

# This Week at Central Academy

## April 6, 2010

This edition of *This Week at Central* completes our second round of focusing on how our democratic school helps students to extend their thinking. A few weeks ago, we had the opportunity to host *Deborah Meier* for a visit to Central. She not only spent time in classrooms, but also talked with students from various levels about their education and their perspectives on Central. Deborah is known for creating wonderful schools that facilitate and promote critical thinking in students. She understands our school well, and helps us to remember that while all learning is important, the ability to think critically and express our thoughts respectfully in both agreement and disagreement, is, perhaps, the most important skill we can teach our students.

A proponent of having students practice critical thinking and discourse on a regular, daily basis, she frequently looks for this in schools with whom she consults. So, as she observed and listened to students and teachers, Deborah also asked many questions. It's always exciting to watch how our students respond to thoughtful and challenging questions from visitors. Perhaps *Jacob* expressed it best when he pulled me aside later that day to quietly say, "Man, she's a handful! I mean she asks so many questions – she really makes your head jump!"

Our students of all ages thought, and responded very well throughout the day, once again demonstrating their comfort in taking part in challenging discussions.

When I met *Deborah* and some professors at Miami University that Friday after school, during another equally challenging discussion on the purpose of education in our country, *Dr. Ray Terrell, Special Assistant to the Dean for Diversity Initiatives*, used our students as an example of the importance of not sell students short in their abilities to think and react to life matters.

Last year, *Ray* had facilitated a series of discussions on education and race with groups of students representing each of their levels at Central. Once again, even some of our youngest students had "blown [him] away" with the depth of their insights and comfort in discussing an issue that some adults are uneasy with. Our students surfaced in that discussion at Miami as examples of the importance of developing student abilities to practice critical thinking, in order to better prepare and sustain our next generation of citizens.

I hope you'll take a minute to read through the various articles from teachers (K-8) in this newsletter. It gives a great picture of what and how we work mindfully in creating classrooms and a school that honors democratic principles and expands students' minds.

There is a reason that Central has been historically organized and structured to deliver education in the manner we do. And that reason has everything to do with our ability to sustain a thoughtful and caring community in Middletown. As some of our students who have come back to visit after high school have pointed out, it may also help the next generation of citizens far beyond our own community.

*Dianne*

### Central Academy's Website

Find out what's going on at Central by frequently visiting our website. The website includes:

Important Dates    Newsletters    Classroom Web pages

Pictures of Students (**You can search by student's first name, teacher name, or by level!**)

[www.middletowncityschools.com](http://www.middletowncityschools.com) (click on Central Academy)

### IMPORTANT DATES

Apr. 7	Early Release – 2:00
Apr. 14	Early Release – 2:00
Apr. 15	EP Program – 7:00 pm
Apr. 22	Skating Party – 6:30-8:30
Apr. 30	Central Sensations

# EARLY PRIMARY CLASSROOMS

The students in **Mrs. Brooks' Early Primary** class have been extending their thinking through learning how to solve problems, and not just academic problems, but social disagreements and concerns. Throughout life there are many circumstances that arise out of disagreements or miscommunication. We have seen many of these types of situations in our class this year. In a democratic school, we believe in using our voices to speak up when problems arise and talking through our issues. Believe it or not, this is happening in Early Primary!

Just the other day two students in our class had an argument that escalated quickly. This response grabbed everyone's attention and, as a class, we decided to break away from our activity for a few minutes to talk about what happened. First, we talked about the situation, and then we tried to determine what needed to be done to either solve the issue or figure out what steps should be taken to make sure this type of conflict is handled differently in the future.

As we sat down in a circle the students shared one by one how they felt. It could be about the day in general, an instance that upset them, or a concern they had for the class. Many students stated their concern for the way our class had been treating each other. *Taylor* said, "I'm sad that we are not talking kindly to our friends and it makes me feel like we are not a family." *Gavin* said that it makes him feel upset when people call him names that aren't nice. As we went around the circle everyone had something to say about how it felt to be treated unkindly.

