



# Whole Child School 2009 Parent Handbook

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# WCS HANDBOOK

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# 1. Welcome to Whole Child School!

On behalf of the Whole Child School (WCS) Advisory Board, Organizing Committee, and Curriculum Team we would like to warmly welcome you to WCS. We have been working on this initiative for three years and we are very excited that our vision is now a reality. It has been a piece of work to get this school off the ground! Truly a labour of love for our children, for the environment, for society and for educational transformation.

It all started in Withrow Park at a harvest festival in 2006 when Deborah and Robyn (two of the founding members) were discussing how to transform Withrow Park to make it more like Dufferin Grove Park. Deborah commented: “Let’s try to get a holistic school in the East End and then transform the park! I dare you to walk up to [City Councilor] Paula Fletcher and ask for a holistic school.” Robyn did just that. Paula made a promise that day, and in the end she managed to keep her promise to us; however, she could not possibly have prepared us for the journey we would have to take to make that school a reality.

Ever since that fateful day it has been a whirlwind of activity and an enormous amount of hard work to get to this point. What kept us going was the constant flow of e-mails in support of our initiative. We knew we had enough students and that there was enough demand for a holistic school. However, we could have never imagined the huge response that we received on the February 5th Information Night when more than 500 people turned out, leading to more than 320 student applications for Whole Child School. With much regret, we had to turn away 160 applicants.

Now, today, we are extremely aware that the hard work has not ended as we move into our first year of operation as an official Toronto District School Board (TDSB) alternative public school. Our hope is that the families who now join us on this journey have the high level of commitment and drive essential to making Whole Child School a success. There is a tremendous amount of work and vision that will be required to transform the indoor and outdoor spaces of the school into a holistic teaching and learning environment. Our curriculum team, comprised of seven experienced holistic educators, will continue to develop a detailed and exciting curriculum for the grades being offered in September 2009. And, there will be so many additional opportunities to get closely involved in realizing the vision of WCS and making a positive impact on the educational journey that our children and each of us are about to embark on.

We welcome each and every one of you with open arms!

## 2. The Holistic Curriculum

### Introduction

The challenge of an alternative school is to establish an underlying approach/philosophy that will stand the test of time. We have worked hard with the WCS Advisory Board and Curriculum Team to develop a strong philosophical foundation for our school. We have adopted the **holistic framework** that Dr. John P. Miller, a professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, and a pioneer in the field of holistic education, developed in his book *The Holistic Curriculum* (2007). This book provides an excellent theoretical overview of the philosophical underpinnings of our school, and will be used to train teachers and inform parents about our holistic approach and philosophy.

We have also identified **seven key teaching and learning strategies** that teachers will use on a daily and weekly basis. Our teachers **must** be trained in these seven teaching and learning strategies to teach in our school. These strategies provide the foundation for how the classroom will be run.

Finally, we have provided a **teaching and learning continuum**, central to our approach. This continuum is based on the Ontario Curriculum, and we have identified when key concepts are taught in each subject area. This approach is based on a morning lesson unit model. For each grade we have identified eight to ten integrated morning lesson units aimed at teaching key concepts in each subject. Prior to teaching the concept in the classroom, the teacher will ensure students have ample experience with the concepts through play, discovery and exploration. The actual lesson unit comes at the end of a lot of hands-on experience, and is aimed at helping students make the connection between the abstract concept and their own hands-on experience. The final step on this teaching and learning continuum is applying new knowledge in a real-life, authentic learning situation.

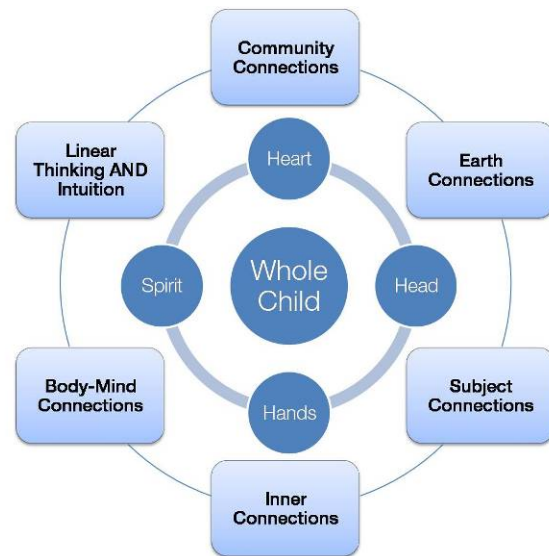
The integration of these three elements of our holistic curriculum: **the Holistic Framework, the key Teaching and Learning Strategies, and the Teaching and Learning Continuum** provides a strong foundation for our holistic approach. In the spring of 2009 we will be publishing a grade-by-grade teacher's guide. This guide will provide sample lesson plans and ideas for teaching in a holistic classroom.

### The WCS Holistic Framework

The goal of WCS is to create a teaching and learning framework that inspires, educates and delivers a complete, holistic environment for children and teachers to thrive and grow. To truly educate a child, not only must the mind be engaged, but also the heart and the will. The WCS mission is to foster the development of healthy, responsible and

creative human beings who realize the fullness of their potential.

