will be met by CIEE representatives who will provide them with a pre-departure orientation to prepare them for their experience abroad.

Successful completion of the program allows alumni to return with unique experiences and invaluable confidence and optimism for their futures.

CIEE was founded in 1947. It is a non-profit, non-governmental organization dedicated to quality exchange and global learning opportunities. The CIEE USA High School program is designated by the U.S. Department of State to sponsor a student on a J-1 visa to attend high school in America. CIEE is approved by the Council on Standards for International Education Travel (CSIET). The CIEE mission, to help individuals gain understanding, acquire knowledge and develop skills for living in a globally interdependent and culturally diverse world, is accomplished through diverse programs ranging from secondary level study abroad to teacher and faculty development seminars.

No asbestos products were used in the construction of Eagle Rock School & Professional Development Center. A copy of Eagle Rock's *Asbestos Management Plan* is on file. This is a once a year notification required by the State of Colorado.

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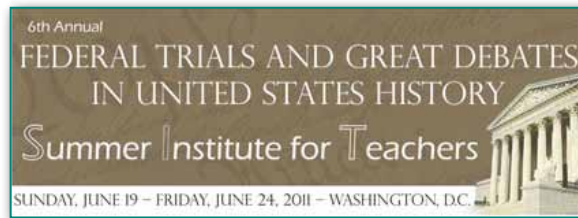
## EAGLE ROCK INSTRUCTOR LEARNS IN DC

by Berta Guillen, Instructional Specialist in Societies & Cultures

I have a firm belief that every decision I make can leave a legacy. The decision to teach, to teach at Eagle Rock School, to teach history: all of these decisions have left a legacy on my life and the lives of others. Yet, there are some decisions that impact our society as a whole. Our constitutional liberties and rights are routinely challenged then upheld by the decision-making process of one person: a judge. Yet, I had never once met a judge personally, known their names or shared their experiences. Still, their decisions as a body or alone have made a significant impact on our society and way of life.

This past June, I packed my bags and travelled to Washington D.C. on a full scholarship by the American Bar Association and the Federal Judicial Center to study and reconnect with three historical court cases and significant trials in American history: the *Amistad case*, *United States v Debs* and *Bush v. New Orleans Parish School Board*. The essential questions throughout were: Did the court have the authority to intervene? If property (slaves) or commerce (labor unions) were involved, were there violations to the amendments of the Constitution? Over and over again, the questions returned to the Constitution and if it was violated or not. Personally, though, I had a difficult time believing that cases that made it to the Supreme Court didn't have some ulterior motive. I believed that the personal lives and political beliefs of judges *must* influence their interpretation of the law. Therefore cases heard by the Supreme, whether during Reconstruction or the Civil Rights Periods, must reflect the general thinking of the time.

I did not know I held this belief until the seminar began. It was until I actually met a judge that



I recognized my skepticism, and my ignorance. Honorable Roger Gregory, United States Circuit of Appeals, Fourth Circuit was the first African American to sit on this court even though this circuit has the highest percentage of African American population. Everyday as he walks the historic courthouse he presides over, he is reminded of the significance of this. He came to our seminar to give us a judge's perspective on the *Amistad* case. Many of you are probably familiar with the Hollywood film *Amistad*, which depicts the tense moments of the Mende revolt on a Cuban slave boat. However, the focus of Judge Gregory's talk was less on the gruesome details and more on the case that resulted from the boats capture off the coast of New York. The Mende claimed they were free, while the Spanish claimed them as their slaves. The American's who "rescued" the boat also placed claims for the booty on board.

This case was in many ways a huge victory for the abolitionists. On March 9, 1841, the Mende were deemed not slaves under Spanish rule, which meant they should not be returned to Cuba and therefore could return to West Africa. However, prior to this, when abolitionists requested a writ of habeas corpus on behalf of the Mende they remained in custody since 1839, the judges did not allow it. Only *humans* were allowed the rights to a writ and to give the Mende this would have undermined the entire slave economy and sent a distinct new message about the worth and value of Africans in the United States.

Judge Gregory who helped us see the role of the judges at that point in time in making concessions on behalf of the Mende yet still denying them rights. This analysis and interpretation of the historic *Amistad* case could only have come from another who stood in a similar position, albeit a century and a half later.

I was in awe of Judge Gregory's ability to connect to this case. He made it come alive in a way that was interesting and still left more to be discovered. He ended his discussion with this: "Justice is a process. The courts are for the public and if the public stops believing in us, then the courts have lost all power."

