



## Eliciting Greatness: An Educational Vision for Woodstock School

### ***Setting the Scene***

The title of Woodstock School's educational vision, *Eliciting Greatness*, is drawn from Scottish statesman, John Buchan's admonition, "The task of leadership is not to put greatness in humanity, but to elicit it, for the greatness is already there." In using this title we acknowledge in the great spiritual traditions of the world an emphasis on service and servant-hood as the expression of true greatness. As Christ also told his followers, "he who would be great must be the servant of all".

Every organization has a destiny - a deep purpose that expresses its reason for being. This sense of purpose can become tacit – obscured by daily routines and unquestioned culture. Our educational vision must allow us to remain attentive to this deep purpose amidst the busy schedules of day to day life and the inevitable tyranny of the urgent. This vision must also remind us that we strive to deal with challenges, decisions and pressures according to our values. Nothing we do should be haphazard. Everything we do must be carefully thought out with reference to our basic aims and developed from first principles. Whenever new problems or questions arise, we seek their solution within the same context. We ask ourselves, "Is the solution proposed consistent with our vision?" Some of this vision is drawn from the strength and depth of Woodstock's principles which have stood the test of time and represent our founding vision. Other aspects of this vision look forward to those values and principles which need to accompany our hopes and strategies into the future. These principles draw on the best that we now know about how learning occurs, the insights of spirituality, psychology, cognitive science and educational research.

Great human beings live with compassion, strength and humility. We hold that young people learn greatness through seeing adults strive after the same goal and through seeing the principles of greatness woven through the fabric of a learning community.

### **To Elicit Greatness, education should...**

1. Emerge from clear philosophical and spiritual underpinnings.
  2. Take place within a compassionate and caring community.
  3. Require the balanced development of the whole person.
  4. Be challenging, engaging, and experiential.
  5. Offer opportunities for young people to show initiative and develop self-discipline.
  6. Maximize the potential for learning held by a diverse school community.
  7. Develop a clear understanding of leadership and service.
  8. Embrace the outdoors as a significant resource for learning and personal development.
  9. Cultivate a meaningful relationship with the natural environment.
  10. Encourage a healthy lifestyle to support the development of the whole person
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## ***Educational Vision***

*Where there is no vision the people perish.* **Proverbs**

The cultural critic, Neil Postman, commented, "Our children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see." So, too, are our graduates – carrying our values with them into an unknown future. Our students inherit a complex world characterized by change and crisis. Must they take the world as it is, merely accepting an education that enables them to fit into the status quo, or can they learn to question what they see and strive for a deeper understanding? It is hardly a sign of health if an education merely allows young people to adapt to life in a dysfunctional society.

We educators see how a depressing history has accumulated around decades of so called innovation in education. Coupled with the invasion of managerial jargon and production line terminology has come an ever more secular view of what it means to be human. Functional, clinical and essentially arid, these influences have sent out ripples which have rearranged the entire landscape of our lives. The priorities of community and relationship are easily surrendered to the bland corporate agenda of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The fluid language of the soul does not flow well through these dehydrated valleys. Endless tinkering with superficial methods reveals less and less of what can really inspire us.

We educators know more about techniques and strategy than ever before. The outer form of what we do has reached the limits of refinement. We have used everything we know to explore the boundaries and have ended up nowhere better than where we began. As Thoreau put it, "Our inventions are wont to be pretty toys, which distract our attention from serious things. They are but improved means to an unimproved end, an end which it was already but too easy to arrive at." Many who inhabit this planet are wealthier and healthier than ever before, but happiness seems to have retreated to a far horizon. Promised results have eluded us. Many institutions and communities have experiences of this malaise. Internalizing its logic leads only to despair. At the root lies a moral and spiritual backwardness which has failed to keep pace with our scientific and technological 'advances'. At the root, too, lies a view of education that limits its purpose to preparation for the workplace. Acknowledging this is the starting point to a different path, a path which looks back as much as it looks forward. We need an approach rooted in the restoration of the human soul as the heart of life and meaning.