Drawing from *The Holistic Curriculum*, the K-8 curriculum for WCS will be designed to engage not just the intellect (the head), but also the heart, hands and spirit of each child. It is a curriculum that makes connections: community, earth, soul, subject, and mind-and-body connections, while also striving to restore a balance between analysis and intuition. The diagram shown here illustrates the holistic framework for Whole Child School with the “whole child” placed at the centre.



## WCS Teaching and Learning Strategies

In order to educate the whole child, we believe it is necessary to recognize that:

- learning occurs on many levels – physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual
- learning occurs in many ways – effort, play and wonder are all critical to the process of learning
- learning is inspiring and engaging when the arts are integrated throughout the curriculum
- learning is brought to life by active participation in hands-on learning experiences
- learning is more meaningful when it is related to real-life contexts
- learning is facilitated in safe, nurturing, positive and respectful learning environments

Therefore, WCS has adopted seven key teaching strategies that will bring the holistic approach to each of our classrooms:

### *1. Narrative-based*

Stories that are told orally (not read from a book) naturally capture children’s imaginations and bring new concepts to life. Myths, legends and folktales from around the world will be shared throughout the grades. Stories will become a vital tool used across many different subject areas and students, themselves, will eventually learn the art of storytelling.

### *2. Arts-based*

The arts engage children in the learning process through their hands and hearts. The arts will be taught on their own, as independent subjects and will be used to help to integrate

subjects with each other (for example: painting plants for science and clapping rhythms to learn math).

### *3. Experience-based*

Children learn through experience and exploration. For example, in the primary years some Science and Math curricula will be taught outdoors, while in the higher grades students may learn abstract concepts through real-life, learning activities.

### *4. Inquiry-based*

An inquiry-based approach is one of the ways that teachers develop students' intuition. Teachers will provide activities that facilitate exploration in the playground, in nature and in the classroom. Students direct the exploration - making discoveries and predictions as the teacher encourages with open-ended questions.

### *5. Cooperative-based Learning*

The inquiry and problem-based model lends itself to children working collaboratively in groups. The Kindergarten exploration program will help to lay a foundation for the students to work cooperatively – a skill set that children will continue to build throughout their years of education.

### *6. Project-based Learning*

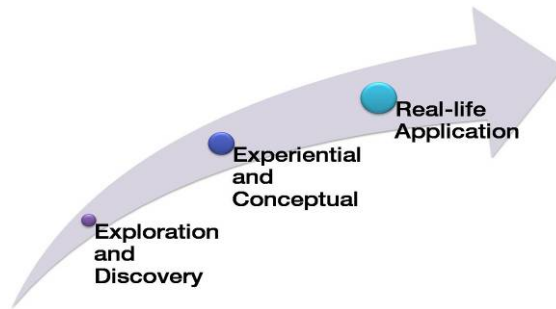
Projects help to bring together a number of concepts and skills into an authentic learning activity. Small-scale, project-based learning begins in Kindergarten, and through the grades children will increasingly take on projects of greater scale.

### *7. Student-led vs Teacher-led Learning*

WCS will aim to strike a balance between student-led and teacher-led activities. However, when students are learning new concepts and techniques in math, science, language, drawing, music and French it will be important for teachers to lead activities.

## **WCS Teaching and Learning Continuum**

Prior to introducing more complex concepts in the classroom, WCS students will have ample experience with these concepts through intuitive play, discovery and exploration. The actual lesson unit will follow a significant amount of hands-on activity and will be aimed at helping students make a connection between the abstract concept and their own personal experience. The final step on this teaching and learning continuum will be the application of their knowledge in a real-life, authentic learning situation.



### *Exploration and Discovery*

Play-based exploration and discovery centres in math, science and earth sciences will be set-up by the teacher, particularly in Kindergarten and primary grades. The teacher plays the role of teacher/facilitator, guiding the children in their learning and discoveries. These explorations will lay the foundation for future conceptual learning.



### *Experiential and Conceptual*

Throughout the year, students will be introduced to new concepts during a 3-4 week morning lesson unit. The morning lesson is structured as a 1.5 hour lesson at the beginning of the day. A variety of the teaching strategies described previously will be applied during these morning lessons.



### *Real-Life Application*

Project lesson units will bring together a number of subjects and concepts in the form of a project designed to create real-life learning activities. The length and scheduling of the project will depend on the type and format of a project. Some projects may span the entire year, and will be designed to encourage ‘authentic learning’ that will bring each student to a point of personal comprehension of the subject matter – closing the loop, so to speak, on the learning continuum.

### 3. Community Building

#### School-wide, Community-Building Program

Fostering a sense of community is a cornerstone of WCS. Children and their families will experience and contribute to a sense of community in the school through activities in the classroom, organized community events, earth-based festivals throughout the year, and volunteerism. Relationships are valued and strengthened in the interest of developing a safe, supportive learning environment that values diversity and that helps students excel.

The teachers at WCS will take the time to build a cohesive and collaborative classroom community. WCS has adopted a school-wide, community-building program that provides classroom routines and rituals and a common language for conflict resolution - all designed to build community throughout the entire school. Specifically, this will include elements like regular classroom meetings, cooperative/collaborative learning activities, and common practices for relating respectfully to one another.