We then went back around the circle and the students could either say something in response to someone else, for example an apology or an appreciation about someone. *Jerrel* told *Eli* that he was sorry for not being a good partner during math workshop. *Kirsten* stated that she realized she could have handled a problem she had with a person in a better way, like saying, "Could you please help me?" rather than yelling at someone to do something.

Although these conversations seem like simple things, through our voices we are learning effective ways to solve conflict within our community.

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Democratic Learning takes many shapes and forms. One way we allow students to have a voice here at Central is through our bi-monthly Celebrations of Learning. These all school assemblies allow students to share their learning with their peers, the staff, and many parents.

Recently, **Mrs. Jantausch's Early Primary** class was able to present a slide show that explained our maple syrup project to everyone. The students in our class had discovered a maple tree outside the school, and with the help of my husband, had tapped the tree for sap, and boiled down the sap to make maple syrup. The students helped to write a series of slides for a power point presentation explaining the process. They also decided the order for our photos from our adventure. Many were eager to speak in front of the school, and anyone who wanted a speaking part was given one!

The excitement of the students was unbelievable! They were thrilled to be able to share their new knowledge of trees, sap, and the syrup making process with everyone. Now that they have had a taste of this excitement, they are clamoring for more. Through this public display of their work, my students are encouraged to extend their learning and are thus eagerly looking for the next topic that they will be able to share with the whole school!

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Last week **the students in Ms. Roe's Early Primary** were fortunate enough to have *Carter's* grandmother, *Mrs. Karla Sorg*, come to visit our school. While she was at our school, she shared her musical expertise of the violin with us. Not only did the Early Primary classes enjoy her music while they ate lunch, but *Mrs. Sorg* also came to our classroom to share her knowledge of the construction and workings of her violin.

The students sat in amazement as she shared that the strings on her bow were actually from a horse's tail. *Andrew* couldn't believe it! *Mrs. Sorg* proved it to us as she loosened the strings on her bow. Wow! "It did look like a real horse's tail!" commented *Eristan*. *Mrs. Sorg* also gave us each the opportunity to touch the violin as she plucked the strings. She shared that the vibration we felt is what actually produces the sound that comes from the violin.

Seeing how intrigued the students were last week with our visitor and her instrument has made them want to know more about vibrations and sounds. For this reason, during the next two weeks, the students will have the opportunity to discover more about vibrations and sounds at the Science station during Project time through an experiment with rubber bands.

We want to thank *Mrs. Sorg* for coming and sharing her contagious excitement of music and learning with us! We look forward to another visit from her in May around the topic of Phonics!

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**Mrs. Uhl, Mr. Jarrell & Ms. Stillwell's Early Primary Class** is discovering ways to work together, stretch their thinking, and share their own learning with the class. Project Time is an opportunity during our day when the students can choose which activity they want to do as long as there is a spot available at that center. Through this, the students learn how to get along with other students and explore new things about math, science, art, writing, and reading. After each day at Project Time, we gather as a class to discuss what went well, what they learned new, if they worked with a new friend, if there was a problem and, if so, how they were able to resolve the situation.

*Noah* shared that he wanted to go to Art but it is always full. He was very excited today because he got to create his own picture using stencils at art. *Charlie* was making various shapes at art and challenging the students at blocks to recreate his designs! *Hanna* chose to expand her reading collection by picking new Just Right Books in our Book Nook! *Jordan* investigated his building skills at blocks!

In addition to Project Time, we have been deepening our thinking by doing comprehension daily through our Just Right Books. After completing a story map that included: characters, setting, problem and solution, *Gabe* was able to retell me his story! Way to go! *Eniyah, Trinity and Ahvonni* were working collaboratively on sequencing the events in their Just Right story *Paint It Purple!* *Alex* demonstrated that he was able to describe the beginning, middle and end of his story *I Bet I Can*. The students continue to display daily how they are growing as learners and participating as citizens in a community!

## **LATE PRIMARY CLASSROOMS**

In **Mrs. Andrade & Mrs. Zumbahlen's** Democratic Late Primary Room, students take responsibility for their own education and environment.