At Woodstock School, we believe education is about "soul-making" - shaping young lives, confronting the destructive modern patterns of materialism and self-centeredness and showing young people how to live what the ancient philosophers called the 'good life'. This view stands closer to the 'monastery' than the 'market place' but as schools have moved from the former to the latter they have lost significantly more than they have gained. George Howie, summarizing the thoughts of St. Augustine on education, put it this way: "If man's life is to bring him abiding satisfaction, it must be consistently inspired by the desire to understand the eternal reasons of things. Happiness is, therefore, a condition of purposeful, intelligent activity, a labor of the soul, in which the generating power is love. A man's love may be

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# Woodstock School

directed to higher or lower ends, but it is always something specifically directed, which is satisfied only by the achievement of the goal which he sets before himself. To educators, this suggests that education must be a joyous activity directed by love of what is intellectually satisfying. Education is not an irksome preparation for the happy life. *It is the happy life.*"





***Education should emerge from clear philosophical and spiritual underpinnings.***

*"The most important fact about the subject of education is that there is no such thing. Education is not a subject, and it does not deal in subjects. It is instead the transfer of a way of life."* **G.K. Chesterton**

Amiel's dictum, "Every life is a profession of faith, and exercises an inevitable and silent propaganda," reminds us that there is no neutral position which can be adopted in any human activity. Clearly, every educational philosophy emerges from one theological foundation or another. Woodstock School has always looked to its founding Christian vision as a source of inspiration and guidance. This vision provides a translucent framework of values which informs a view of what it means to be human, what it means to be educated and what it means to live life to the full. In modern parlance, we would call this a "narrative". This narrative or story gives true purpose and meaning to a Woodstock education.

Without a spiritual dimension, education too easily sustains narratives which only support economic utility, getting a better job, consumerism, comfort or success for its own sake. In this sense, a Woodstock education is a form of soul-making – enabling young people to find and embrace those values which will provide meaning, purpose, sustenance and resilience at the very deepest levels of their awareness. This education is not merely about acquiring knowledge and correlating facts; it is, essentially, about attaching significance to life. The rationale for committing to distinct philosophical or metaphysical foundations cannot only be based on a respect for the past. Veneration of history for its own sake is unthinking traditionalism (and would, amongst other things, venerate blood-letting over penicillin!).

The teachings of Christ must be seen to provide a robust and compelling approach to education – its pedagogical methods, values and goals – which can assert its relevance in the 21st century. For example, Christ drew extensively on story and metaphor as methods of communication. His reliance on agricultural metaphors reveals a view of learning as an organic process of growth that was personal, individualized. Compassion marked his interactions with all, as did a regard for the dignity and freedom of people to choose their response, to choose their way forward. He paid close, individual attention to those who found themselves on the fringes of society. We, too, embed these tools and ideas in our approach. Of course, these values will not always be compatible with the values of business or industry – nor with the values of modern societies or even of conventional educational wisdom. In fact, these values may actively and aggressively challenge many approaches to education, organization and decision-making – for they emerge from a very different narrative to that which inspires many features of modern society. Woodstock School chooses to consciously enter the communal tension that can emerge from these conflicting narratives. We encourage the community to openly explore, discuss and untangle our individual thinking in response to the tension—to embody a level of increasing self-awareness around our own stories, our own narratives.



# Woodstock School

This commitment to the teachings of Christ as the source of institutional and educational values is not to suggest that Woodstock is like a church or a community of faith. Woodstock is an educational institution – a school – and our deep commitments must find their most authentic expression in ways which are appropriate to that setting. These include the quality of daily life, relationships, interactions and community engagement; an awareness, as Pope John Paul II put it, that “love is the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.” A true valuing of the spiritual in a school context is measured in the power of what is practiced rather than what is preached. That being the case, gentleness, humility, forgiveness and love must inform our pedagogy as much as insights from psychology and cognitive science.







***Education should take place within a compassionate and caring community.***

*It takes a village to raise a child.* **African proverb**

We value a community which encourages open-mindedness and courteous freedom of expression and one in which everyone can expect to be treated honestly, fairly and with respect. But why is that? What's so special about a compassionate and caring community? We now know far more about the defining characteristics of an environment within which teaching and learning is effective and productive. Most significantly, precisely this type of environment also promotes meaningful personal, moral and spiritual growth.

The foundations of this approach are based on a commitment to strong personal, emotional and psychological care. In our mechanistic worldviews, still dominated by Newtonian mindsets, we can struggle to truly comprehend and trust the mysterious alchemy which shapes the character and personality of the child. Our preoccupation with control and fascination with models of development dominated by the cognitive element ignore a more ancient and far simpler wisdom. Cultivating a community in which young people experience love and integrity, discipline and clarity, will nurture roots of self-knowledge and confidence far deeper than any we can contrive.