Other community-building practices WCS may employ include teacher looping and a peer mediation and leadership program. Teacher looping occurs when a teacher stays with the same group of children for up to three years. This approach helps to build a strong sense of community and feeling of safety in the classroom. When students stay with the same teacher for an extended period of time, the teacher and the students develop strong bonds and feel very comfortable with one another. Younger children can learn a lot about social relationships from older children. The leadership and peer mediation training program will be offered to older students to prepare them to take on leadership roles in the school community and to build a positive community in the playground.

#### Multi-age, School-wide programs

Throughout the year the school will provide many opportunities for children of different ages to interact. Children often have a very different learning experience when they learn in multi-age groupings. One program that will be put in place is the **Thursday handwork-and-craft studio**. Students will choose from a range of handwork or craft activities that will span a couple of months before the student chooses another activity. Parents will be asked to help run this school-wide program.

Another multi-age program at WCS is our **reading and math buddy program** which will pair intermediate and junior grades with the primary grades for specific activities. For example, through the math-buddy program, primary students may play math games with older students. Classes rotate between math and reading buddies.

The school also has three, **school-wide play days** (1/2 day) in the year: a beginning of the year play day, winter play day and a summer end-of-year play day. The older children and parent volunteers will help to run these play days which provide all students with the

opportunity to play together and have fun in an informal environment.

Finally, each year the school will choose a school-wide **environmental action project** in our local community. Some examples of this may be caring for and cleaning up our local ravine, or planting native species and trees in the local community. The goal is for the students to have hands-on experience working towards improving the environment.

## **Festivals at WCS**

As part of our environmental and community building programs, the school will come together to celebrate festivals based on the agricultural calendar. Some examples of the festivals that we will celebrate are: the Fall Harvest and Spring Planting, the Winter and Summer Solstices and Equinoxes. These festivals will be infused with music, rituals and ceremony that honours the earth and the changing seasons. We welcome parent participation in these events.

Other festivals will include a Journée Française each term when the children perform poems, songs and short plays in French. Class plays, family potluck dinners and coffee houses will provide the community with other opportunities to come together and celebrate.

## **Family Camping Trips**

The school will organize two family camping trips per year: one weekend in June and one weekend in September. This will provide families with a chance to get out of the city and to get to know one another in a natural setting. The children love being out in the woods with their classmates. These trips are a lot of fun for everyone in the school!

## **Class Field Trips**

Starting in grade 5, students will have the opportunity to participate in class overnight trips to some of the outdoor education centres outside of Toronto. At the beginning and end of each school year the class teacher and class parents will come together to discuss potential class trips for the year. A committee will be struck for each class to help organize both field trips and overnight trips. Overnight trips provide an excellent opportunity for the students to bond and enjoy outdoor learning experiences.

## **Electronic & Media Literacy**

At WCS we understand that parents may be concerned about potential long-term effects of exposure to electronic media, and confused about conflicting messaging surrounding these technologies: Some experts believe video games can stimulate the brain in positive ways - increasing intelligence and adaptability, increasing efficiency, stimulating creativity and honing transferable skills, teaching perseverance and delayed gratification as complex problems are solved over weeks, providing social interactions and

opportunities to collaboratively solve challenges, reducing stress and alleviating symptoms of ADHD. Other experts warn the brain can become habituated to the “jolts per minute” of fast-paced games or edited programming, inhibiting learning and creating restlessness in the classroom. Some studies indicate violent media and toys may lead to aggression, desensitization to violence or increased fear. And, for some, electronic media may become addictive and contribute to a sedentary lifestyle.

As such, in addition to providing media literacy as part of the WCS curriculum, we believe the WCS community would be well-served by developing suggested guidelines for parents who would like their family’s media exposure to complement the curriculum and maximize their child’s ability to fully engage in a holistic education. This will be developed, refined and elaborated upon in future versions of this Handbook.

In addition, we will also create an online resource centre and forum where our community can share information and ideas around electronic media – both mitigating the potential risks, as well as capitalizing on positive opportunities. It is envisioned that this space will foster a supportive, respectful environment where parents and teachers will be able to develop a framework within which the WCS community can encourage each other to find solutions to the challenges electronic media exposure can bring to teaching and parenting.

## **4. Outdoor Environmental Education Program**

### **Outdoor Clothing**

Students will be spending a lot of time learning outdoors in all seasons. To support our outdoor environmental education program, each student will be asked to maintain a complete set of extra outdoor clothing at school. At all times the children must be prepared to go outside. A change of clothing will enable the children to be comfortable to explore, enjoy and thrive in the outdoor setting where rich learning will take place.

### **Primary Guided Nature Hikes**

The primary classes will come together each week for a guided nature hike to the Leslie Spit or other local natural areas. Curriculum expectations in science and math will be taught during these nature hikes, each week there will be a math or science focus that will be taught through stories, observation and exploration activities. During these hikes, the students will hear stories about nature while teachers encourage them to explore, wonder and develop a connection with the natural world around them.

### **Farming and Gardening Program**

The primary classes will embark upon field trips to organic farms and our community garden. During harvest times, the primary grades will host a school-wide Stone Soup Day and provide the soup to a community kitchen. WCS will strive to develop unique opportunities in a variety of ways to further children's learning experiences. These may include learning experiences in urban farming, community gardening and habitat creation, such as a butterfly garden.

