PDC AWARDED CES CENTER STATUS
by Dan Condon, Associate Director of Professional Development

The Professional Development Center at Eagle Rock School has recently accepted an offer by the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) to affiliate as a CES Center. A CES Center is an independent organization guided by the CES Principles, providing long-term professional development and technical assistance to schools. Centers are of a size and scale that allow members to know each other well. Each center has the autonomy to create policy appropriate for the schools it serves.

Lewis Cohen, Executive Director of the Coalition of Essential Schools explained, “As a CES mentor school, Eagle Rock exemplifies our Common Principles in practice. The Eagle Rock Professional Development Center’s effort to disseminate information about these practices, particularly through the engagement of its students with visiting educators, captures all that a CES center should be.”

For fifteen years the Professional Development Center has disseminated information about Eagle Rock’s philosophy, programs and methodologies related to re-engaging struggling students in learning, keeping them in school, and graduating them so that they can make a contribution to society.

Initiatives of the Professional Development Center include hosting visiting educators from around the world, speaking at conferences, sponsoring twelve teaching fellowships with Public Allies, offering a variety of learning opportunities to pre-student teachers, student teachers, graduate students and researchers, providing technical assistance to schools and districts, helping fellows become certified through an approved alternative licensure program, and publishing articles (in educational journals as well as the New York Times and Teacher magazine) and books, including The Other Side of Curriculum: Lessons From Learners (the first book written about Eagle Rock).

MINNEAPOLIS FELLOW REUNION
by Dan Condon, Associate Director of Professional Development

From time to time when I travel on behalf of the Professional Development Center I am fortunate to visit cities where former Eagle Rockers reside. Such was the case during a recent trip to Minneapolis where I had dinner with Adrianna Barboza, Andrew Barron, John Gillum and Robyn Weaver. All are former Public Allies Teaching Fellows from Eagle Rock School. It was great to catch up with them. Here’s what I learned about them since they left the Eagle Rock community.

Adrianna (ER-37) works for Wellstone Action, a national center for training and leadership development for the progressive movement, where she is the Training Program Coordinator. She primarily works with three programs. Camp Wellstone is a three day training program for citizen activists, campaign workers and candidates running for office. She’s also involved in the Wellstone Fellows Program, which is a leadership development fellowship program for people of color doing electoral work in communities
With a B.S. in math but no prior math education training, my first job as a math teacher was at an alternative charter school with a holistic mission. I was charged with teaching math to five groups of 17 7th, 8th, and 9th graders, embracing problem solving, communication, and collaboration. Few of these students had been taught math in this way previously, and I had not taught math this way (or any other way, for that matter). While I still believe such an approach is possible and worthwhile, I was not prepared to pull it off. I struggled tremendously and no doubt left numerous opponents to math reform in my wake. Fortunately, I attributed my ineffectiveness to my lack of experience and skill as a facilitator and curriculum writer, not to a flaw in the vision. Though I have no way of knowing, I have since wondered what percentage of new educators in similar situations would draw a different conclusion, something like, “Math is different from other subjects. It can’t be learned collaboratively. You just have to memorize.” This experience motivated me to understand why and how math teachers can become effective in settings that stress understanding over memorization.

Why Did I Struggle?

I believe I struggled in the effort to engage students in the work of actually doing math, as opposed to practicing other peoples’ math, not only because I was a new instructor, but also because I learned math quite differently from the way I was aspiring to teach it. My earliest school memories are of racing through addition and multiplication charts to win ice cream from my teacher. I remember doing pages of practice problems and receiving high percentage scores for getting most problems right. I do not remember ever applying math to real world problems with more than one correct answer, and I never remember working with other people on a problem. Interestingly enough, the only times I remember solving problems at the board in school were when I was racing to be the first finished with a correct answer in class competitions. Incidentally, I loved those days – no doubt because I usually won!

If memories like mine approximate the math experiences of others among the current group of math educators in the CES network, is it any wonder we struggle to create math environments where students solve meaningful problems collaboratively with others? If I, or any math instructor, haven’t actually experienced learning important math concepts by solving and discussing problems in a collaborative environment, how do I even know it is possible? And if I don’t believe it’s possible for all students to learn math without an expert telling them what to do and encouraging (often coercing) them to practice and memorize, how much creative energy and perseverance can I bring to the challenges of engaging all students with a meaningful, creative mathematics education? With the benefit of a few years of experience, it now seems obvious that I struggled, and I believe many of us struggle, because I had almost no actual experience learning math concepts through problem solving in collaborative settings.