In the *Amistad* case, the judges had an opportunity to claim the Mende as *free people*, instead of *not slaves*. Yet what Honorable Gregory points out is that the courts are really a reflection of us and of the direction our society is moving in. If not, we would not continue to value its ability to make the difficult decisions they make.

This day, and the several other days spent meeting with Supreme Court Justice Ginsberg and district court judges, proved to me that our choices do have a legacy. Even when we feel vindicated, whether it by the law or our moral and ethical code, our choices live on. I've chosen to include these judicial perspectives in several of my upcoming courses including Immigration and School and Society.

I will be incorporating significant court cases and inviting judges into my classroom as a result of attending this seminar. In any content area, the role of the judicial branch has played a significant role. Now I feel more confident creating interdisciplinary curriculum in Social Studies education.

## GRADUATE PROFILE – WHERE IS SHE NOW?

by *Jeanine Cerundolo, former Public Allies Fellow in Professional Development*

**Tahira Ali**, ER-37, hails from Oakland, CA, and graduated from the Eagle Rock in ER-43 after having lived in Aspen House. Immediately after graduating, Tahira entered college at San Francisco State University and then transferred to UCLA's School of Film & Television. Having a passion for film even during her time at Eagle Rock, she began to study production with an emphasis on visual effects and she gained experience in all aspects of filmmaking. She completed her degree a year early, having been in school only 3 years, and graduated cum laude on June 10th. She is now interning at a production company in LA where she is an assistant editor on a show for the Discovery Channel. She is also a nanny and waitress and is looking for a paid job in post-production. Tahira attributes much of her direction and success to the things she learned at Eagle Rock. She says, "Although the coursework was non-traditional, my time at ERS taught me how to think more critically and write in a way that was much more efficient than I had been taught in high school. My reading, writing and reasoning skills improved dramatically and helped me to be academically successful at UCLA." As designed, ERS is a place that allowed Tahira the space to work on her personal growth without the distractions of her environment back home. After two years at Eagle Rock, she reports becoming "much more centered, grounded, mature, emotionally stable, and intent on making a better life for myself. ERS encouraged me to work on myself and I left a completely different person than I was when I came in."

When she first came to ERS, Tahira says she wasn't very motivated to do anything but she knew that she wouldn't survive long if she continued doing what she was doing at home. Her motivation initially came from her desire to live and be healthy, but after she became more comfortable at ERS she realized that she was capable of so much more than that. She states, "I was motivated by the idea of going to college, exploring the world and excelling at whatever I did instead of constantly being my own obstacle." Some of her favorite memories are ones of connecting with nature, and spending time alone on the top of a boulder

looking out over the mountains. She also cherishes the connections she made with her house parents, fellows and many staff members who "helped me more than I can express in my journey towards self-awareness and holding my self accountable for my thoughts, actions and words." She continues, "The unique relationship between staff and students stood out to me the most and is one of the most important aspects of the school. Since many of my teachers were also my friends, my motivation to actually do homework (something I had never done in high school) was different. It was more than the desire to learn or graduate. I did it out of respect for my teachers who I knew cared and would be disappointed if I didn't put the effort into my work that I was capable of. I felt safe coming to them about serious problems and when the difficulty of living at a high school was overwhelming, I knew I had someone older, wiser and disconnected from all the drama who could give me perspective."

Through these cherished times with staff and other students, Tahira learned a lot about herself and the world. She states, "My biggest life lesson was that I deserved to be happy and no person or substance could give me what I needed to learn how to give to myself. I learned to ask questions and analyze my actions and relationships with people so that I could grow from my mistakes and learn how to be a better person." She also expressed that her biggest area of personal growth was in accountability and communication. She says she learned how to take control of her life and express herself in a way that was not combative, accusatory or condescending. Then, her relationships with her



*Tahira Ali, ER-37 (Fall, 2005)  
Graduated ER-43 (Fall, 2007)  
Geography: Los Angeles, CA*

➔ See "Profile" – Cont. on Pg. 6

“Profile” – Continued from Pg. 5

family and her peers improved dramatically once she understood how to really listen and think about her words and how she approached people.

Tahira has big plans for her future, which include building her visual effects reel and establishing herself in the film industry in LA before moving to New York to continue to work in film. She says that the things that matter most to her in

life are family, creating meaningful bonds with people, laughing constantly, loving as much as she can, traveling, experiencing new things and making movies. She hopes to make enough money to affect major change in as many peoples' lives as possible. She has already considered many things including funding research that will save lives, creating safe spaces for homeless LGBTQ teens who are often

abused both at home and in shelters, and providing aid to countries and villages destabilized by war and greedy corporations. Tahira states, “There are so many things I want to do to help right the wrongs of this world and I plan to do as much as I can with the resources I obtain...We only get one life and its up to us to decide whether to play it safe or make something incredible out of the time we're given.”