Goal work time is a perfect example of one way that students self-guide their individual learning objectives. Because every child does not come with a specific level of information about concepts, such as spelling skills, they do not all need the same instructional prescription. Therefore, there is time built

into our reader's workshop where children can practice the phonemes they are working towards mastering. This is one of the easiest ways to have children from both grades (2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup>) find commonalities. If you walked into our room during this part of our day, you would not be able to tell who is in what grade level because the work depends on the individual, not their grade level. We never wonder why this is the students' favorite part of the day.

Our class definitely takes ownership of their own environment through classroom roles and daily responsibilities. Laying the groundwork for students to learn how to run operations and care for others is extremely important. There are some jobs that are rotated weekly amongst all students so that everyone is contributing and learning how to lead others. These rotated jobs are student teacher, substitute, line leader, and recess equipment manager. All of the students have rotated through these jobs at least once this year. We are currently on our second round of rotations.

Then, there are permanent jobs that require a certain amount of self-initiative or drive seen by others. *Briley* is our time-keeper. *Aly* is our classroom librarian. *Chris J.* is our weekly temperature person. *Austin F.* is our calendar person. *Briella* is our lunch card manager. *Jocelyn & Daniel* are our projector/overhead managers. *Emily & Amalia* are our sink managers. As mentioned in our last TWAC, *Briella and Savanna* are our indoor recess managers. While none of these jobs go without appreciation, there are two extremely responsible children who make morning responsibilities go extremely smoothly. *Briley* has created a system to tell who is absent, then he works with *Rowan* to ensure that everyone has signed up for lunch. Lastly, they bring this information to their teacher who confirms their computations and enters it into the computer. If only everything could be so simple.

We all know the saying that people learn best from their experiences. If we give children these opportunities early in their educational careers, then interns and volunteers will eventually become a viable resource provided by young adults.

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In **VanBurgey's class'** last article, we talked about the social aspect of a democratic school, in which students are able to use their voice. This week we are focusing more on the curriculum and what you might see in a democratic school. If you walked in our room around 1:00 you would see some students playing synonym bingo or another student helping a peer read their sight words. You may also see a couple of children working on the computer researching a topic they are interested in. You are probably asking where the teacher is. Well, we are in a corner working individually with a student on their personal goals. Did school look like this when you were growing up? Or were you sitting in a seat doing paper and pencil work?

Yesterday as I was conferencing, I took a minute and looked around our classroom. I saw *Tiffany* practicing her fluency cards. I saw *Jacob M.* and *Tay'von* working on synonyms. I also saw *Josh* writing and correcting sentences. What I didn't see were students arguing, students yawning, or students that were not engaged. We would definitely say that student engagement and democratic schools go hand in hand! Until next time, GO CENTRAL!

## **INTERMEDIATE CLASSROOMS**

Education in a democratic school provides opportunities for students to learn about the characteristics of a democratic way of life and how such a life might be led. In **Mrs. Larison's Intermediate** classroom, students are given these opportunities in numerous ways. For example, through group activities and

during Circle, students are encouraged to openly share and discuss their ideas, regardless of the popularity of the ideas.

Engaging in democracy often involves tensions and contradictions. *Elijah, Nadia, and Josh* recently shared their strategy for finding the volume of rectangular prisms. Each strategy was different. Some of the other students in the classroom voiced their favoritism for one of these strategies over the others and respectfully argued their viewpoint. At the same time, they also acknowledged the right of other students to use a strategy of their choice.

Democracy is also about concern for the welfare of others and the common good. We strive to keep our classroom clean and organized so that materials are readily available and in the proper working condition for everyone to use when needed. While some students complain about having to clean up after others, *Megan and Taliyah* can often be counted on to give an extra effort in straightening up the room at the end of the day, even if they were not the cause of the disorganization. In a democracy, people often do things that do not directly impact them; however, they do them anyway because they understand that a direct benefit to others often returns to them in an indirect manner, which strengthens the democratic society as a whole.