Quality relationships lie at the heart of the nurturing environment within which nobler aims of a school can be more readily achieved. The ingredients of this relationship are not necessarily synonymous with professional qualifications or techniques alone – important though they are in the provision of a sound education. We locate the core of this relationship in the compelling power of openness, integrity, honesty and the transformation that comes from relating to others as 'persons'. As Goethe put it, "we only truly learn from those we love." To this bond, we would add the bond of trust. These emphases find practical expression in a warm, supportive family environment – one characterized by civility, respect and attentive listening. This, in turn, creates a powerful sense of belonging for students. Capricious discipline, insult and bullying must be absent. Only within this kind of environment can the greater educational goals of the school be achieved. As such, each member of staff is engaged in this same process and their ability to help young people begin this journey is significantly determined by their own commitment to personal growth and spiritual discovery.

This raises questions about the "kinds" of people who are able to educate effectively. Schools focus much on the what, when, how and why of education – much more rarely on the "who" (who does the educating, what personal qualities characterize them). The over-riding quality of the educator should be a certain "seriousness" about their own journey, a depth of questioning about themselves and the world and a sensitivity to the spiritual dimension of experience – for what the teacher *is*, that the teacher *imparts*. It is unquestionably the 'narrow path' and the 'difficult way' for it places remarkable demands on those who choose to live by its rule. Gentleness, kindness and a willingness to be vulnerable are the most

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# Woodstock School

reliable qualities any teacher can bring with them to their vocation – and these can only be expected from the strong. The consequences of holding onto less reliable values such as building a false reputation or masking human frailties are, in the long-run, profoundly destructive - as Rumi warned his followers: "If you're here unfaithfully with us, you're causing terrible damage."

It takes faith to hold onto that which is ultimately valuable in education. Weakness tempts us to depend upon other, more superficial methods – discipline, measurement, control, formality and outward appearance to name but a few. These false gods extract costly sacrifices of time and energy from their devotees. Woodstock School remains free from this dull bureaucratic liturgy - and the benefits are real. This includes a freedom to sacrifice time and energy to those things which are of great value and which, frankly, cannot be weighed or measured – compassion for the troubled and vulnerable, a relentless commitment to care (which though often inconspicuous is, nevertheless, powerful) and the encouragement to make discoveries outside the boxes of a syllabus or exam paper. This is 'whole person' learning at its best - innovative, challenging, personal and profoundly spiritual.



***Education requires the balanced development of the whole person.***

*It should come as no surprise that the unhealthiness of our world today is in direct proportion to our inability to see it as a whole.*

**Peter M. Senge**

Many of the great headmasters of the late 19th century sought to develop what they described as “the whole man” in their respective schools. Though our terminology and methodology have dramatically changed, we can recognize in this aspiration an aim which is deeply relevant in the 21st century. This is to sustain an approach to education which seeks to nurture development across a wide variety of domains. It acknowledges that the success of an education cannot only be located in intellectual achievement, cognitive development or examination success. Harvard Graduate School of Education Professor Howard Gardner’s ground-breaking theory of multiple intelligences reveals that there is more than one “intelligence”. Each person has a unique combination of interpersonal, intrapersonal, linguistic, mathematical, musical, artistic, kinesthetic, and naturalist “intelligences”. Taking account of this through a genuinely broad and balanced curriculum (Capital “C”) allows students to find, express and develop their varied intelligences or faculties beyond those achievements measured in SAT scores. What is more, it is evident that those students who make the most of their potential in a variety of ways are more likely to make significant contributions to a world that values talents of all kinds.

In the 20th century the renowned educator, Kurt Hahn, had a significant impact in this endeavor. Not only did he found two great schools but he also created the Outward Bound Organization, the United World Colleges and the International Award for Young People. To honor his 80th birthday, the heads of eleven schools who were either alumni or former teachers under Hahn, founded the Round Square, a global movement whose goal is to develop every student into a whole person through a diversity of structured educational experiences. We take careful account of Hahn’s thinking at Woodstock School, retaining membership in the Round Square organization.

Achieving this balance requires that our approach to education encourages an integrated development of potential across a range of dimensions, including the spiritual, academic, moral, aesthetic, emotional, social and physical. This is precisely why we need to create a sense of what we call the curriculum Capital “C” – an approach which recognises, records and rewards student engagement in a range of learning environments and experiences. We value both individual and communal efforts. In addition, as a residential school, our responsibility takes on many of the qualities of parenting. We embrace the many, necessary parenting conversations with young people.