## GETTING A 'TASTE' OF THE REAL WORLD

*Portions being reprinted with permission from the June 8, 2011 edition of the Estes Park Trail Gazette, written by Eagle Rock student intern Jeffrey Pomeroy*

It is hard for young adults to figure out the real world and what they want to be in it. Eagle Rock students are learning what is in store for them by doing internships. This summer two Eagle Rock students are doing just that. **Jesus Ramos** is partnered up with PeaceJam and **Vidal Carrillo** is doing an internship with Rock Mountain National Park.

PeaceJam is a worldwide organization that teams up with teens and Noble Peace Prize winners that discuss and protest on global issues. Jesus first got involved with PeaceJam by going to a few conferences in Denver. He got excited about it and was offered a three-month long internship. There will be an all day festival that he will be running at Performance Park. Booths will be set up giving information on ending racism, social justice and human rights for all, and restoring earth's environment.

Vidal Carrillo is doing an internship with Rocky Mountain National Park. He will be working on



maintaining the landscape of Rocky Mountain National Park. His training will be to know every plant and its fetters that are beneficial to the park. He first learned about applying for this internship from Jon Anderson an Eagle Rock Teacher. Jon Anderson is an outdoor education specialist that has done a fly fishing class and a telemark skiing class. To even do this internship Vidal had to write an essay,

write a government resume, a cover letter, and tons of training for the job he is going to be a part of. In fact he is not the only Eagle Rock student working in the park this summer. He is going to be with fifteen former and current Eagle Rock School students. Once his internship is over he will be hired by RMNP to maintain the landscape and make sure the park is looking as beautiful as always.

Eagle Rock School provides their students the knowledge and confidence to step into the world and succeed. This is only one of the ways Eagle Rock does it.

## FOUR MORE GRADUATES TAKE FLIGHT

by Jeanine Cerundolo, former Public Allies Fellow in Professional Development



**Damian Hernandez** grew up in Northern California on the West Coast and spent his time at Eagle Rock living in Spruce house. He came to ERS “to try something different, and public schools didn’t work for me as well. I knew Jesse Tovar [Eagle Rock’s Health & Wellness Counselor] back in Richmond years ago, and he is the main reason I am here. He is my hero and my role model.” Damian says he has changed so much since being here that “it is hard for others from home to believe.” After graduating, Damian plans to work at Rocky Mountain National Park with STEP (the Student Temporary Employment Program). He then plans to spend December in Mexico at his grandmother’s house before continuing with his education, potentially at San Francisco State University. His advice for

current students is to “remind yourself the reason you

came here. If you want to change something... start on yourself. It’s not what you say at times; it’s how you say it. Take advantage of the opportunities they offer like scholarships, classes, relationships, and credits. Something that we can’t get back in life is time, so use it right. The harder you work now, the easier your life will be later.” Damian says that Eagle Rock has made him feel safe and that there is nothing like it. He states, “It is a key to open doors for the future. This place gave me lots of opportunities that I never even thought of trying. There is nothing else like these classes.” Damian urges his classmates: “Stay true to yourself, remember where you come from and where it took you - its not who you are, it is who you choose to become.”

**Gretchen Horne** came to Eagle Rock’s Aspen House from Las Vegas, New Mexico. She decided to come to Eagle Rock because she wasn’t satisfied with the education she was getting in Las Vegas. She was close to dropping out of school, and wanted to leave home as soon as possible. Having been known to be shy and on the quiet side, Gretchen has changed a lot in her time here, becoming more outspoken and assertive. She says, “My biggest area of personal growth has been becoming more outspoken. When I first got here I would practically have conversations without saying anything, and I would be really scared to make any announcements at morning gathering. Now I am definitely more comfortable talking to people I don’t know, and just talking around people in general.” She states that she has also become more comfortable with playing sports every Wednesday at intramurals. Eagle Rock has become a special to because “it’s been my home for two years. Home in the sense that I have family here now, and I’ve spent so much time, and learned so much here. I guess a part of my heart will

always be at Eagle Rock.” After graduation Gretchen will be going on to work in Rocky Mountain National Park for about a month, then going on a backpacking trip. Following those, she plans to go to school for either culinary arts or outdoor education. We wish Gretchen luck as she continues to learn and grow in her new adventures!