In my classes of 17 students ages 12 to 15, I was encouraged to select problems for
The theme of this year’s reunion held during the weekend of June 22nd was entitled A Flock of Eagles. Although registration officially began Friday afternoon, alumni began to congregate in the lodge well in advance of the opening event. Past and present members of Eagle Rock began to mingle, catching up on events that have occurred since they had last connected.

Flocks of eagles continued to arrive well into the evening, while the official welcome was kicked off by Robert Burkhardt. Each former student, graduate, and former staff member sat in the Hearth as each ER group was called upon to show representation. Some alumni endearingly recalled the last time they had sat between Robert and Philbert Smith.

Later in the evening the six student residences held open houses in the living village. Each house had their own unique way of greeting former house members. Open house events ranged from the traditional dessert gathering to a more unique Iron Chef competition. Later that evening, some alumni endearingly recalled the last time they had sat between Robert and Philbert Smith.

On Sunday morning many alums participated on brunch KP. It was great to see alumni donning the new purple KP hats and showing the community just how it’s done. Most alumni departed that afternoon.

Many chose to gather in the PDC hearth for final reflections and connections. One by one, each had time to share something about themselves. The final closing was facilitated by former Director of Students, John Oubre. Proudly wearing their reunion t-shirts, one by one, alumni headed back to their lives outside of the Eagle Rock community.

For everyone, and especially those of you who were unable to come home this time around: wherever you are in your life, we love you and we hope to see you home again soon. See you in 2009. We encourage everyone to stay connected through the new alumni portal on the Eagle Rock website located at www.eaglerockschool.org/our_school/alumni.
of color and the Voter Engagement Schools, which is a civic participation training primarily focusing in Native and Latino communities.

She explained, “Eagle Rock impacted what I am doing now in that it provided me with a holistic view of the importance of building different levels of power. As a teacher at ERS, I was able to give students tools to empower themselves as individuals. In essence, this is what ERS does. Through learning and having access to these tools, students are able to see themselves as agents of change and most importantly see themselves as individuals with choices and with capacity to impact their communities. Although this was primarily at an individual level, being at ERS really impacted me. I was able to see how much a person’s life and universe could change when they have access to tools. Although the individual empowerment of these students is amazing, I realize that the worlds in which many of us live in, the communities from which we come from, are not communities with power – especially political power. Now at Wellstone Action, I have a role in training people across the country on the tools needed to build community power through community organizing, public policy and electoral politics. It is a very grassroots approach to building power. It moves us from a model of individual power – which is what is done at ERS – to model of community power in which as a collective our voices are heard and listened to so that we impact the current institutions in ways that improve our lives.”

Andrew (ER-34) traveled to Buenos Aires, Argentina where he worked for a year at El Hogar La Casita, a group home for boys. Then, after a brief stint as a substitute teacher, he moved to Minneapolis where he works for Genesis II for Families. He is the program coordinator for the Independent Living Skills program. He teaches teenagers who are aging out of the foster care and juvenile justice systems how to pay bills and cook pancakes. He’ll be leaving his job soon to start graduate school at Harvard Graduate School of Education. He will pursue his Masters of Education in Risk and Prevention with hopes to one day be a Philbert.

He shared, “Eagle Rock is a huge part of how I teach my life skills classes. I redeveloped the curriculum to be more constructivist and experiential. Because of my experience at ERS I was ready and able to form relationships with the young people in my program. My work at ERS also guided me as I was looking for a graduate program.”

John (ER-37) blew his meager bank account on a six-week backpacking trip in Europe. He came back with $4 to his name and has been broke ever since. After Europe, he made his way up to Minnesota where he is currently attending Minnesota State University studying Experiential Education. He hopes to continue to work in schools similar to Eagle Rock.

He described, “It’s cliché to say, but I would not be where I am without Eagle Rock. The students at ERS changed what I wanted to do with my life. I know I want to work with young people similar to the ones I worked with at ERS. I am basically learning how to make school more fun, meaningful, and effective. ERS definitely shaped the way I think about education and youth.”