Balanced development emerges, not only across a range of dimensions, but also in response to the range of human experiences. Balanced development means that we work to cultivate in young people a true awareness and reckoning, not just with dreams and aspirations, but with suffering, mortality, and the





# Woodstock School

ephemeral nature of our lives. To see the whole means to recognize both the light and the dark. To be balanced means to see with both resilience and hope.

However, a busy accumulation of various activities and academic subjects does not make up a 'whole' educational package no matter how many fragments are crammed into the mold. What we end up with is a frenetic approach rather than a holistic or balanced approach. Yes, we must create an environment in which young people have opportunities to encounter different forms of knowledge and a wide range of learning experiences. But we must also allow a sense of balance to emerge from the calm of reflection. In the absence of deliberate opportunities to nurture coherence and integration, education risks fragmentation, imbalance and unexamined bias.



## ***Education should be challenging, engaging and experiential.***

*"Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand."* **Confucius**

This requires the learner to take initiative, make decisions, and to be accountable for the results, through investigating, experimenting, being curious, solving problems and assuming responsibility. All that we now know about the learning process supports an approach in which the teacher is the facilitator and not only a performer. It is all about seeking the teachable moment, offering enough challenge for young people to be drawn out of their individual comfort zones into the realm of self-directed discovery and insight. To achieve this, the spaces we create (literally and figuratively) must be safe and capable of eliciting the learners' potential – enabling energy and opportunity to combine in pursuit of possibility. One of Hahn's schools was founded with the motto, 'Plus est en vous'. In other words, "there is more in you than you think". Woodstock's approach to education enables young people to realize this transforming truth and to have opportunities to act upon it.

Young people need to experience success if they are to build confidence. But it is also important for them to be supported in learning from their failures. This combination of challenge and support should exist in and out of the classroom. At various times and in different contexts, each student – from the most able to the least able – will find themselves in need of challenge or support in order to maintain the optimal conditions for learning. On all occasions, our interaction with young people begins from where they are at rather than from where we want them to be. This is what Vygotsky termed "the zone of proximal development" – that zone in which the possibility of learning is maximized. This is precisely the point at which adult intervention is most likely to encourage real learning – for it is the point at which the individual student has reached the limits of their unaided progress. Intelligent adult intervention depends on the quality of the relationship between the student and the teacher. For independent, courageous learning that involves serious risks on the part of the student, the response of the teacher is critical in encouraging or frustrating the student.

Assessing exactly what combination of challenge and support is appropriate is not easy. We all wear other people's faces at times. As Jung described it, we conceal our true nature behind protective layers of identity and self-image. We can easily make the mistake of dealing with others in terms of the facades they present – we are taken in by them and conned into believing that what we see is the same as what lies within. We see the dismissive arrogance of the adolescent and mistake this for the real person who cowers behind the mask. These defensive layers protect the frail and timid individual struggling to come to terms with their identity and the turmoil of change so characteristic of the teenage years. Naively, we can fall for the illusion and respond to the youngster on the basis of the shallow and superficial persona. This forces the fragile 'self' even further into the security of their façade. It also runs the risk of reinforcing in the young person a sense of self-worth based upon the shallow features of their mask. The best education, like the best pastoral care, recognizes the masks and sees the clues - and clues, by definition, are coded and must be deciphered. As educators we have made a choice: When a child enters the

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# Woodstock School

classroom or the residences, we do not make the child fit the mold of their 'age and stage' for the *mold's* sake. Rather, we seek to know and develop the child to his/her full potential for the *child's* sake.





***Education must offer opportunities for young people to show initiative and develop self-discipline.***

*Treat a man as he is, he will remain so. Treat a man the way he can be and ought to be, and he will become as he can be and should be.* **Goethe**

We want young people to become self-disciplined individuals who make informed decisions – about this there will be little disagreement. The question is not ‘what do we want to achieve?’ but ‘how on earth do we get it?’ We know that many factors influence a young person’s personal development. We also know that the internalization of values is different to external compliance prompted by rules and punishments. In other words, there is a big difference between control and self-discipline. We don’t simply want young people who know about self-discipline – we want individuals who will actually behave in self-disciplined ways!