### **Composting Program**

Digging deep into dirt and soil will also be a theme at WCS. Students will get their hands and clothes dirty at our school. The primary grades will help to run a school-wide composting and vermi-culture program. By grade 3 students will demonstrate their knowledge of soil when they run the Spring Garden Market. They will be able to describe in detail different types of soil and plant growth as part of their study of plant growth and soil science.

### **Environmental Education Projects**

As students gain experience and knowledge, there will be opportunities to create and participate in environmental education projects consistent with the Ontario curriculum guidelines. These projects may span a lesson unit, a semester or an entire year. Key topics explored in the environmental science curriculum include habitats, biodiversity, water and energy.

Exploration of these topics will be done in a manner that strives to encourage student inquiry and understanding of multiple perspectives around these topics. Students and teachers will work together investigating issues, completing case studies and field trips to enrich their understanding of environmental issues. Students will be empowered to create projects, such as a sustainable business or an environmental action project they are passionate about in their culminating years at WCS. With parental involvement, there should be numerous opportunities to create and participate in a variety of clubs with environmental themes.

## **Eco-schools**

The TDSB has launched a program to support all schools in their quest to become Eco-Schools. This is a labour-intensive challenge that will require initiative and cooperation from parents, students, teachers and staff. Schools must reapply each year to gain Eco-School status. One tangible example of an eco-school initiative is to implement a litter-less lunch program. With participation from parents, WCS aims to become a certified Eco-School.

## **Outdoor Kindergarten Exploration Program**

The Kindergarten Exploration Program will be set primarily outdoors with a play area designed for children to explore and discover nature. Teachers will establish learning centres each day that facilitate exploration and discovery. For example, a spot for sand and water contains large shovels, watering cans, tubes, trucks, pails, stumps and sticks where students can mix, pour, design, create, play and build with these materials. Teachers will ask questions to facilitate discussion and encourage exploration. A space (indoors and/or outdoors) will be created for the children to have a break from the elements and to bring the children together for music, storytelling, circle times and sharing circles.

Connections to the earth will be fostered through (1) gardening, (2) weekly nature walks, and (3) visits to our partner organic farm. Each day is a new journey for the children, and will be documented with dried plants, art, photos, drawings, paintings, writing, stories and mixed media art pieces. At the end of each year, Kindergarten classes host a Kindergarten Discovery Walk that showcases the Kindergarten journey and celebrates the graduation of the Senior Kindergarten children.

Each day, students will also participate in circle times with music, storytelling, poetry, French, and shared reading. Other activities will include gym, music and library time, depending on the year's schedule.

## 5. Subjects at WCS

### Math and Science

At WCS, math and science are taught along the WCS Teaching and Learning Continuum described previously. Key concepts have been identified, grade-by-grade, in both math and science. The first step in teaching a new concept will involve student exploration and discovery where the teacher will act as a facilitator/guide, with the goal of helping students discover the concepts on their own.

One example of this approach (from Reggio Emilia – a system already adopted by a number of TDSB Kindergarten classrooms) may involve a group of students who want to build a table for the school. They ask a carpenter to build a table for them and he informs them that they must first provide him with the measurements. The children go through a process of figuring out how to measure the table, discovering their own methods and approaches to solve the problem. As part of their exploration, the children may draw the table, write about the table, measure the table with their shoes, etc. They are given the freedom to inquire and discover the concept of measurement independently through their own learning style while also working together to share and discuss ideas.

The next step in the teaching and learning process is bringing the concept to consciousness through a 3-4 week morning lesson unit. This step corresponds to the Ontario Curriculum requirements. For example, in grade 2, students learn the concept of place value and working with 2-digit numbers. For a 3-4 week time period the students work on the concept of place value every morning. Imaginative stories help to bring this concept to life. The students may work with hands-on math manipulatives, draw pictures, write stories, act-out the story, etc. And, as the students start to understand the concept, they begin working with the numbers. Some students will make the connection to the concept based on their prior knowledge and experiences, while others might need more time to explore and discover the concept. The teacher will observe and document each child's progress along the teaching and learning continuum.

The final step on the teaching and learning continuum is real-life application of a math or science concept. This last step will likely be part of a large-scale project that brings together a number of math and science concepts. For example, the grade 3 **garden market** is a real-life application of the students' knowledge of plant and plant growth, soils, adding and subtracting, money, and measurement. Through the garden market the grade 3 students will be able to apply their knowledge by growing and selling plants to the parent community.

### Language Arts

At WCS language arts will primarily be taught through oral language learning in the Kindergarten classroom. Stories, poems, finger-plays and songs engage students in oral

language learning. The students will be gradually introduced to the alphabet through stories and explore letters and sounds through hands-on activities. The process of learning the letters and sounds will be introduced to the children through discovery and exploration similar to the math and science approach. When a child demonstrates a readiness to start reading, the child will be provided with simple-leveled readers. Children will be encouraged to engage in pre-writing activities such as writing notes, drawing, and form drawing.

WCS will follow the TDSB balanced literacy approach to teaching reading and writing. This is an extremely well-researched and effective approach that is outlined in the Ontario Curriculum documents. WCS will also follow the reading test schedules outlined by TDSB. Students will be tested twice per year to determine individual reading levels.