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As we spoke about in our last article, there are special characteristics of democratic education. In addition to students taking responsibility for their own education, students are also able to research topics they are passionate about and to educate others and share their new knowledge. In **Muenchenburgey Land**, we recently brainstormed new topics that students would like to research under our new theme, *Shaping Our World*. As always, we were amazed at the ideas that 9-, 10-, and 11-year olds generated!

*Janis* had an idea that came from a conversation she had with her mother about children eating healthy and the impact fast food has on children's health. She immediately connected this idea to our theme because fast food plays a role in shaping the people in our world. She is not only researching the effects of fast food, but she is also looking into what responsibilities fast food restaurants have to help people stay healthy.

*Tonya and Nya* took a different route with this new theme. With all the news about Haiti and the earthquake, they want to find out more about the impact the earthquake had on the people that live there and what is being done to help them. They recognize that this earthquake had a dramatic impact on how Haiti is shaped and are interested in learning more about earthquakes in general and how they impact our world.

Another group of students are also interested in the devastation in Haiti and wanted to find a way they could help. The ideas they developed were to create and sell paper footballs, bookmark kits, hand-made pillows, and sell raffle tickets for prize baskets. The students were responsible for splitting up the work amongst each other, advertising, creating a schedule for selling, and contacting the local Red Cross to arrange the delivery of the money they raised through their fundraisers. They are discovering that even as children, they can make a difference in our world!

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There are many ways that the democratic way extends student thinking in **Ms. Thinnies' Intermediate Classroom**. During our daily class meeting, there are many ways that the all students share their individual voices. Two or three students are facilitators of the student-selected topics for discussion. This week *Noasia* and *Amirah* assisted in facilitating the class meetings. Also, the facilitators are able to choose seven Task Enforcers that have exhibited positive attitudes and that have made appropriate choices

that day. The job of the Task Enforcer is to keep all students aware of and respecting our classroom norms on our Social Contract. Task Enforcers redirect students that are not respecting our norms. Students who have been asked twice to respect these norms are asked to go back to their seats for two minutes as a timeout to think about their choices.

All students are given the opportunity to share their opinions and views on a centralized topic. There is a rotation of teams that are permitted to bring the object that is passed around the circle, in order to be equitable. Students then call on other members to have a voice by saying, “next”. If someone has a connection to what the speaker has to say, they hold up a thumb prior to being called upon. Any other topics that students would like to share for future class meetings are placed on a parking lot poster. So, all students in **Ms. Thinner’s Intermediate Class** extend their thinking through democratic ways by making connections, asking probing questions, and holding each other accountable on a daily basis in our class meeting.

## **MIDDLE SCHOOL CLASSROOMS**

At Central eighth graders complete an internship as part of their graduation. They must complete at least twelve hours of service learning volunteer hours at a community agency, where they do work that an adult would normally do. Service learning joins service to the community with school curriculum. It is a hands-on approach to applying school curriculum while developing civic responsibility. The internship provides an environment for learning by creating an opportunity for students to explain what they can do and know. An extremely important feature of service learning is providing them with time where they can reflect on the internship experience. The time for reflection helps the eighth graders make a connection with what they have been learning in school and larger community outside the school. This helps students to better understand the extent to which they can impact positive change.

At Central, our eighth graders have a voice in where they do their internship. They determine how the internships are identified and accomplished; this creates an interest and excitement for learning. The eighth graders learn about their role in the community. Service learning encourages lifelong civic participation. The experiences help improve workplace skills and enhanced personal development. Service learning gives them a sense of competency; seeing themselves as contributors to their learning experiences rather than submissive recipients of adult decisions

In **Mrs. Hodson’s** Humanities class, *Jacob* did his internship at Spring Hill Assisted Living. Working with the activities director, he helped create activities that helped improve mental, physical and social well-being with the residents. *Jacob* enjoyed the work that he did with the facility. He was surprised by how much it meant to both the residents and himself to just play pool together. When *Jacob* talks about his experience, you cannot help but notice the sense of pride he has in what he has accomplished.