We take for granted a differentiated approach to academic learning. We would never think of setting up a math program that treated every student exactly the same! Yet, schools often set up approaches to the personal development of students which, it seems, do exactly that. Schools often fail to take account of the fact that students function at different levels or stages of self-discipline and personal growth, within the same age cohorts. Though it has since been critiqued, Lawrence Kohlberg’s work on the moral and social development of children offered some important foundations. Over many years, Kohlberg studied stages of moral reasoning in young people from a variety of cultural, social and national backgrounds. He established one crucial fact: everyone, regardless of culture, race or sex, goes through stages of development and at varying rates. We need a thoughtful approach to personal development which takes account of different levels of development within the same age cohorts.

The school’s rules set the basic minimum standards that all members of the community are expected to adhere to. Our aim is to help young people move from external rule-keeping towards more internalized forms of initiative and self-discipline. In fact, recent research demonstrates that if young people begin, at an early age, to imagine their way into actively bringing about real change in their immediate communities, this effectively predicts their future levels of civic engagement and citizenship. Woodstock students must learn to think for themselves. Critical thinking skills and a healthy skepticism will enable them to gain meaningful independence of thought. Where possible, privilege should be linked with responsibility and maturity. Age alone should not be seen as the automatic rite of passage from one set of freedoms to another. Students should recognize that privilege and greater personal freedom are the corollary of developing responsibility, self-knowledge and self-discipline. Those who show maturity and responsibility should be progressively freed from petty restrictions.

Young people cannot successfully internalize qualities of self-discipline by being ‘talked into them’. Nor does a consistently assertive and controlled environment foster these qualities. Students become accustomed to them through a process of progressive experiences from the earliest years. It is not enough to talk in abstract terms about how much we value self-discipline. If we only show our respect for these qualities in token ways we breed cynicism rather than real internalization. Awareness of the needs of others represents a direct corollary to the development of self-discipline. Only when we become *aware*

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# Woodstock School

of others and what they need, can we discipline ourselves as a kind of respect, honor, or service to them. We discipline ourselves to include those who are marginalized. We discipline ourselves to take care of the world around us, to consume wisely. So, to develop self-discipline, we must help young people become aware of the needs of others.

Participation must be real and include actual experience and responsibility which allows progressive development to occur. If we want an environment that will allow self-discipline to flourish, we will need a differentiated approach as far as our work with students is concerned. This will mean actively looking for opportunities for students to practice personal initiative, self-discipline and responsibility, to manage risk and embrace challenge. Where appropriate, these opportunities should always be supported by a reassuring adult presence.





***Education should maximize the potential for learning held by a diverse school community.***

*"Through others, we become ourselves."* **L. S. Vygotsky**

Albert Einstein once observed that "the problems that exist in the world today cannot be solved by the level of thinking that created them." There is something uniquely valuable about a diverse school community- and especially a residential one in which students live and work together in a close community around the clock. There are many ways to define "diversity" –for example, from passport and nationality to colour, creed, culture, caste, socio-economic background and language. However we choose to define it, it is only in the presence of diversity that we become aware of our own, constantly shifting identities. When we are surrounded by characteristics which match and mirror our own we can become strangely blind to our own distinctive baggage.

Diversity is not a static force in our lives—we are all in a continual, dynamic process of becoming, of changing and growing in ways that cause inner choices about the labels we want or don't want for ourselves. We do students a disservice when we assume that they have arrived and formed a clear sense of themselves already. We do better when we remember the unique and irreplaceable nature of every human being. Humanity is infinitely diverse and therein lies enormous potential for learning. We must innovatively use diversity as a resource. Basically, this comes down to creating space for the telling of our individual stories. This allows all of us to see inside another human being ever so briefly—to understand the differences, seek the commonalities, and learn from another's experience.

In a diverse Woodstock 'village', young people can come to discover a common humanity which transcends the divisions of wealth, culture, religion and ethnic identity which so often characterise the conflicts and problems in the world today. These divisions often represent the level of thinking at which many of the world's problems were originally created. Etched on the stone of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial in Washington DC, are words which dramatically sum up the challenge of education in the 21st century: "If we are to have peace on earth our loyalties must become ecumenical rather than sectional. Our loyalties must transcend our race, our class and our nation. And this means we must develop a world perspective." When the posture of our soul is towards understanding others, we begin to develop this perspective which is, in essence, a global mindedness.

We must enable our students to develop the skills of global understanding and critical thinking. Young people need to develop a critical stance - the strength to stand alone and to stand differently if need be. Their ability to be agents of change in the world will depend upon this. The forces of cultural homogenization around the world are powerful, particularly for young adults with a desire to fit in.

