

SYNERGY TIMES

The Newsletter of Synergy School

Winter 2020



8th Graders Tori and Sophia Cooking for the Pancake Breakfast Fundraiser



Buddy Reading with Lila and Ari

Social Justice: Inclusive Classrooms

by Cynthia Louie, Administrative Coordinator

As part of Synergy’s mission to nurture the growth of our students in a diverse and inclusive community, we have always focused on social justice. Our work in the past has included a Strategic Plan to Increase Racial Diversity and Enhance Community, as well as staff trainings in implicit bias and gender bias. Teachers began the school year with a continued focus on their teaching practice as it relates to social justice. Their work began last year with a self-study on creating inclusive classrooms.

The inquiry, developed by nationally recognized diversity

consultant Rosetta Lee, looked at how teachers weave social justice in their classrooms and curriculum. Some of the questions they asked themselves were how their teaching demonstrates the values of social justice, what data or evidence could be collected, and what areas of challenge remain. Specific lines of inquiry included, but were not limited to, the following:

Do you see me?

Are there representations of my students on the walls of the classroom?

Are multiple perspectives represented in my teaching?

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“Some of the questions they asked themselves were how their teaching demonstrates the values of social justice, what data or evidence could be collected, and what areas of challenge remain.”



6th Graders Zara and Patryja



Buddy Reading with Students Micah and Mykel

Do I share my personal story with my students and create opportunities for students to share their stories, if they choose?

Do I notice and affirm my students in and outside the classroom?

Do I demonstrate care in getting to know my students and their families?

Do you hear me?

Are students asked to share prior knowledge and experience?

Do I seek and respond to student feedback?

Does my curriculum include student choice?

Do I offer clear and high expectations?

Do I offer consistent and predictable assessments?

Staff shared their self-reflections at the end of the school year and talked about next steps, including getting more feedback from our students and having courageous conversations about bias, entitlement, gender, and race. We affirmed our commitment to this ongoing work.

Professional Development

This past summer Carolyn Kruse, Kinne Chapin, Rita Franklin, and Sandy Barra attended Columbia University's Teachers College for the

Lucy Calkins Writing Project. Each came away with new insights, skills, and valuable lesson plans. Carolyn called it, "the most inspiring, professional development I've ever taken."

Ebony Manion, Jessica Raygoza, and Liz McDonald attended the Progressive Education Network Conference in Minneapolis in October, which focused on education in a democracy. Among the noted speakers were Paul Gorski, founder of Equity Literacy Institute, and award-winning author Dr. Bettina L. Love.

Rita Franklin also recently returned from the National Black Child Development Institute Conference in Chicago, focused on critical issues impacting black children and their families.

Sam Heminger and Kim McClain connected with other Orff music teachers and exchanged ideas at the Annual Orff-Schulwerk Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah in November.

Ali Felman, Carolyn Kruse, Jana Barber, Jessica Raygoza, Rea Inglesis, Rita Franklin, and Tanya Baker attended the 19th Annual

Teaching for Social Justice Conference at John O'Connell High School in late October. Dr. Bettina Love was the keynote speaker.

Susanne DeRisi attended the November 2019 AASL (American Association of School Librarians) conference in Louisville, Kentucky. The conference focused on common values of the school librarian profession such as research, literacy, advocacy, and diversity. Susanne came away empowered with new ideas and resources to strengthen and diversify her teaching.

Jeff McMahan attended the National Science Teaching Association Conference in Seattle, Washington, in December. He reconnected with teachers from his Masters program.

Upcoming Professional Development

Bay Area Writers Workshop – Voice, Identity, Access and Equity (April)

White Privilege Conference – Understanding, Respecting, Connecting (April) ∞



6th Grade Class at the SF-Marin Food Bank



6th Grader Cecil Measuring Rice

The SF-Marin Food Bank

By the 6th Grade Class

As we enter the building warehouse, we pass shelves of boxes of food. There is a different smell for every aisle we pass. When the tour starts, our guide tells us a bit about the food bank.

“Can anyone guess how many pounds of food we deliver each year?” he asks with a smile. Some of us call out numbers- forty thousand, one hundred thousand, one million.

“No, no, and no. It is actually forty-eight million pounds per year, and we spend day and night delivering it. Can anyone guess who the food is for?”