Robyn (ER-31) became a Wilderness Field Instructor at a drug and alcohol treatment center for young adults in southern Utah. Then she took a position as a trip leader for LEAPNow, based in Calistoga, CA, and led a trip of college-aged students around India for two months. Upon returning in December of 2005, she applied to the University of Minnesota’s initial licensure program/Masters of Education to become an English as Second Language (ESL) teacher. She returned to Eagle Rock in January of ‘06 and took a patrol of new students, along with Jac Fournet, down to the Superstition Wilderness area for the ER-38 wilderness experience. She came back the following trimester and accompanied Russ Rendón and four students to Guatemala. Since then, her passport has been dormant as she’s been at the University of Minnesota for the past 15 months. This fall she’ll be fully licensed to teach ESL and will relocate to Milwaukee.

She reflected, “Having spent the past year completing four student teaching placements to become licensed in ESL and Spanish, I’ve seen my fair share of schools that seem to be missing the boat. I admire Eagle Rock’s staff who day after day, trimester after trimester, year after year, put forth amazing effort to do what’s best for the students. There’s something to be said about making that commitment as an educator (and I’d go even further to say as a human being) to do one’s best in the interest of helping out others. It’s part of my philosophy as an educator—do the best I can with what I have as a way to better the society that we all live in. I walked away from Eagle Rock in August of ‘04 with this sense that if I were a student at ERS, I’d be pretty darn grateful that the community makes it hard to give up on me. As I start teaching this fall, I’d like to create a space where our students feel the same way.”
I’m not a religious person. I celebrate my culture but rarely attend a house of worship. I strongly believe in separating the church from public education.

Yet I’m concerned about a type of spiritual bankruptcy in most public schools, perhaps a reflection of our society. I was reminded of this recently when I spent several days at Eagle Rock School in Colorado, a place that is spiritually rich.

I periodically go back to the school for so-called “at-risk” kids to be renewed and to be reminded of what is possible in education. From my first moments during this visit, I was continually aware that there was an important human dimension present that I rarely find in even the best of our schools, although I do find it in some classrooms.

My wife and I are having dinner our first night and a young woman sits with us. Like many of the students, she is filled with promise and challenged by her scars.

Robert Burkhardt, head of the school, walks to our table. Before greeting us, he puts his arm around her shoulder and gently kisses her on the head, while whispering to her. Her face lights up with a broad smile and her eyes are suddenly totally alive.

Later, we sit and watch student presentations of learning, a trademark of Eagle Rock.

Meschach ... presents “Requiem for My Past” in which he carefully shifts his costume as he role plays three stages of his life. The first is the alive and happy kid who “could lead a congregation of 100 people,” the 8-year-old who virtually died when he and his mom left his ... father for a town where he attended an all-white and racist school. Next comes the person who shut down to cope with this new life - “I was cold and no one could touch me.” Last is the new Meschach, who was reborn on the Eagle Rock wilderness trip. He concludes with a quote from Ghandi and by singing a song in Spanish, written by and in memory of his beloved grandfather.

Robert ..., a member of a gang in California, is working hard to put his life in order. He struggles to describe why the past trimester was difficult for him. He stops, places his hands over his face, and chokes back tears, haltingly describing the death of a cousin who was “like my older brother” in a gang-related shooting.

“I’m headed back there on Sunday for our break and don’t know what I’m going to do. I’m still wearing these gang colors (pointing to his blue shirt) but I don’t want to die like my cousin.” Answering questions from our panel he reiterates that he doesn’t know how to deal with what he faces. His heart is still with the gang even as he knows education is the road to a better future. At Eagle Rock, he feels safe enough to share this with us.

The spiritual quality of Eagle Rock has nothing to do with religion. It has everything to do with human relationships. There is the warmth and the trust that allows these kids to be open about who they are, their challenges, their triumphs. There is easy touching between students and between faculty and students. It is the safe touch of caring and connection, between brothers and sisters, parents and children. A student sits stroking the hair of the young woman who is leaning against him. She may or may not be his girlfriend. It doesn’t matter. Poems are read. Ghandi and King are quoted. The messages are often about the human spirit and about how we should connect to each other.

There is a longing for care and for connection in most adolescents. Yet touch is avoided in our schools, in part out of a fear of litigation, in part out of some vestiges of the Puritan ethic. We need schools and classroom that create an environment of trust and open human accessibility in which our teens feel free to reveal who they are. Teachers need to be able to connect subject matter to the inner lives of their students, to make their subjects meaningful. And our schools need to be places where students can both learn and heal.

