



Proposed Model For The Durango Community School

Introduction:

The model proposed here is meant to serve as a basic guide for our vision of our Durango Community School. The basic principles are:

1. To create a space of love where children grow and expand from the inside out.
2. To help children learn the knowledge and skills required for living sustainably on our planet.
3. To provide a forum for children to experience democracy/sociocracy in action.
4. To help children and adults develop emotional intelligence.
5. To recognize that children learn from what adults do and who they are being, and so to encourage parents, teachers and others involved in our school community to do their own inner work.
6. To provide training for teachers and parents to grow and expand from the inside out.

Proposed Model Basic Overview:

1. School Year Schedule: In keeping with the rhythms of nature, school days will be shorter in winter and longer in summer. We also recommend year round school starting mid-September. There will be three months of school with a week off in the middle, followed by one month of vacation and then repeat the pattern throughout the year. This allows for greater retention of learning and less burn out of co-learners. Actual start and stop times may be decided upon in school council.
2. The Structure of the Day: The Durango Community School model is a hybrid democratic free school. Mornings are structured learning that children must attend and afternoons are free choice and are called "BE" time with optional classes offered by adults and children alike. Children may pursue their own interests at this time. Many resources for art, music, drama etc. should be present in the environment all day as well as opportunities for physical activity and time in nature.
3. Weekly Schedule: We intend a four day week with full and part time options. Friday's may be offered if there is demand, and will be a free, unstructured time for children to explore and integrate their learning.
4. Democratic/Sociocratic School Council: Its Role and Function

In a democratic/sociocratic school council there are three basic functions:

1. Governance of the school.- using both democratic and sociocratic principles, decisions are made by both adults and children with all having equal votes.
2. Learning conflict resolution, democracy, sociocracy, and communication hands on in real situations.
3. Learning to speak and listen with purpose and intent so improving language skills, reasoning ability and problem-solving.

The specifics of powers granted the council and how it will be run, how often it meets and so forth are flexible and can be decided upon by each individual school community.

5. Programs By Age Group

Infant – 18 months

Love, nurturance, and physical comfort are paramount at this age. Play and nature are emphasized. It is also possible to teach babies sign language using Baby Signs and as early as 6 months math and reading can be taught using the “How to Teach Your Baby to Read” and “How to Teach Your Baby Math” programs developed by the Institutes for Human Potential. Teaching academics to children this young is definitely controversial. We will offer the possibility and the choice. The Institutes programs are recommended for those who choose to take this journey because they emphasize extremely short (less than two minutes) sessions, no testing AT ALL, and lots of love. The best part of these programs is that children seem to learn the concepts without even being aware of it – in other words their natural curiosity and love of learning is maintained.

18 months - 3

Yoga/movement and mindfulness practice can be introduced now. Hands on activities such as kneading dough, water play, painting, drawing, playing in mud and sand, collecting flowers, building blocks, music, and imaginative, unstructured play make up most of the day for children this age. The programs mentioned in the infant to 18 months age group can also be continued or begun if desired.

Gardening/Food Security

By the time a child can walk and dig, they can join the food security aspect of our community and begin to learn to garden. Gardening for food production will be part of our program at all ages and will provide food to families and perhaps even the larger community. See more under Logistics.

Age: 3-6

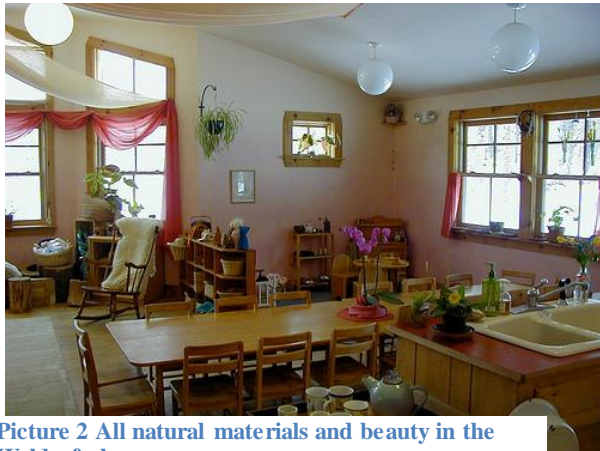
Mornings begin with a meditative practice, a movement practice and/or a nature activity. This may look like a combination of yoga, meditation and nature walks.