“Homeless people?” someone in the crowd asks.

“Actually, that’s only about 15% of the people we serve. Did you know that one in every five people in San Francisco is food insecure? And that is a big percentage of our big city,” he says seriously.

“And most of the people that package our food are volunteers like you! There are only about ten days in a year where we do not get any volunteers. Thank you so much.” His smile gets wider.

After answering a few questions, we walk on. We pass a wide variety of foods, including squash and potatoes. We did not see as much canned food as we expected. When we ask him about it, he explains that, contrary to popular belief, not all of the food they serve is canned. In fact, a lot of it is fresh fruit. We stop in the back of the warehouse and he explains guidelines, how to get to the bathroom, and what we will be doing.

“For the hour and forty-five minutes you will be here, you will all be working in the rice room, packaging white rice,” he says.

When we walk in, we are asked to put on hair nets. Some of us giggle at trying to slip them over our hair, and we all laugh at the beard nets some adults have to wear. There are many tables, and on each table are two rows of machines and buckets of rice. Our guide shows us that there are three stations per row. The first station is putting rice into smaller bags, and trying to

estimate a pound. The next person measures it on a weight, then adds or takes away rice to make it exactly one pound. The last person seals the bag, puts a sticker on it, and packs it away neatly in a box. Once the box has 15 bags, you give the box to a worker who seals it. We all got to our stations and got to work.

Once some 1980’s music goes on, some of us cannot stop tapping our feet. Sure enough, once Queen music comes on, a few people start singing along. By the end, everyone is talking about how fun it was, how good it feels to help our community, and to know that people in need will soon be receiving food.

Our guide announces that, in the hour and forty five minutes, we produced 2,940 pounds of white rice! After a bus trip back, we reflect on the memories and hope to come again. ∞



2018-19 Sun Room Students with their Global Village Projects



Global Village - Crafting Memories

by Jesse Kitses, Synergy Teacher and Parent

Collecting 50 milk cartons, cutting paper mache strips, taking trips to SCRAP & sharing pictures of past projects – the build up to the biennial Sun Room Global Village Project may be the most exciting part.

Global Village, formally “Sunville” from over a decade ago, is a group based exploration of five specific places in the world from five different continents. This year, we studied Northern Territory, Australia; Phuket, Thailand; Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico; Amazon Rainforest, Brazil; and Togo, Africa. The process involves lots of hot glue, acrylic paint, and salty dough which becomes a smaller version of a second or third grader—it creates many opportunities to engross one’s self in social studies in a memorable and arguably unconventional way.

Group work, or ‘Synergy’ if you will, is truly the essence of the project. From the teachers’ rearranging the classroom to fit the project, to each group’s planning out of their respective

section with color coded squares, to researching & designing poster boards, not to mention researching and creating famous monuments from each section, there are lots of opportunities to agree, disagree and compromise on a decision.

We support students to work in groups by using the GROUPS acronym- the G stands for GET ALONG, the R is to RESPECT ONE ANOTHER, the O stands for ON-TASK, the U is USE QUIET VOICES, the P is PARTICIPATE and lastly, and probably the hardest, the S encourages kids to STAY IN THEIR GROUP. These guidelines are helpful, but with the biggest classroom in the

school, it was a challenge... a fun one at that!

During the project, we use technology to virtually visit each location, and sample snacks from the natural resources of each section. At the end of the project, we celebrate students’ hard work by inviting neighboring classrooms and our parent community to visit and learn about our studies, which really ties the 8 week unit together.

As a parent, I have enjoyed the creative work and projects that come home from Synergy & Buen Dia, my younger child Olive’s pre-school. The challenge is where to keep and IF to keep it, respectively.

“The process... creates many opportunities to engross one’s self in social studies in a memorable and arguably unconventional way.”



Students with the Amazon Rainforest Project

Despite the planning and work spent on the creation of Global Village, I am motivated to continue this Synergy tradition, when former Sun Room students stop by to see the project.

“I still have my person from the Thailand group on my desk.”- 7th grader

“My Earthen Castle from Togo is in my room.”- 5th grader

“Uluru lives in our house still!”- 7th grader

(Yes, we raffle off the large monuments at the end of the project for kids to take home.)