Mark Phillips of Woodacre is a professor of secondary education at San Francisco State University.
If anyone can find the balance between formal education and real-life experience, it seems to be Natalie Newman, who has kept very busy since her graduation from Eagle Rock in August of 2001. Originally from Berkeley, California, Natalie returned to the Bay Area after her ER graduation to pursue her studies at the University of San Francisco (BA in Communication Studies, May 2005) and to begin her career near her family and friends.

Through a USF connection, Natalie took advantage of the career services office, and spent a semester exploring broadcast journalism with TechTV, a company that has since been bought out by Comcast. Through a USF connection, Natalie worked as a teleprompter, writing news stories to be read on-air. Though she has always had a passion for writing, this experience with news writing felt “very rushed and straight to the point” and lacked the usual “emotion” she put into her writing projects. Sometimes learning what you don’t want to do proves useful, though, and when the San Francisco office for TechTV was shut down, Natalie witnessed first hand the impact corporate layoffs can have on people.

During college, Natalie did manage to find a creative outlet for her writing. CityFlight, a non-profit publication in the Bay Area founded by an African-American male for the local African-American community, caught Natalie’s interest. With its articles about entertainment, health, and events in the community, Natalie contributed some of her writing and published multiple articles in CityFlight, including some that she designed herself and pitched to the editors. Natalie enjoyed the creative control she had, and eventually became a copy editor for CityFlight until the summer of 2005, when she left the publication to pursue full-time work.

Before graduating from USF in May of 2005, Natalie had accepted a three-month temporary position with Kaiser Permanente to “get her foot in the door.” Before her three months was up, Kaiser offered her a permanent position in the Human Resources Center for Northern California Employees as a Human Resources Service Representative. Natalie accepted the position and became so skilled at her job that eventually the work began to feel repetitive, and she left to get another perspective on HR. During her time with Kaiser, Natalie credits some of her success to her time near her family and friends.

The world of HR seems to fit well into Natalie’s strengths in communication, and she has already begun to take classes at the Continuing Education Program at California State University - East Bay towards earning her Human Resources Management Certificate. In the next few years, Natalie is looking towards a return to school to pursue her Masters, but wants to first make sure that she is “comfortable” and “solid in her decision” before she commits more time and money into her formal education.

When asked about her memories of Eagle Rock, Natalie spoke a great deal about her appreciation for Philbert’s support during and after her time as an ER student. When she was so far away from home, Philbert, “stepped into the father role” and opened his home up to her. She enjoyed sharing meals with the Smith family during her tenure as an ER student, and was grateful to have Philbert at her USF graduation.

Highlights of her time at Eagle Rock were often the opportunities she had to travel with the school. Six years after graduating, she still recalls her excitement in being chosen as one of four students to present at the National Service Learning conference in Providence, Rhode Island, and the powerful experience of going to Senegal, West Africa in the spring of 2001.
Each year Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center along with Public Allies invite 12 individuals who are passionate about education and youth development to teach at Eagle Rock School and be part of a leadership program. Through weekly professional trainings, mentorship and support from Instructional Specialists, and community living, Fellows learn about education, youth development, and themselves. Fellows have had a big impact on the Eagle Rock community and will be very much missed. The Eagle Rock Community and Public Allies thank them for their contributions and wish them well in what comes next.

**Spencer Christensen**, Service Learning Fellow, will spend time with his family and then travel to Argentina. He will help facilitate a study abroad program about art and revolution in Buenos Aires, presenting lectures, and lead tours of graffiti art in Buenos Aires for a couple of weeks. After his time in Argentina, Spencer will return to the Bay Area and plans to spend his time working with youth in other capacities inside or outside of the classroom, or traveling. Working with study abroad programs may give him the opportunity to combine both of these passions.

**Esperanza Gallón**, Health and Wellness and Counseling Fellow, will travel back to her hometown of Cincinnati, Ohio. Inspired by the students of ERS and encouraging staff members, Esperanza will be pursuing a Masters degree in Counseling. Her focus will be in substance abuse, grief therapy, and abuse counseling. In the meantime, Esperanza hopes to work as a high school teacher in Cincinnati or as a social worker with children services near Cincinnati. Her long-term goals also include going to law school to become a guardian ad litem and to represent underserved youth involved in children services.

**Molly Goulden**, Human Performance Center Fellow, will travel for a month and then move to Bellingham, Washington. Throughout her time at Eagle Rock she had various opportunities to work in health and fitness both inside and outside the classroom. She realized her great passion for health and fitness. Molly plans to pursue a Master’s degree in exercise science within the next year and make an impact on the health and fitness industry.