## **French as a Second Language**

Officially, our French program will start in grade 4, when students have four lessons of French per week. However, at WCS, our goal is to foster a bilingual learning environment starting in Kindergarten. In the primary years, French will be introduced through songs, poems and drama. WCS will use the AIM gestural approach to language learning, which provides a series of short plays with gestures, songs and poems. Please visit their website at [www.aimlanguagelearning.com](http://www.aimlanguagelearning.com) for more details on this approach. In grade 2 the students will start to learn reading and writing in French.

In junior and intermediate years, students will have lessons in French four times per week. The students will continue to learn French through music, drama and poetry. However, the focus is on building oral communication and literacy skills in French through real-life, authentic learning situations. This program will be taught through skits, simulation drama and role-play. For example, students may choose to create a drama about “Going on a Vacation.” The goal will be to help students to feel comfortable communicating in French in real-life situations. The literacy component will be taught in the context of these simulation dramas with the support of French grammar texts and read-alouds.

Students in these grades will be responsible for organizing the **Journée Française**. On this day, the older grades open their doors and provide an authentic French learning experience for the school. The upper grades may take the school on a vacation to the beach in the dead of winter or to a local French café. On these days, the primary students will have the opportunity to present their learning in French as well.

WCS is in the process of developing a three-month **Intensive French Experience** for junior and intermediate students. This program will likely be offered once every two years. All lessons are conducted in French for half the day. The culminating activity for this program will be a **trip to a French-speaking destination**.

## Music

Music is a way of life at WCS. Opening activities in class, school celebrations and trans-disciplinary lesson themes all have a musical component. We believe music touches people at deep levels and helps to create a feeling of community.

Music will also be taught as a subject following the TDSB and Ontario Curriculum approach. This curriculum offers an excellent, well-rounded music education for children. In addition, the TDSB has excellent professional development and support systems for teaching music in the classroom and the school. The Orff method of music instruction will be followed, and students will learn to play recorders at the primary level. In the upper grades, instrumental music will be offered as an enrichment program for students.

The school will gradually build a **children's choir** which will become a cornerstone of our community-building program and will be an important part of our school festivals.

## Visual Arts

Visual arts are also a way of life at WCS. In Kindergarten, the visual arts are honoured as a vehicle for children to express their understanding and discoveries about learning in their indoor and outdoor classrooms. Students are provided with a range of art supplies: wire, clay, recyclables, beeswax, tempera paint, watercolour paint, different types of paper, in addition to the treasures that the children find in nature.

Visual arts help to document the Kindergarten journey through our Kindergarten Exploration program. In grade school, expression through mixed-media exploration will be part of our lesson themes and is a way to express learning. Students develop Visual Arts and Visual Literacy skills as tools to express their ideas, along with their writing and speaking skills. Students are encouraged to brainstorm their ideas, express their inquiry into all curriculum subjects and to express their knowledge using their visual arts abilities.

Visual Arts are also directly taught as a subject where students will learn skills of drawing, painting, sculpture, printmaking, handicrafts, as well as art history and art theory. For some of our Visual Arts program WCS is inspired by the Waldorf approach to teaching art and handwork in the classroom. This approach is comprehensive and students graduate with excellent artistic skills. Some elements from the Waldorf approach include: form drawing, beeswax crayons, watercolour painting, pencil crayons, sculpture and woodwork.

At WCS, students are encouraged to see themselves as artists and to think creatively in all of their subjects. In Kindergarten, children are given tools from nature to develop their motor skills and enjoy creating art through play. In the primary years, children will be

encouraged to explore many forms of art, and practice expressing their ideas and feelings visually. By the junior grades, students will develop proficiency with certain artistic mediums, and develop confidence expressing themselves in visual ways.

## **Drama**

You might have already guessed that drama is also a way of life at WCS. Starting in Kindergarten the children will have numerous opportunities to re-enact the stories they have heard through play and drama activities. Through the primary and junior years, French will be taught through drama.

Moreover, drama will continue to be integrated into all areas of the curriculum, deepening the connection the students have with what they are studying. For example, history comes alive through drama as the students step into the shoes and situation of another person in another time. Conflict resolution skills and character development can be taught and experienced more vibrantly through role play. Ancestor days provide students with an opportunity to explore their own roots and have a better understanding of the diverse city we live in.

Oral storytelling by the teacher engages the class and enlivens the curriculum, whether personifying the parts of speech into characters or talking about the four math gnomes—Plus, Minus, Times and Divide—who live in the forest. Oral storytelling by the students empowers them and develops their oral language skills and self-confidence.

More specialized language-through-drama units will occur in the higher grades, such as the Grade 5 students immersing themselves in the study of a Shakespeare play, or the Grade 7 students producing and performing their own class play. All children across the school will have the opportunity to participate in an inclusive school play, which will help to build community and connection between the grade levels.

## **Social Studies and Social Justice**

The social studies offer exciting opportunities for learning and integrating a number of subjects. Topics from the Ontario Curriculum can be brought to life through holistic education, while critical and discovery-based approaches will enliven the learning process.

Students will study and understand culture, history and current world issues as they play roles, sing and create with their hands, giving them the opportunity to experience and understand strong emotions like exhilaration, injustice and respect. In some cases, students will experience deep empathy and soulful connections. Students will naturally find inspiration through their studies, and will be supported as they find their own voice and perspective on the issues that concern them.