Testimonials like these and hearing their memories make it all worthwhile. It’s easy to say that now as we’ve finished Global Village. Let’s see how we feel in 2021 when we start asking for your rinsed out almond milk cartons again. ∞

Congratulations! Class of 2019

Last year’s eighth grade class was accepted to a wide range of public, parochial, charter and independent high schools:

Abington Friends School
Drew School
ICA Cristo Rey Academy
Jewish Community High School of the Bay
Junipero Serra High School
Lowell High School
Mercy High School
Ruth Asawa San Francisco School of the Arts
Sacred Heart Cathedral Preparatory
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Class of 2015

Our 2015 alumni matriculated to the following schools:

Cal Poly San Luis Obispo
Comillas Pontifical University
Northeastern University
San Diego State
San Jose State
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Seattle University
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6:30-11:00 PM

SOMArts Cultural Center

Online Auction
February 28 - March 8

www.biddingforgood.com/synergy/madscience



Authors Sarah and Ian Hoffman at Synergy School



Author Visit: Sarah and Ian Hoffman

By Kelly White, Synergy Parent for the Diversity & Inclusion Committee

Have you read *Jacob's New Dress*? or *Jacob's Room To Choose*? If not, you should. *Jacob's New Dress* tells a story about Jacob, a boy who loves wearing dresses. Despite a formidable bully, Jacob doesn't waver in his gender expression, and stays true to who he is—a joyful boy in a beautiful dress.

Jacob's Room To Choose addresses issues that gender non-conforming children face when using public bathrooms. Jacob, who has long hair and wears a dress, and his friend, who's a girl with short hair and likes "boy clothes," get harassed in their respective bathrooms at school. Their kindergarten teacher uses the incidents as an opportunity to show the class how to make room for everybody to use whatever bathroom they choose.

The books are great, and they are written by local authors Sarah and Ian Hoffman. Synergy students were lucky to meet the Hoffmans during an author visit, which was organized jointly by the Library and the Diversity Committee. Sarah and Ian began their visit by reading and

chatting with students in grades 4/5, went on to share lunch with members of the LGBTQ Student Alliance, and then wrapped up their afternoon with the students in K-3.

To begin the presentations, Synergy librarian, Susanne DeRisi, introduced Sarah and Ian to the students. She explained how one of the agreements at Synergy, "Keeping a safe space, without prejudices, for everyone's body and feelings," can be challenging, but is so worthwhile. This agreement is one of the things that makes Synergy such a special place. Susanne and the authors hoped that by reading and discussing the books, everyone would learn more about ways to keep a safe space for each other.

In both the 4/5 and K-3 presentations, Sarah acknowledged that it was rare for her and Ian to come to a school that was so ready to talk about including all kids. She and Ian went on to explain jointly,

with the aid of a visual presentation, about experiences they'd had, raising their son, Sam. They said that when Sam was 2 years old, he really loved dinosaurs, construction sites, and other things that are stereotypically considered "boy things." But one day, they took him to buy new sneakers, and when they offered Sam a choice between red sneakers and blue sneakers, Sam announced he wanted pink ones. Ian said he double-checked whether Sam really wanted pink, in part because he wasn't sure if Sam really knew his colors. And then he asked the students to guess why else he had hesitated to buy Sam pink shoes. In both presentations, students answered easily that they thought maybe Ian thought pink was a stereotypical color for girls, and not for his boy, Sam. Sarah and Ian went on to explain that although they were supportive of Sam's pink sneakers, Sam's preschool teacher didn't approve. And that was the first instance

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where Sam's being a "pink boy," Sarah's coined phrase for the male equivalent of "tomboy," began to prove challenging.

Sam grew to really love pink, sparkles, and Disney princesses. As a preschooler, he dressed as a pink fairy with gossamer wings to go trick-or-treating. At school Sam was always in the dress-up princess costumes and tutus, and eventually, he wanted a dress that he could wear for real, to school and out in the world. Sarah and Ian knew that other kids would make fun of him at school because they were so fixed in their gender ideas, but it was much more important to Sam to wear the dress than to worry about ridicule, so he got the dress and wore it every day.