**Scott James**, Language Arts & Literature Fellow, will move to Oakland, California to become an advisor with MetWest, a Big Picture School. “The Big Picture Company’s mission is to catalyze vital changes in American education by generating and sustaining innovative, personalized schools that work in tandem with the real world of their greater community.” There he plans to continue resolving the student-teacher contradiction, listening to every soul he is fortunate enough to meet, and contributing a few thoughts to the eternal conversation that is life. He will also continue to work and play with creative writing and spoken word.

**Denise Lord**, World Languages Fellow, is looking at various opportunities to continue to work with youth in education, be it in the U.S. or abroad. Denise took part in the Eagle Rock Licensure Program and has completed all requirements to receive a 3-year teaching license. Denise is also interested in utilizing her teaching certificate to teach Spanish, leading educational trips in South America, or teaching English overseas.

**Emily Matuzek**, Professional Development Center Fellow, has sold all of her earthly possessions with any monetary value in preparation for her move to the Dominican Republic. Emily will be serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer for the next two years, where she will be paired with a local youth worker to serve marginalized young people in her assigned community. Emily is looking forward to working and learning with young people in a small community again, and plans to build on the questions, philosophies, and skills she developed at Eagle Rock.

**Sarah Louise Pieplow**, Music Fellow, will move into a shared housing co-op and community in Boulder, CO, in order to be near family and live out her collective hippie dreams. Sarah is pursuing a position training as a queer youth group facilitator and will be substitute teaching in the Boulder Valley School District. With her minimal income from the education field, she plans to fund two other lucrative careers: independent recording artist and published poet. She also hopes to travel and to stay in touch with the ERS community while she is nearby.

**Emily Roh**, Societies & Cultures Fellow, will return to Los Angeles before heading out on a two-week adventure to El Salvador with friends. In the coming months, she plans to finish her Fulbright application to study queer activism in South Korea, as well as find employment where she continues to empower young people as well.
Early in July, five members of the Eagle Rock educational staff embarked on a week long journey to Miami, Florida to exchange practice and theory with other educators from around the country at the annual Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) Summer Institute. Throughout the week, many institutions, schools, staff and students presented workshops and presentations on practices they have incorporated into their daily routines. The themes of the Summer Institute ranged from culture building to expanding technology use in the classroom, all in the context of the CES Common Principles.

The Director and Associate Director of the Professional Development Center, Michael Soguero and Dan Condon respectively, capitalized on the opportunity to facilitate a six-hour workshop on Asset Based Community Development (ABCD). This approach to school community building focuses on the skills, strengths, resources and assets already available to the community and its members instead of depending on “outsiders” to bring positive development and change.

Often, the process of ABCD includes identifying already present resources, people, and institutions, defining or redefining their roles, and together, creating and implementing actions steps that lead to sustainable community-driven changes. Michael and Dan worked to help schools introduce this approach to their school communities.

Beth Ellis, Cynthia Elkins, and Mohammed Elgazzar joined Michael and Dan in representing Eagle Rock School at the Summer Institute. They joined the Professional Development Center staff in attending workshops and presentations and engaging in problem solving and relationship building. The ERS staff also worked with their CES mentee schools: Odyssey – The Essential School in SeaTac, Washington and Skyview Academy in Thornton, Colorado. A small team of ERS staff is currently planning a visit to Odyssey in order to help establish some common practices and purposes. The visit is planned for August.

The CES Summer Institute is a smaller version of The CES Fall Forum. The Fall Forum, which invites many more participants from all over the country and world, will occur this November in Denver, Colorado. Eagle Rock is one of the host institutions. Please visit essentialschools.org for more information on the workshops offered during the Summer Institute as well as additional resources regarding the Fall Forum.
Three More Graduates Take Flight
by Emily Matuzek, Former Public Allies Fellow in the Professional Development Center

On Friday, August 10th, the ER-42 graduates crossed the HPC stage to claim their well-deserved Eagle Rock diplomas. This all-female trio represents a great deal of strength: strong personalities, work ethic, and willpower to finish what they started. Many people were present to celebrate the accomplishments of these young women, and to wish them well in their next adventures.