It is from our innovative use of diversity, as a powerful and deliberate resource, that Woodstock students will discover personal strength and possibilities beyond old levels of thinking. It is only by living and working together, facing challenges together and sharing experiences of success and failure that those from fundamentally different backgrounds will learn both to interrogate their own thinking and to



# Woodstock School

understand one another. We require a robust scholarship program to allow us to pro-actively recruit for diversity (in every sense of the word).

The main challenge facing education in the 21st century is to educate young people for the 'real world' of diversity and difference. Whether these differences remain as the fragmented divisions of hatred and intolerance will depend to a large extent on the kind of education young people receive. An international education offers the opportunity to celebrate diversity in a spirit of understanding and tolerance and to develop a positive regard and awareness of other people. This must be one of the most important challenges facing the world today - it is certainly a challenge which Woodstock students should be able to face with courage and determination. A real education is one that allows us to seek out and find what life is all about. It cultivates in us the awareness and intelligence which probe the deeper problems and the more ultimate questions. And this is only really possible in the context of diversity.





***Education must develop a clear understanding of leadership and service.***

*"The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."*

**Frederick Buechner**

A compelling vision of education must be orientated towards meaningful action in the world. For young idealists, excited by the possibility of change, and motivated to act through personal example, there are real opportunities to make a difference – education must actively and deliberately support this.

Leadership means different things to different people. For some, it is all about issuing commands and ordering people about. But there is another model of leadership which has stood the test of time as a far more powerful instrument for change. This model defines leadership as 'how to be' rather than 'how to do' and focuses on the values and qualities of character of the individual – inspiring a personal vision of greatness which can create powerful leadership energies. Warren Bennis summed this up well: "people begin to lead that moment when they decide for themselves how to be." This view of leadership is about creating the inner conditions and commitments from which positive outer influence can emerge as integrity and trustworthiness. Unless we support (and model) the development of these personal foundations within our students, our leadership techniques and strategies will be superficial and ineffective – rarely tapping into those energies which can truly inspire and never eliciting the greatness within.

The great spiritual traditions of the world have long recognized the power of encouragement, example and service to others. This is the type of leadership we aspire to at Woodstock. It is the kind of leadership that acts without great fuss and gives willingly of time and energy. This leadership expresses itself through encouragement, example and collaborative approaches. We work to infuse all areas with this sense of what has been called "servant leadership." This will be challenging, for as Tim Brighthouse noted, "Some of the shared value systems we have are quite pernicious and they can be successful in a kind of pernicious way. Most of our schools have unspoken assumptions in their organization, their timetable and their curriculum which reinforce individualism and materialism, and minimize the need for co-operation."

Student and staff leadership alike should be characterized by this willingness to serve –sometimes being willing to lead and sometimes being willing to follow. In this way, leadership and service are two facets of the same entity. "The first responsibility of a leader," said Max De Pree, "is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between, the leader is a servant." There are already many opportunities to express this at Woodstock –including within the local community. But to become part of a defining and inspiring education, these opportunities need to be deeply embedded within the heart of the institution. "Service-Learning", as it is known, is a strategy that integrates meaningful opportunities for service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience. We aim towards a system of increasing, guided self-evaluation which encourages students to reflect on the benefits of their service-leadership opportunities and to evaluate and integrate the understanding and insights acquired with all other aspects of their Woodstock experience.

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# Woodstock School

Woodstock School focuses less on leadership posts and roles and more on service as a way of being in the world. The best leaders and followers live to serve something greater than themselves, not to be seen. Morally and spiritually, the goal is to give to the community, to bring about needed change; pragmatically, the goal is to efficiently move forward and organize. Neither of these goals requires a spotlight.





***Education should embrace the outdoors as a significant resource for learning and personal development.***

*"Great things are done when men and mountains meet."* **William Blake**

Experiencing the outdoors, physically challenging ourselves, and learning our place in the more-than-human world has become a matter of urgency. Joseph Conrad in *Lord Jim* explains the failure of his hero on a momentous occasion in his life by saying that "he never was tested in his life by certain experiences which revealed his inner worth – the qualities of his resistance, the stuff of his fibre, the edge of his temper, the truth of his pretenses to others and to himself." Many young people have unquestioningly developed near addictions to technology, gaming, and movie-watching. This is not a neutral matter, when we consider the biological realities: when our bodies are physically pushed to the limits, our brains release a triple high of dopamine, endorphins, and norepinephrine. However, a gaming 'high' causes only an addictive dopamine rush. Our students could settle, in other words, for less than the full human experience—and they are wiring their brains for an adult life of more of the same.