While Sam loved his long hair and dresses, he also adored dinosaurs, pirates, and battle axes. By eight years old, Sam was very interested in LEGO, Dungeons & Dragons, Magic The Gathering, math, Pokémon, and opera. Sam is now 17, and identifies and presents as a boy. He and his family firmly still believe in his expressing his true self.

The Hoffman's began to connect with other parents similar to Sam via email to support each other. They learned that parents of children like Sam always asked the same three questions: (1) Is your family supportive of Sam? (2) Is Sam's school supportive of Sam? and (3) How is the school handling the bathroom?

The first two questions are what inspired Sarah and Ian to write *Jacob's New Dress*. This third question is what prompted their second book, *Jacob's Room To Choose*.

Sarah and Ian reminded the students that by being yourself, and being true to yourself, you can help change the world. Hearing the students' comments and questions, I have no doubt that Synergy students are already helping to change the world. ∞



Class of 2019 Graduation on June 1, 2019



Jessica Mass Delivering her Speech

Synergy - A School That Knows You

By Jessica Mass, Alumni Parent & Former Trustee

I am sure Synergy teachers deal with this a lot. Teacher parents! I am a teacher, so when Ezra started here, I was a little anxious.

Is this the right thing to do? Will it work for him? What if he has learning differences that we don't know about? But at our first curriculum night, a parent asked about expectations for reading growth—how much growth do you expect in a year? Tanya won me over in a second—“A year's growth from wherever they are.”

And that was it. I knew that this is a school that really does see each kid for who they are. Each kid has their own time table. And I could breathe again.

Education, and a school that sees who you are—that knows you—unfortunately for all of us, that's a privilege not everyone lucks into. And that's what privilege is—it is just luck.

Each of you has had the privilege to be reminded of your value and your voice. From day one, each of you was apprenticed into

understanding how to use that voice—that sense of agency—to figure out what you think, to say what you think, to connect with others, to decide if and when you want to drink tea, to ask questions, and respectfully question authority at the dinner table, in the classroom, on the hard yard and on stage. But having this as such an intentional part of your education is a privilege not everyone gets.

Use that privilege, use it to open the door for someone else, and then—get out of the way. Because part of your responsibility is to learn from voices that are not yours, voices that have had different experiences and opinions.

And in your years at Synergy, you've also had the great fortune to develop the kinds of friendships that have extended your family and ours.

Because your friends are the people who let you change—even during those years when your taste

in music goes down hill and you get a tattoo that will ultimately embarrass you for years.

Your friends are the people who let you change. They are the people who ask you questions—out of curiosity, not judgment (mostly). These friends—this community of learners, thinkers, artists, musicians, writers, chefs, engineers, actors and athletes — you have let each other become. Keep listening to each other. Keep becoming.

And class of 2019, use your agency to keep an eye out for each other because “unconscious people do not want tea.”

Congratulations. ∞

Jessica delivered this speech at Graduation on June 1, 2019

Synergy School 2018-19 Annual Report



Gifts to the Synergy Annual Fund

Thank you for your support.

We are grateful for the generosity of our donors who helped to raise \$330,886 for the Synergy Annual Fund in 2018-19. Our Board participation in the Annual Fund was 100%, and Synergy families' participation was 95%.

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Mission Statement

Synergy Times is published once a year by the Development Office of Synergy School. Feedback and story ideas are welcome.

Editors: Cynthia Louie, Liz McDonald, and Talia Uribe

Photography: Russ Curtis, Liz McDonald

Our mission is to nurture the intellectual, creative, and emotional potential of every child in a community dedicated to diversity, inclusion, and social justice.

Synergy School was founded in 1973 and is a non-profit educational cooperative, wherein students, parents, staff, and teachers

cooperate together to further a rewarding education for each child. We are a vibrant, diverse community with 192 students in transitional kindergarten through eighth grade located in San Francisco's Mission District.

Synergy Annual Fund



The Annual Fund helps to bridge the gap between tuition and the actual cost of educating a student at Synergy School for a full year.

The support we receive from our community of parents, friends, alumni and grandparents helps Synergy to maintain the strength of our program while keeping our tuition affordable and offering financial aid to at least a third of our community.

Every Gift Counts

Every gift counts. Donate online at www.synergyschool.org/giving

If you have any questions about donations, please contact Liz McDonald, Director of Development, at liz@synergyschool.org.

Thank you for your support!