**Cody Lesser** from Aurora, Colorado, had quit high school and started working, but wanted a high school diploma and viewed Eagle Rock as his last chance. One of his favorite memories was eating 9 hot dogs, 1 bratwurst, and 1 ice cream bar with his friend Cherie, a past graduate, even though he got sick afterwards. Another fond memory is taking classes at ER. He says, “The classes here are a lot of fun, especially the Science of Fitness class.” Lastly, he has enjoyed every new experience he has had at Eagle Rock. He says, “I’ve tried many new and great things because of this school.” In his time here, Cody says he has really broken out of

➤ See “Graduates” – Continued on Pg. 8

## WILD ANIMAL SANCTUARY OVERRUN WITH EAGLE ROCKERS

by Kari Liotta, former Public Allies Teaching Fellow in Service-Learning

Eagle Rock School has valued service since its inception. In fact, service to others is one of Eagle Rock's themes as seen in  $8+5=10$ . EagleServe is just one way we carry out that value. At the beginning of every trimester, both students and staff participate in a daylong service event. This trimester, we collaborated with the Wild Animal Sanctuary, located near Keenesburg, Colorado, to lend a hand to our furry friends.

The Wild Animal Sanctuary is a refuge for large cats, bears, wolves and various other animals that have been abused, abandoned, exploited, or illegally kept. The sanctuary has a small staff, so they rely greatly on volunteer participation to help keep the sanctuary running. To aid the Wild Animal Sanctuary, Eagle Rock staff and students rolled up their sleeves to sort raw meat for the animals. Different animals

require different diets, which is why it's so important to sort the bulk meat that the sanctuary gets donated. In reflecting on the experience, Zev Vernon-Lapow, former Public Allies Teaching Fellow in Societies and Cultures said, "It was something I never would have done or even known about. It was a unique experience and a good way to help out animals who have been mistreated." Eagle Rockers also pulled weeds in order to help maintain the grounds for visitors.

A Wild Animal Sanctuary staff member remarked, "In just a few hours, they [Eagle Rock students and staff] did as much work that usually takes me two weeks to do alone." By lending a hand with pulling weeds and sorting meat, sanctuary staff members were given much needed time to address other pressing issues. Service at the sanctuary not only helped out the animals, but also helped Eagle Rockers gain awareness of animal abuse and neglect. Student, Eddy Nieto said, "Learning about how much the animals had suffered and then being able to help them by sorting their food made me feel good about myself." By upholding the Eagle Rock value of service to others, all who participated not only helped the quality of life of the animals, they also experienced the satisfaction that comes with giving their time for a greater cause.

For more information about the sanctuary visit [www.wildanimalsanctuary.org](http://www.wildanimalsanctuary.org)



"Graduates" – Continued from Pg. 7

his shell, becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable. He also states that he has become very driven. For example, his goal is to become a CrossFit Level 1 trainer at a gym that he previously interned at. We wish Cody luck in his pursuits!

**Jesus Ramos** came to Ponderosa House at ERS from East Los Angeles, California. He decided on an Eagle Rock education because his counselor and principal thought it would be a good path for him and recommended it. While at Eagle Rock, Jesus learned to keep an open mind to things so that he can create better opportunities for himself in the future. He says one triumph was losing a lot of weight and getting in shape through running. After graduation, Jesus will attend a community college in Los Angeles called ELAC (East Los Angeles College). His advice to current students includes, "Don't be afraid to express yourself and open up to service... it is really rewarding once you get into it and it feels good to see all your hard work pay off." To Jesus, it is the people who make Eagle Rock a special place to be. He explains, "I have enjoyed talking to everyone and the awesome conversations have struck me throughout my time here. There are truly amazing people here."



## EAGLE ROCK STAFF ATTEND NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON VOLUNTEERISM AND SERVICE

by Dan Condon, Associate Director of Professional Development



In mid-June, leaders from the nonprofit, government, and corporate sectors convened in New Orleans for the National Conference on Volunteering and Service. The conference, co-convened by the Corporation for National & Community Service and the Points of Light Institute, is the world's largest gathering of volunteer and service leaders.

Dan Condon, Associate Director of Professional Development; Mark Palmer, Director of the Public Allies Teaching Fellowship Program at Eagle Rock and Kari Liotta, former Public Allies Teaching Fellow in Service Learning, were in attendance representing Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center as well as Public Allies.