WCS will incorporate several methods and teaching styles into our approach. Aboriginal

stories will be used in several subject areas as they represent the original stories of Canada and effectively teach about life, personal interactions, and the environment. Studies of Aboriginal cultures are found throughout the Ontario curriculum and provide a wealth of wonderful earth-based practices and celebrations to draw from, as well as holistic teachings and methods like the Medicine Wheel and talking circles.

## **Examples from the Curriculum**

### *The Medieval World*

Students will engage in studying the Medieval World. They will begin with stories that engage their imagination and proceed with turning their classroom into a Medieval village. Each day, students will be given problems to work on collaboratively like: gardening challenges involving math and graphing populations, map-work, problem solving with trade, leadership, and gender and class rights (i.e. issues centred on who should receive schooling). Students will extend their learning by viewing and making art and crafts from the time period, analyzing artifacts, reading novels, and writing stories, songs and poetry. Finally, they may plan a celebration with food and the arts for the community.

### *Canadian Government and Citizenship*

In grade 5, students will learn about Canadian government and citizenship including the immigration process. Our students will work on an Immigration Documentary project. Students will research the immigration process on the website of the Government of Canada. They will relate to a person who has immigrated to Canada, and conduct an informed interview with them. They will learn first-hand about the struggle to gain citizenship, and why people choose Canada over the circumstances in their homelands. Students will work with maps and statistics, and pursue further research relating to social issues around the world. As well, they will create a multimedia biographical piece to share the experience. To culminate this unit, students will create a feast and documentary festival in order to share the immigration stories they have studied and captured.

### *Aboriginal peoples and the European explorers*

The Grade 6 students study Aboriginal peoples and the European explorers. They will study the diverse cultures in Canada through artwork, structures and legends. For example, we will use a Creative Visualization method to bring to life the ancient Haida story of creation, as students hear and imagine the scene of the first humans being released from a giant clam by Raven, the Trickster. Students will look at evidence and primary sources, and learn to draw conclusions of their own through critical inquiry.

The students will compare and contrast the Aboriginal holistic world view with the Christian, Enlightenment world view of the European explorers. They will study a variety of sources and look critically at how these values played a role in the relationships at first contact, and how these relationships have evolved.

Students will be asked to consider Canadian policies such as residential schools. Aboriginal perspectives will be discovered through a variety of sources, such as artwork and novels that tell the original unwritten stories. Talking circles and debates will provide possibilities for working with students' feelings and creative ideas about these controversial subjects.

There is a significant opportunity for working with social justice issues right here at home. Students will discover bias and stereotypes in our media, past and present, and connect with the struggles of other cultures through art and song.

Grade 6 students will plant a three sisters garden of corn, beans and squash and connect to the Haudensaunee culture. The story of Hiawatha and the Great Peace will appear in Government studies (and the synchronicity of our school finding a home on Hiawatha is not lost on us). Students will also learn of sacred medicines and grow them for drying and tinctures.

We are excited about students learning from many cultures and creating a year end rite of passage ceremony connected to the health curriculum and adolescence.

## 6. Student Progress and Assessment Practices

WCS aims to take the focus away from grades and place more emphasis on skills development and individual progress and strengths. WCS feels that this approach honours the whole child. We will redirect the creative energy tied up in student concerns of comparison, status, and rank back into their process of inquiring into the world and developing a natural love of learning.

### Assessment Focus

At WCS, the primary assessment focus for students, teachers and parents is **formative**. The emphasis will be on respectful tracking of each student's progress in terms of his or her own learning process. The purpose of assessment is to track each child's progress by comparing their starting points to where they end up in terms of learning. When goals are not met, a conversation exploring the obstacles faced and the lessons learned will be held between parent, teacher and student as required.

As part of the formative assessment, teachers will be sensitive to different **modes of expression**. Some children excel in forms of expression that fall outside the conventional educational modes of writing and speaking. WCS accepts that a child's strength in creative expression may come through visual artwork, dramatized play, song or dance. We use a variety of assessment and evaluation tools, including projects, oral presentations, peer conferences, observation and documentation, portfolios, and mini-quizzes.

A secondary focus on **summative** assessment is used to provide compliance with Ontario Ministry of Education guidelines. This is conducted in accordance with the Ontario standardized "learning outcomes" and skills development. The assessment criteria and benchmarks (standards of performance) established by the Ontario Ministry of Education will be followed.

### Assessment Process

Setting learning goals and objectives is a first step in the assessment process. This step is more teacher-led in the lower grades and more student-led in the upper grades. Goals are established in a number of different areas, including cognitive, affective, physiological and behavioural. As the students progress through the grades, they will begin to learn the skill of discussing and assessing their own work. Student school-work accumulates in a "learning portfolio" that grows over the course of the year. Regular documentation in the student portfolio will play a key role in the assessment process (for both students and teachers).

## 7. Special Needs at Whole Child School

**All regular (not alternative) elementary schools** are provided with a minimum of one half-time special education teacher. That allocation is increased depending on the size of the school and number of students who are formally identified as having special needs, through a Ministry process known as IPRC (Identification, Placement and Review Committee). The special education teacher provides support to students both pre- and post-identification, as well as support to regular classroom teachers regarding strategies they might use in the classroom.