Allowing students to experience a different context to the ones they normally find themselves in is a powerful opportunity for learning of a very particular type. This learning is not just about acquiring new knowledge but a far deeper level of personal understanding. Kurt Hahn put it bluntly, "It is culpable neglect for educators not to impel young people into health giving experiences." Hahn believed that the skills and confidence to deal with unfamiliar situations could be developed and learned. Exposure to challenge, in a secure environment and appropriately reflected upon, can awaken a self-belief and resilience which can last a whole life long. Little wonder that Kurt Hahn used the phrase "Outward Bound" to describe this program - the nautical term to describe a ship leaving the safety of its harbor to head for the open seas.

James Neill's research at the University of New Hampshire confirms that the controlled experience of challenge increases psychological resilience and other key qualities. Detailed studies of adventure training programs have suggested that young peoples' resilience levels can increase to become up to 300% greater than those found in the average population. Many other studies have shown that by encountering the edges of our physical and psychological limits we increase our capacity to deal with everyday life. In the context of education, the outdoors is more than just a way of providing interesting activities or a chance to enjoy the scenery. Outdoor education enables young people to realize their potential, to learn about themselves and see clearly, perhaps for the first time, what they might be capable of achieving in life

The dictionary defines resilience as "the ability to cope with and respond effectively to the stresses of life or the ability to spring back." Resilience is one of the most important qualities a school can develop in its students. The evidence is compelling – a structured and committed approach to outdoor education is, par excellence, a primary way to build character and positive personality traits in young people by developing core values of courage, confidence, integrity, humanity, team work and resilience. Roles shift as an outdoor journey together progresses, and sometimes that can bring real humility at the recognition





# Woodstock School

of leadership. As students' inner reality/worth is revealed, these experiences can give dignity and respect to those who are sometimes ostracized in other settings.

Aside from meeting challenge and developing resilience, outdoor learning offers enormous opportunity. It allows students to experience (in a bodily sense) the scarcity of resources and our corresponding responsibilities. It forms deep bonds between us through shared experiences. It creates a profound level of spiritual awareness that can come through understanding the more-than-human world and our place in it. Through the outdoors, we contextualize the learning that happens within classrooms.

Achieving this goal entails temporary discomfort and accepting the challenge of deferred gratification – neither of these are the instinctive choices of any teenager. The former requires no small measure of firmness on the part of the school whilst the latter requires a fair amount of faith on the part of the student (probably firmness and faith from parents!). The goal becomes attractive when outdoor learning is tied to ideas and motivations that students already possess. When it comes to preparing for life's challenges, an ounce of prevention in the form of resilience is worth more than a pound of cure. As an ancient Japanese proverb puts it, "fall seven times, stand up eight."



## ***Education must cultivate a meaningful relationship with the natural environment.***

*Our youth should dwell in the land of health amid fair sights and sounds; and beauty will meet the sense like a breeze and insensibly draw the soul even in childhood into harmony with the beauty of reason. Plato*

The relationship between education and the natural environment is a fascinating one. An education which takes place in an urban setting is qualitatively different to that which takes place on a wooded mountainside. Our sense of self alters as we begin to understand that all of life and the world are connected in fundamental ways, and that our isolated, virtual islands are only illusions we create. A school campus spread across a mountain is uniquely positioned to cultivate a young person's ability to think in terms of whole ecosystems.

The influence of the environment on education extends beyond the natural setting to include all aspects of the physical space within which it occurs – from the aesthetics of buildings and spaces to the quality of light and color in a room. All of these factors play a role in shaping the “space” within which education takes place and form part of what the architectural philosopher, Christopher Alexander, has called the “architecture of the invisible.” None of this requires plush or exotic physical spaces. Beauty and attention to aesthetics is not incompatible with structures and interiors which are modest, fit for purpose, easy to maintain and in keeping with contextually and culturally appropriate norms.

The need to form meaningful relationships with the natural environment does not end with school buildings and the infrastructure of a school campus. H.G. Wells warned that we are “in a race between education and catastrophe.” The environmental challenges of the 21st century demand an approach to education which fosters awareness of sustainable paths forward, critical thinking and responsibility. Yet education is no barrier to barbarity and recklessness – after all, the designers of Auschwitz were the heirs of Kant and Goethe. None of the world's environmental problems are the work of ignorant people. The world's environmental challenges will not be solved by education – but by a certain kind of education. In a residential school this is an education which can model, with integrity, a credible and carefully considered approach to the natural environment.