Condon was invited to present "Strengthening Your Service Site With Asset Based Community Development." This highly interactive session answered the age-old question: with so many people working in nonprofits why doesn't meaningful change come faster? Condon, faculty member with Public Allies, Inc.'s Leadership Practice in collaboration with Northwestern University's Asset Based Community Development Institute, shared ideas on how to harness the power of participants to produce greater impact.

Over 4,500 conference participants were inspired by the stories of super-empowered citizens – from those who speak for the national service field to the world and those who create change in their own communities.

Civil rights activist Ruby Bridges shared how service enriches not only communities, but also souls; Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour discussed the importance of shared responsibility in the wake of disaster; CNN's Soledad O'Brien inspired participants

to help children achieve more academically through simple, thoughtful outreach, one child at a time; participants were entertained by extraordinary musicians from Branford Marsalis to Percy Sledge; and New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu emotionally and powerfully thanked the service community for helping his city recover. Political strategists Mary Matalin and James Carville, who spoke at the opening session, agreed on the importance of service.

The conference provided over 150 sessions that provided participants with ideas, tools and inspiration to move forward in an effort to create meaningful change in their home communities. With the help of hundreds of volunteers, participants left their own mark on New Orleans - revitalizing 25 parks and recreation centers and restoring the city's green play spaces. This effort culminated the six-month Road to the Gulf initiative to activate service leaders and inspire 10,000 volunteers to action.

Liotta explained, "I found the networking to be most valuable. It was also reassuring to see how many public service positions there are out there. It gives me hope for employment in the future. The conference opened my eyes to new service avenues to pursue once I finish Graduate School."

Palmer stated, "The learning that takes place in the sessions is equaled if not exceeded by the learning that takes place in the highways and byways of the conference hall. One only needs to saunter through to not only see but also feel the connections we make in service."

To learn about the conference that will be held in Chicago next year, visit <http://www.volunteeringand-service.org/>

## BRINGING FOOD INTO THE CLASSROOM

*Portions are being reprinted with permission from the July 22, 2011 edition of the Jamie Oliver Food Revolution Blog, written by former Public Allies Teaching Fellow in Science, Andrew Nimmer*



At Eagle Rock, a vast majority of our students have grown up on fast and processed food. Most did not know that bread is made from flour or that cheese is made from milk.

That was before we introduced the Science of Cooking class, to give them a glimpse into the making of some of the things that they eat every day. In this class, taught by myself and Janet Johnson, students explore the world of microbiology through fermented foods.

Which is how, if you came into the science lab at our school last winter, you would have been greeted by a distinct briny smell. On a typical day in the lab, students would be spread throughout the classroom working in small groups, writing notes or mixing what looked like thick paint. If you asked them what that smell was, they would tell you that it was their pickles. But the pickles were old news – what they were working on then were their sourdough starters.

The first week of the course, the students began with a simple cup of flour and water. Each cup was given a name and date of birth. Then they waited. After days, bubbles began to appear. After a week, a clear “overripe fruit” smell let the students know that their starters were maturing.

As the starters bubbled on a countertop in the back of the room, students learned about their role as a breeding ground for wild yeast and “good bacteria” lactobacillus. They studied cell structure, reproduction and biological classification of bacteria and fungi. Then, when it was finally time to use the starters to make bread, they could put that knowledge into practice.

On baking day, the students used their individual wild starters to mix dough. They brought their dough over to the kitchen, where chef Mike Glowacki showed them how to shape and score it in preparation for the oven. After taking careful notes of the process, the students put their unique rounds of dough into the oven and headed to the computer lab.

The final assessment for the Science of Cooking was for students to create a scientific cookbook discussing, analyzing and explaining the three foods they studied and prepared.

As well as pickles and sourdough, they also travelled to a cheese importer to learn the ins-and-outs of cheese production. They studied coagulation and the history of fermented foods, before making fresh mozzarella and enjoying it on homemade pizza.

My pupils learned that the food they made in class was composed of the most basic ingredients, with none of the preservatives, binding agents and artificial flavors that hide in much of the food that they eat.

After our class, they felt empowered to make their own foods as well as seek out higher quality products. After learning what it means for bread to have a “good crumb” they may opt for a bakery rather than the bread aisle at the supermarket. More than anything though, the students developed a connection with the food that they eat that can only come from knowing all of the steps that it took to create it.

As the students worked to put the final touches on their cookbooks, word came that the bread was ready. They took a break to go try the fruits of their labor, and compare crumb, taste and rise. The sourest bread was the winner – but they gave props not to the student who had baked it, but to the creature that had created it: lactobacillus.