**The staff at alternative schools** also engages in regular meetings to review student progress; however, they do **NOT** receive an allocation for special education support of any kind. Where there are significant concerns, there may be a recommendation to parents to reconsider the appropriateness of the present placement, given staffing limitations, limited support, etc, and/or to consider intensive support at a regional program. School staff then makes their best recommendation. But, the final decision regarding child placement are ultimately made by the parents.

It is our belief that a holistic approach to education meets the needs of children with a wider variety of learning styles. The teachers at WCS are also dedicated to fostering a sense of compassion and respect for individual differences within the classroom. This inclusivity will be further enhanced by the connected nature of the WCS parent community.

If your child has unique needs that you feel can be met through strategies implemented by the regular classroom teacher, then WCS may be an appropriate choice for your family. If you already suspect, or are aware that your child will need additional, more intensive support, it may be best to enroll at your community school to ensure that your child's special specific needs will be met.

## **8. Volunteer and Committee Work**

### **Family Involvement**

At WCS we believe that teachers, parents/caregivers, and administrators should work together toward the common goal of educating our children in a way that aligns with our common core values. When this collaboration occurs, our school benefits in many ways:

- stronger relationships between our community members
- children understand that we all value their education
- teachers receive much needed support in the classroom

Family involvement at WCS is vital to the success of our school, and is, therefore, requested of all families. There are a number of ways that parents can get involved in the school that take into consideration both professional obligations and changing family structures. Whether parents are involved directly in the classroom, on a committee or at an event, we value and respect the time that family members are able to give.

Some examples of involvement:

- school council participation
- committee membership: interior/exterior space, gardens, trips, eco-school, french, social, fundraising & event planning, etc
- class representative
- offering after school programs, clubs, etc.
- participating in excursions and field trips

### **Volunteering in the Classroom**

Parents can add a great energy to the classroom and are a valuable part of the children's experience. Parental involvement in the classroom fits into two general categories:

- parents with a specific expertise to share (e.g. music, visual arts, crafts, architecture, gardening, drama, etc.)
- parents interested in general help

Each teacher has a different working style and set of needs in the classroom, so parents must communicate directly with their child's teacher to plan how they can contribute. Teachers may also request volunteers for specific tasks, and will post these opportunities outside classrooms. All volunteer scheduling in each class must be pre-arranged and approved through the teacher. In addition, a Volunteer Coordinator from our parent community will assist in the scheduling and organization of parental involvement in the classroom (this position to be filled prior to the school year commencing).

Some volunteer jobs in/for the classroom include:

- performing, teaching, presenting or leading activities
- assisting on field trips
- collecting materials from the community, e.g. art materials
- reading to children and listening to their reading
- volunteering in the library
- playing math or language games with small groups
- facilitating group work
- preparing and supervising art projects
- photocopying and other administration
- one-on-one tutoring

Helpful reminders for volunteering in the classroom:

- respect the privacy of the students in the class
- respect the teachers' professional responsibility to provide a curriculum that meets the requirements set by Ontario's Ministry of Education
- consider the needs of the classroom first
- assist children and let them complete their own projects for a stronger sense of accomplishment and satisfaction

If you have questions about volunteering in the classroom, talk to your child's teacher, the Volunteer Coordinator, an experienced parent volunteer, or your Class Representative for some ideas and feedback.

## Committees

The following committees represent those that we currently anticipate for the 2009-2010 school year. As WCS begins to take shape, there may be additional committees that are formed in order to deal with specific requirements or ad hoc projects.

**1. Childcare Committee (Spring/Summer 2009):** Responsible for identifying and exploring caregiving options for WCS families (1/2 day childcare, after-school care) and communicating these to interested families. Some of the skill sets and experience that would add value to this committee include: familiarity with City of Toronto Daycare guidelines, ECE background, interest/personal need for daycare, project management.

**2. Interior Space Committee:** Responsible for creating a space that aligns with the school's holistic approach and values. Some of the skill sets and experience that would add value to this committee include: interior design, interior décor, space organizing, lighting, drawing/drafting, indoor plant knowledge/botany, an artistic background.

- two parents as co-chairs who are responsible for leading the team and reporting to

### Organizing Committee/Parent Council

- between 12-15 additional members are needed as we have 6 classrooms (2 per classroom + extras for shared spaces)
- develop budget and detailed expenses
- research and source out materials for the classrooms and shared spaces: living wall and green spaces (plants), furniture (desks, chairs, bookshelves, cupboards), lighting (natural where possible, energy efficient), textiles (organic and natural), artwork, etc.
- develop a plan and timeline to achieve goals

**3. Exterior Space & Gardens Committee:** Help to develop an outdoor space (playground, landscape) that provides a more natural environment for the children and that best utilizes elements such as sunlight, water, trees, plants, etc. In addition, this committee will be responsible for developing a Garden on-site to be used as an outdoor classroom for the children and teachers. This committee will also establish a nearby community garden. Some skills this committee may be looking for include: landscape architecture (\*\*Xeriscaping), landscape design, physical labour, drawing/drafting, gardening, tree planting, stonework, water conservation, organic gardening (natural pesticide etc), nutrition, outdoor ecology.