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As Central Academy is a democratic school, many opportunities arise to extend student thinking. Our students are involved in projects and activities that encourage higher level thinking. **Kristi Joseph’s** Humanities class is studying the colonial period, and the class has analyzed many primary source items from multiple perspectives. The students are in the process of creating their own colony and its corresponding charter. In addition the students are responsible for mapping and recording their journey to the new world.

These activities allow the students to internalize and apply their learning in a meaningful manner. *Caleb C, Sam and Mark* created a thorough charter for their colony. *Angel S, Allana and Sandra* worked to

make their charter look like an historic document. *Grant, Ethan* and *Jonathon* created a map of their journey, and are trying techniques to make their map appear to be an antique.

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The students in **Mrs. Smith's** science classes have the perfect opportunity to use their democratic voice to extend their learning. Developing a sense of scientific knowledge while finding leadership opportunities is exactly what we have been working on this trimester. We have tables arranged in which there are different jobs from quality control to table leader. Currently the afternoon leaders are Emily, Samantha, Jacob S., Braden, Julia, Grant, Kayla and Mark. The AM leaders are Bailey, Austin, Kaleb, Izzi, Cole, Asia and Davey.

The major responsibility of the table leader is to ensure that everyone at the table has input during the labs and especially when formulating answers to the analysis questions. They are also responsible to make sure there is a general understanding of the challenge question and to encourage everyone to participate.

We have also had resident scientists conduct experiments for the class as a demonstration lab. These scientists were Julia, Mark, Cole and Bailey. Science is the time when some of our students really shine. They think critically and really examine science in relation to their world. We are moving into force and motion for the remainder of the school year. We have a great project to end our year. Expect to hear about this after we complete our OAA testing.

## **Other Places and Voices Around Central**

**Mrs. Carroll** gets the chance to work in multiple rooms at many different levels throughout the school community. I have had the opportunity to be with many of the middle school students from intermediate all the way through their eighth grade year and see each of them grow up academically as they each mature into bright young leaders able to express each of their voices in our middle school.

A few weeks ago Deborah Meier visited our school and classrooms, toured our building, and ate lunch with a group of middle school students. During my lunch I joined the group and listened to some of their conversation. I enjoyed seeing students talk who are often quiet in class. *Dylan* and *Regan* had a difficult time not talking when the topic of video games was discussed. Students had the opportunity to debate their favorite and not so favorite subjects.

Most of the larger group agreed that they didn't like social studies. When they were asked why, *Lexi* and *Jacob* were able to talk about a historical figure who was looked at favorably in most history books, however they found that he was not such a nice person after researching him for themselves. They were able to argue their cases using facts that they had discovered, showing how students at Central are able to extend their thinking and form opinions based on what they are learning during their years in a democratic school and in their humanities classes.

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In **Mr. Perdue's** advisory I have seen how students are trying to learn in a democratic way. In my advisory the students listen to each other's point of view and are kind to one another. A couple of weeks ago we had a discussion about a daylong trip that our advisory would like to take. *Leah* suggested we make a list. So *DeAnna* got up to the white board and we made a list of schools that we might wish to go too. *Lillie* suggested that we tell **Mr. Perdue** our top two choices and that we would see what school received the most votes. We did this, and the students were all supportive in the final outcome.

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From the desk of **Mrs. LeForce, secretary**, I wanted to share some exciting news about our Boys Basketball Team.

Our Middle School Sixth Grade Boys won the entire 5th-6th grade Boys Basketball League. It was a close game (23-21) with Rosa Parks, but *Luke, Jonathon, Brennen D., Cameron, Tyler F. and Jalan* pulled it off.

Our Intermediate Team really played their best game ever. They lost the first round of the tournament with a close game of 14-16.

The Junior Winter Guard team that some of our middle school girls (*Bailey, Hannah, Kashley, Paige, Leah and Samantha*) are on also placed second in the championship competition.

Thanks, also, to our Central girls (*Paige P., Katie P., Kylie, Ahriana, Nya, Eboney, and Madison D., Keiara*) who played basketball in the Skeeter Payne Basketball League on different teams throughout the district.

We are so very proud of all of our boys and girls and their coaches and assistant coaches!