Next there are two different schools of thought about early childhood education - academic and non-academic. Educators and parents tend to have very strong opinions on this issue. In a truly child-oriented program, we allow the children to decide for themselves by offering both options. In the 3-6 year old age range this can be fairly easily achieved with two well-known programs: Montessori and Waldorf. Each offers its own unique strengths.



Montessori is a highly child-centered, collaborative, hands-on, approach to academic and life learning that allows children to follow their interests at their own pace regardless of what other children are doing. The Montessori approach provides varied structured activities employing materials that children use in very specific ways. The materials have levels of difficulty that the child progresses through sequentially. The materials develop

sensory, mathematical, scientific, geographic, linguistic, and practical life skills. Children learn how to focus, self-regulate, and explore knowledge in a methodical manner. The teacher becomes the observer and introduces new materials and skills into the classroom as the children are ready. A two–three hour period of uninterrupted time is required for Montessori to be effective. Follow this [link](#) for an RSA Animate video on Montessori.



Picture 2 All natural materials and beauty in the Waldorf classroom

Waldorf places emphasis on creating a homelike environment with an emphasis on all natural materials and beauty, real work for a real purpose, and imagination and play. Waldorf teachers model meaningful, purposeful work in the classroom by engaging in activities such as cooking, cleaning, baking, sewing or knitting. Outdoors, teachers may be found raking, gardening, filling birdfeeders or shoveling snow. Out of imitation, children engage in, and help with all these activities. The children are learning real life skills, as they become confident and capable helpers. Rudolf Steiner, the founder of Waldorf education, emphasized the importance of the imagination in childhood, and

Waldorf educators believe that imaginative play is the key to creative thinking later in life. In a Waldorf early childhood classroom, ample time is allowed each day for unstructured, imaginative play without a lot of adult interference. This is when an observe might see children becoming cats and mice; witness tea parties in the play kitchen; boys and girls building large structures out of Waldorf wooden playstands draped with large silks; building with stumps and natural tree blocks; and other children donning capes and crowns to become princesses and princes. Free play is the heart of the Waldorf kindergarten.

Both Waldorf and Montessori provide mixed-age environments for this age group. Please see www.lightwayschools.org for a complete explanation of the advantages of mixed age environments. Briefly though, most of us agree that children learning socialization skills is an important part of school, so let's consider how useful a socialization experience of being with only people of our same age is when nowhere else in our life will we be in that environment.

6. The Role Of Nature:

Our Durango Community School team is dedicated to bringing our children into nature – their true natural environment. We are looking for land to build on or that has existing structures in place. Therefore, playing and exploring outside will be a large part of our day for all age groups. One advantage of outside exploration is cognitive development achieved through exposure to natural objects.

Artificial vs. natural objects: if I hand you a plastic dragonfly, your mind will have understood everything about it in a few seconds. When I show you a live dragonfly, you could never understand it completely in a lifetime. The speed of thought necessary to understand and observe natural objects is infinitely greater than that necessary for an artificial object. And yet, we take our children from the womb and introduce them immediately to piles of artificial objects and “learning toys”. Exposure to nature and natural phenomena speeds up a child's cognition and helps him/her develop complex thinking capability as well as problem-solving skills.

7. The Value of Play

“Play is the work of the child.” The American Academy of Pediatrics recently announced the importance of unsupervised, unstructured play. The UN included the right to unstructured, unsupervised play in the rights of the child back in 1920.