*\*\*Xeriscaping refers to landscaping and gardening in ways that reduce or eliminate the need for supplemental irrigation. Emphasis is on plants whose natural requirements are appropriate to the local climate, and care is taken to avoid losing water to evaporation and run-off.*

- two parents as co-chairs who are responsible for leading the team and reporting to Organizing Committee/Parent Council
- between 8 and 10 additional members are needed (potentially more as specific initiatives begin to take shape)
- research/outsourcing an organization to assist with development (i.e. Evergreen, Natural Playgrounds, Focus on Forests, Trees Ontario, etc.)
- work with teachers to develop outdoor classroom settings (shade, seating, etc)
- research materials needed for organic vegetable garden and possibly a butterfly garden (ensure non-GMO seeds used, etc.)
- determine a location and build the gardens (begin work over the summer if possible)
- develop budget and detailed expenses, action plan and timelines
- liaise with and engage Roden Parent Council

**4. Special Events & Fundraising Committee:** In order to achieve the goals set forth by the various other committees, significant fundraising is necessary. This committee will establish fundraising targets and coordinate various activities and events to raise required dollars and engage the WCS community, etc. Skills that would help this committee include: event planning, research, sponsorship, fundraising, accounting, communications, marketing, graphic design, creative direction, sales, performance (storytelling, music, acting, art, etc.) sales, tax, creative thinking, community interaction/relations.

- two parents as co-chairs who are responsible for leading and reporting to Organizing Committee/Parent Council
- between 10 and 12 additional members are needed (possibly more once funding needs and events are more clearly established)
- work with other Committees to understand potential funding needs and establish overall budgets (what will these events cost? How much potential do they have to raise money? etc.)
- establish fundraising targets and goals, and possible sponsorship opportunities
- develop list of both community-engaging events and potential fundraising events (or combination) – both big and small
- explore funding opportunities through alternative sources (gov't funds, special programs, grants, etc.)
- plan and prepare a detailed sponsorship proposal and pitch to various corporations and grant organizations (where required)
- create a timeline based on priority – what work must be done immediately and how much money needs to be raised to meet the objective etc.
- plan and execute various events (outsource help where needed).
- coordinate the administration of fundraiser tax receipts
- work with Eco-School Committee to ensure best practices are met
- types of events may include school potlucks, teacher appreciation events, earth festivals (spring and fall equinox, winter festival, etc.); silent auction, and other special events

**5. Eco-School Committee:** Supports environmentally positive initiatives throughout WCS in both the classroom and through extra-curricular activities. The goal is for WCS to become a certified Ontario Eco School (program guides are available). The main areas of focus are energy conservation, waste minimization, ecological literacy and school-ground greening. Some skills and interests that this team will be looking for are: knowledge of eco-friendly practices, waste management, energy conservation, recycling, composting, pulp and paper.

- two parents as co-chairs who are responsible for leading the Eco-team and reporting to Organizing Committee/Parent Council
- between 4 and 6 additional members are needed
- liaise with the Ontario Eco Schools to identify needs and form a plan of action, adhere to guidelines and principles, etc.
- projects may include: Earth Week activities, zero waste lunch program, recycling and composting, plastics and paper policies (i.e. no bottled water, FSC certified paper), Toxins policy (i.e. cleaning products)
- assist teachers with “green” focused curriculum (in addition to what the Ministry already provides)
- develop budget and detailed expenses, action plan and timeline
- work with various other WCS committees to ensure best practices are met

**6. Social Committee:** Provides opportunities for the parent, student and teacher communities (and sometimes admin) within WCS and between both Roden/WCS to strengthen connections through various activities. This committee offers a variety of opportunities for parents interested in and/or with skills related to: camping, canoeing, writing, organization, project management, wilderness survival, first aid, outdoor activity, physical activity, leadership, communication, etc.

- two parents as co-chairs who are responsible for leading and reporting to Organizing Committee/Parent Council
- between 6 and 8 additional members are needed
- establish activities that engage the WCS community i.e. family camping trips, school “play” day, etc.
- explore opportunities to connect and develop relationships with the Roden School community
- plan, develop and execute activities (outsource help where needed).
- write monthly newsletter that covers all areas of WCS – requires coordination with all other committees (provide updates, etc.)
- assist in the update and ongoing development of the WCS website as a key information resource and tool for the school community
- develop budget (are these activities covered or will parents need to help with costs? Fundraising required?)

**7. Co-Curricular Committee:** Plan field trips (i.e. to local organic farms, urban farms, Leslie Spit, natural/green spaces, theatre, festivals, etc.) as well as coordinate special visitors and visiting groups to WCS. People interested in this committee may have experience with and an interest in: organic farming, natural environments, ecosystems, habitats, migration, drama/theatre, art, music, event planning and organization.

- two parents as co-chairs who are responsible for leading and reporting to Organizing Committee/Parent Council
- between 4 and 6 additional members are needed (include a representative for each class in WCS)
- research locations to visit (nearby and within one hour radius)
- researching and bringing visiting artists and other programs into WCS
- develop budget and detailed expenses (how many can the school afford overall? Per classroom?)
- work with teachers to develop appropriate outings (based on curriculum), timing, etc.
- schedule outings and coordinate with the location to establish agenda, etc
- volunteer to assist teachers on outings (can draw from volunteer base as well)