Brizeida “came in as a girl, and is graduating as a young woman” according to Jen Morine, her house mom at Lodgepole. Along with her vast personal growth, Brizeida has taken advantage of many academic opportunities during her time at the Rock. From Utah to DC, and Mexico to Guatemala, Brizeida has traveled a great deal, and has found some of her most exciting learning in classes where she ventured far away from campus. She cites her Guatemala trip of ER-39 as one of her biggest highlights at Eagle Rock because of the opportunity it gave her to, “experience a new culture, eat different foods, meet people and do service for them.” Her trip to the Moab Desert in ER-40 to see the Anasazi ruins was another opportunity to explore a different culture, albeit an ancient one, which added to her perspective on the world. Even in her major research project, Brizeida chose to further investigate her own experience of being Latina in the United States educational system, specifically at ERS. Brizeida will continue to build off of her interest in culture and cultural exchange after her time at Eagle Rock by pursuing studies in Anthropology while working and continuing to travel as much as possible. When asked about her time here, Brizeida says she will miss the people and the snacks the most. She is also grateful to L’Tanya, Adriana, Jesse and Eric, along with other staff members, for their support during her ER career.

As Heidi prepared for graduation, her biggest learning was, “to love myself and [to feel] proud of what I have accomplished.” This list of accomplishments includes the ER-39 trip to Guatemala, which left a great impression on Heidi, and a commitment to PeaceJam from ER-36 through ER-39, which led her to attend conferences on sustainability in Boulder. After her graduation from Eagle Rock, Heidi is looking forward to “being independent, working, making her own decisions, going to college, and having access to her car.” She will miss star-lit walks home alone on the path, intramurals, and everyone who has impacted her time at Eagle Rock. Heidi would like to especially thank Jen Morine, her house mom, for “everything she has done for me.” Molly, Heidi’s fellow graduate is “proud to share the stage with someone like her,” and is excited that the two of them are graduating together since they both began high school together back in Boulder.

Molly will no doubt be remembered for her zany sense of humor and antics around campus. She will most miss, “Laughing every day with all the people I’ve met here,” and “getting the older brothers I never had but always wanted.” Molly’s highlights during her time at Eagle Rock include attending the Close Up trip to DC in ER-38, going to PrideFest, and discovering Chai Shakes. Wilderness also left a big impression on Molly, and she can still recall the “amazing...view from Peak X.” In the words of her brother Hutch, “I’m so proud of my sister because it’s taken her six years to graduate and now she’s finally doing it.” Molly has plans to move to Chicago after graduation and pursue college. She would like to thank Mo for “listening to all of my complaints and being with me at my worst and at my best [and] laughing with me.”

All of these young women have grown a great deal during their time at Eagle Rock School, and have continued to push themselves and grow personally through their final trimester here. According to Philbert Smith, “Each one of them has overcome their own individual challenges, and I’m looking forward to seeing how they will move forward and make a difference in the world.” We wish them all well in their lives after Eagle Rock, and have great confidence in all of them.
What a summer! In the first show following the theatrical legacies of staff members including Alison Trattner and Karolee McLaughlin, Eagle Rock students and staff were proud to present Honk!, the jazzed up story of the Ugly Duckling. While there was some doubt as to whether the students and the production staff could pull off another magical summer musical, they all made it happen and Honk! was performed, once again, at the outdoor amphitheater. With five performances scheduled for July 27 & 28 and August 2, 3, & 4, the wet weather unfortunately interfered with two of them.

Honk! proved a great choice for the summer show because it offers an all-around balance of everything important for an ERS summer musical: great songs, a wonderful script, funny characters and an important lesson; it’s okay to be different. And after much debate in March, the cast was finally set with eleven student cast members, three ERS adults, and three delightful ERS children.

The story begins in the duckyard where the animals are out enjoying the lake. Drake, a duck, played by Maurice Cola, is a good-natured husband to his wife, Ida, played by Madden Foreman, though it doesn’t always come out that way. Ida is a loving mother who has been waiting for her eggs to hatch for over two weeks; she is getting restless. After she shares her thoughts on The Joy of Motherhood with her two best friends, Maureen the duck, played by Eileen Burkhardt and Henrietta the hen, played by Crystal Torres, her babies finally hatch. She is thrilled to see two lovely ducklings, played by Fabiola Lanteros and Brandon Johnson, when she realizes that the biggest of her eggs didn’t hatch yet! As Drake teaches the ducklings how to swim, Ida continues to sit on the big egg in hopes that it will hatch. As she ponders how the egg is different from any other she has laid before, it hatches and out pops a fluffy, brown, and feathery bird who looks nothing like his brother and sister. Immediately after he is born, Ida teaches her Ugly duckling, played by Yoni Fallik, how to swim and is quick to discover that he is an even better swimmer than she. Ida then decides to introduce her babies to the world. As the ducklings meet the other members of the duckyard (the turkey played by Ian Austin, Maggie Pie played by Aisha Davis, the dog played by Ty McDermott, and Grace, the most distinguished duck on the lake, played by Cynthia Alonzo) they all begin to call the duckling “Ugly” and are disgusted and offended by his appearance.