In our local context, opportunities to model (rather than merely “teach”) a responsible relationship with the environment abound – all of which can be connected with an integrated approach to education – from the efficient use of energy to waste management, recycling and meaningful engagement with neighboring communities. Paolo Freire has described what he calls the “banking model” of education – this is an approach in which everything is solvable if only the right stuff is deposited in children's heads. Sadly, this has never been enough. Unless the institutions which call themselves schools model integrity and care towards the environment, young people will only learn that they are helpless to overcome the gap between ideals and reality.

Part of developing a responsible relationship with the natural environment includes listening to young people when they do ask for silence, for meditative space, for time to simply *be* in nature, without any



# Woodstock School

high-energy activity. Woodstock School encourages the creation and maintenance of beautiful, natural spaces around campus devoted to quiet reflection.

All education is environmental education for no education operates from a neutral position. Unless the education we offer models a way of interacting with the environment which is responsible, sustainable and connected, it will only ever reinforce indifference. Indifference in a global society which spends billions of dollars each year using the deceptive tools of advertising to reinforce consumerism and materialism is a very dangerous thing indeed.





***Education should encourage a healthy lifestyle to support the development of the whole person.***

*"The emancipation of our physical nature is in attaining health, of our social being in attaining goodness, and of our self in attaining love."*

**Rabindranath Tagore**

An old adage says "a healthy mind deserves a healthy body" – but a healthy lifestyle is far more than just the companion to a healthy mind! The physical body is the channel through which so many aspects of personal development are mediated and nurtured. Achieving a sense of physical harmony through balanced diet, exercise, fresh-air and healthy living is an important part of achieving balance and integration in other dimensions too.

Clear policies on smoking and alcohol and a 'zero tolerance' policy on drugs are strong reminders that damaging abuse of the physical body cannot be allowed to take place. Physical education, sports and outdoor education also play a key role in promoting health and healthy lifestyles. There are other ways, too, in which this approach can extend beyond the obvious to include subtle but profound influences on holistic wellbeing. This includes a high value placed on rest and on investing in each other's overall wellbeing. The more deliberately every aspect of a school community connects with its educational philosophy, the more compelling the vision which emerges.

For example, we should recognize that food and the services which supply and prepare it are central to the school's wellbeing. The approach to food and diet must take account of the fact that a healthy, well-balanced diet is essential to the holistic development of the individual. Seasonal variation, animal welfare, environmental integrity and the social wellbeing of all those involved in the production and supply of food should be taken account of. Where possible, foods should be whole, fresh and organically grown and obtained from local suppliers. Where palatable wholegrain and unrefined products exist, they should replace highly refined and processed alternatives. A balance should be struck between the realities of a diverse and multi-cultural community and the need to provide an on-going education in sound eating habits. Food and the act of eating must not simply be seen as fuel for the body but part of the fabric of our lives and a key component in the building of community and individual well-being. This establishes lifelong patterns of healthy eating and awareness for young people.

Healthy lifestyles extend beyond the basics of food and exercise to include spiritual, emotional and psychological wellbeing. Providing young people with a credible model from which they can live their lives to the full ought to be part of a Woodstock education. This must enable young people to experience and appreciate balance in their own lives – learning to recognize the need for rest and calm to balance periods of great effort and intensity. We must attend carefully to the wellbeing of each member of the community. In our residential school environment, this means that the entire lifestyle of the adults must model balance and a concern for developing healthy habits.

"All man's miseries," wrote the philosopher Pascal, "derive from not being able to sit quietly in a room alone." In our busy lives where the tyranny of the urgent dictates a frenzied pace, we easily lose sight of



# Woodstock School

this simple truth. Quaker schools have long recognized the great value of shared silence as central to the spiritual life of the community. Silence rinses external attractions from our attention and forces us to look inwards. It is in the silence of stillness and reflection that we open ourselves to a truth that only ever whispers to us – for only when the mind and body are stilled can the voice of God be heard. The practice of shared silence can be a powerful discipline and forms an integral part of Woodstock life. As the great Sufi poet Rumi wrote, “Only let the moving waters calm down, and the sun and moon will be reflected on the surface of your being.”