Seeing that Ugly is saddened and hurt by everyone’s reactions, the Cat, played by Calvin King, decides to pounce and whisks Ugly away from the duckyard, pretending to be his friend. The Cat escorts Ugly to his house and pretends to be fixing lunch for both of them. Before the Cat has the chance to get Ugly in the pot full of boiling water, however, Ugly makes a narrow escape. Meanwhile, back at the duckyard, Ida is sick with worry over her lost baby, though everyone tries to convince her that they are better off. She finally decides to leave to go look for him.

After Ugly’s escape from Cat, he journeys on his own and meets many loveable characters including a squadron of geese, led by Greylag and Dot, played by Robert Burkhardt and Natalie Donchery, a domesticated and snobby cat and rooster, and an aesthetically challenged bullfrog.

By the end of the play, Ugly has met Penny, a swan played by Aisha Davis, and has fallen in love as he realizes that he is not a duck, but in fact a swan. He undergoes a transformation that leaves him more beautiful than all of the other members of the duckyard. Finally, Ida is reunited with her baby and Ugly and Penny escort her back to the duckyard where everyone quickly realizes their quickness to judge someone who was different. They are very apologetic. Ugly is very accepting of the apology and it all ends happily ever after with Ugly as the most distinguished duck on the lake.

Without the talented production staff, Honk! would have never been possible. Melody Page worked wonders as the director, Jeff Liddle was the Producer, Sarah Pipelow specialized in musical direction, Eileen Burkhardt was the stage manager, Mat Kasper, Jimmy Frickey, Hutch Bercow, and Corey King built the sets and served as stage crew, Cynthia Elkins was the prop master, ERS Graduate Zack Brick did sound and Rod Rawson stepped in at the last minute to assist with lights.

A big thank you to everyone who was involved in the show! It was a great success and we look forward to next summer!
students that were “open-ended” and offered a variety of solution strategies that allowed, at least in theory, students with differing math backgrounds to engage productively with the problem. As students with vast differences in prior experience and confidence asked questions about the problems, as well as the new teaching style, I clumsily directed them to “rely on each other.”

Within the first 20 minutes of my first lesson ever, the students figured out that I did not intend to answer all of their questions directly. Over the next few weeks, students, parents, and possibly colleagues questioned my understanding of the role of “teacher,” sometimes with a real intent to understand where I was coming from, other times rhetorically, with disdain and judgment. “Teachers, especially math teachers, answer students’ questions,” they reasoned. “How am I supposed to know what to do, if you don’t tell me?” “What should my student do when she is ready to move on and others aren’t?” “How can someone struggling with fractions really work productively with my ‘Algebra’ student?”

These questions, I believe, represent something more than most first-year teachers endure. They reveal the responsibility reformed-minded educators share in helping others come to understand why reform is warranted and worthwhile. This responsibility is not appropriately borne by any first-year teacher. Despite my best intentions and excitement, I failed my first year teaching math for two primary reasons. I failed because I was unskilled at facilitating a collaborative problem solving culture and had few prior teaching examples in my learning history to imitate. And I failed because I was unprepared to manage effectively the demands of first year teaching, curriculum development, and the necessary public relations work of a new charter school.

My failures manifested themselves in two ways. First, few students made significant gains in mathematics that year. Second, most people attributed the lack of learning to the change in instructional philosophy. That is, my first year of teaching helped reinforce what many students, parents, and educators believed in the first place. “Math is different from other subjects. Math is memorization and practice. Math is not creative.” And, worst of all, “Some people are good at math, and some people aren’t.”

But I refuse, and continue to refuse to believe the conclusions so obvious to many students, parents, and colleagues, because I have had two experiences learning important mathematics through problem solving in a collaborative culture. The first experience was in college in an Abstract Algebra course. Our instructor gave us problem sets designed for us to discover, explain and prove the major theorems of Abstract Algebra. He answered our questions with questions of his own and forced us to rely on each other for validation. We even took two group exams! The second experience was the IMP training mentioned above, a two-week course provided as professional development. Sixty secondary math instructors, some converted art teachers with outright math anxiety, others, like me, with degrees in mathematics, discovered that much of what we thought we knew about probability and expected value was in fact quite superficial and unable to be applied accurately to non-routine problems. Collectively, we expanded our notions of what it meant to understand a mathematical concept. These experiences, and others since, form the foundation of my beliefs that 1) math can be learned through solving problems collaboratively with others, and 2) the math I thought I learned previously lacked the depth and flexibility of true knowledge.

Forming a Network

After my first teaching experience, I decided to opt out of the “sink or swim” model of professional development offered by so many of the new small schools sprouting up across the nation. I pursued an internship at Eagle Rock School with the hope of learning to teach math alternatively from an experienced educator. While Eagle Rock teacher Jason Cushner fit (and continues to fit) that description, as I was applying, he was making plans to leave. Jason worked at Eagle Rock School for seven years as the Instructional Specialist in mathematics prior to my application to Eagle Rock and had even received the Presidential Award in Mathematics Education in 2002. I was offered the position and worked with the previous year’s intern while the school looked to fill Jason’s position.

Fortunately for me, the position was still vacant seven months into my internship and the job was offered to me. While this was a tremendous opportunity, the hope of learning to teach math alternatively from an experienced educator never played out for me. Even with Eagle Rock’s belief in the “Teacher as Generalist” principle, there were few, if any, people offering experience and knowledge about how to facilitate a collaborative problem solving class in a heterogeneous environment, how to develop and utilize inter-disciplinary courses, and how to reengage students with mathematics. On the contrary, in my perhaps overly cynical moments, I sometimes got the sense that people were just glad someone at Eagle Rock was willing to do math.

So I began to look outward. I invited instructors I admired from professional development experiences outside of school to observe my courses, collaborate with me to address challenges unique to Eagle Rock, and help identify and recreate our successes. At the debriefing of one such experience, the idea of creating the community of math instructors I was craving was born. While musing about how most math conferences talk about things meant for dramatically different school settings and how most internal school professional development focus on anything but implementing math curriculum consistent with our school vision, my guest suggested I invite people to Eagle Rock for a conference. Eagle Rock is in beautiful Estes Park, Colorado, he reasoned, and people would love to come here to “work on math.”

Insights

The experiences of isolation relieved by collaboration have led me to a few insights about my practice as a math educator and math
education in small, personalized, and student-focused schools:

Effective instruction requires collaboration with other instructors. There are people working effectively to implement alternative math programs, but they are exceptions to the rule and they are not currently in positions to share their wisdom with people who could benefit.

New instructors need experiences that will ground their belief in the idea that math can be learned through collaborative problem solving, or else they will teach the way they were taught. If that support isn’t present in your school, then it is our responsibility to make it available.

Curriculum writing is hard! We need to collaborate and share with one another so instructors can spend more of their time focusing on questioning and assessment strategies in support of collaborative classroom cultures.

In our brief time in Chicago, it was clear there are many areas of common interest and concern: developing more interdisciplinary classes and projects, developing additional classes and projects connecting math to issues of social justice, wrestling with the challenges of heterogeneous groupings, understanding and implementing a “less is more” philosophy in the current “high-stakes” climate of accountability, and developing collaborative, inquiry-based classrooms, to name a few.

I’ll close with some questions that suggest some thoughts about how we can continue and expand this work. What if we could gather, develop, and share five ways linear relationships have been successfully taught in interdisciplinary courses? What if we knew who within CES really understands how to teach spatial reasoning and made her knowledge readily available? What if we collectively advocated for a more complete, humane, and useful vision of mathematics education? What if CES offered training in math education meant for smaller community-based schools? What if CES collaborated to bring math educators together in the summer to develop curricula and offer intervention courses to students who need them at little or no cost in support of high expectations for all students and with the goal of sharing that curriculum?

With every challenge we face, there is an opportunity. The fact that so many have such similar opportunities suggests we are dealing with something larger than our own schools and classrooms. Individual successes in the network can create future allies, and more successes can add to the momentum.

Full text of this article may be found at www.essentialschools.org