5. Learn self-talk
6. How to process emotion
7. Self-acceptance
8. Develop imagination
9. Joy and happiness

1. Children learn to put undivided attention into something.
2. An increased sense of personal value.
3. Find creative solutions to problems: ex. Making up rules to games.
4. Development of executive function.

Skills Developed by Play

- Communication
- Negotiation
- Taking responsibility for own choices
- Pursuing interests deeply
- Inner strength
- Creative problem-solving

We advocate children spending as much time as possible in free, unstructured play. Both Waldorf and Montessori allow for play.

Age: 7 -13

Mornings begin with a meditative practice, a movement practice and/or a nature activity. This may look like a combination of yoga, meditation and nature walks. The rest of the morning is spent in academic studies.

1. Academic Studies:

At this age we now move into a project-based learning model that employs interdisciplinary units of study on topics chosen by the children in a democratic council meeting. The co-learner/teacher facilitates the unit by designing activities around the topics chosen by the children. Interdisciplinary means that all the subject areas are integrated showing the interconnectedness of knowledge and making what is learned more relevant. Our co-learners have the freedom to do this because they are not tied to testing schedules. These units will be collaborative group projects.

2. Scope of Units: The units of study allow for tremendous flexibility in design, purpose, and assessment. Service-learning projects can be included that give children a real stake in their world. A unit could also include camping out on the land, building a straw bale, adobe, or Earthship house. These units are really only limited by our own imaginations.

3. Nature and Play are as important as they were in the younger age group. See that section for details.

In the afternoon, children enjoy “BE Time”.

4. “BE” Time is just that – time to BE. Children can dive deeply into their passions, take classes offered by each other or by adults, spend time playing, or in nature or both. During this time children can often be observed acting out the lessons from the morning. They are integrating that learning into their bodies and minds. This step is totally left out in traditional education at the expense of the well-being and learning of the children.

Age 14 +

The basic structure of the day remains the same beginning with meditation and yoga/movement and then morning academics and afternoon Be Time.

- Academics Studies:

Often by age 14 children who have had the freedom to explore their interests and passions have found some direction in their life and have a pretty good idea about whether they will go to college and what they will study there. We will see the continuation of units of study although they will become increasingly individualized in nature. Individual unit studies are called Passion Projects because they are guided by a child’s passions.

At this age, it is also possible for students to start taking courses at local community colleges and doing internships in the community.

Please see the section on the Light Way Schools website about college and accreditation. www.lightwayschools.org It is under the Program tab.

There are many different ways we can approach the needs of this age group. Children who have been in our school for a while will have the functional capacity and maturity to develop their own pathway. Our main task will be to provide them the resources they require to do so.

Development of specific graduation requirements in collaboration with the youth in the program can be developed as the children reach this age group. Most often we will not be enrolling children new to the school who are over age 13 because experience at other democratic schools has shown that they are rarely able to let go of traditional school programming and assume responsibility for themselves and their learning.

Logistical Aspects:

Where: We require acreage we can build on or that already has suitable structures in place.

Enrollment: To move forward we require people to commit to enrolling their children. We are asking that each family contribute monthly to hold a space for their child/ren. We recommend a minimum of \$25 per family and ask that families that can afford more do so. Money will be used for the administrative costs of starting the school. At this point all monies paid can be considered charitable donations and are tax deductible.

Budget and Funding Overview: The way to create sustainable new schools is within communities. A community can be creative about funding. Below are some ways we can provide access to all families who wish to join.

- Compensation packages for co-learners and administrators:
 - People with spare rooms/apartments may consider providing room and board for a teacher or administrator. The cost of board could be compensated to the family from school funds or a co-learner/administrator could elect to receive those funds directly. Room is gifted entirely to the co-creation of new ways of being and educating children.
 - Offer services such as massage, acupuncture, chiropractic, therapy, energy healing etc to teachers on a monthly basis.
- Write grants. We can operate under the Light Way Schools 501 (c) 3.
- Run businesses that fund our school.
 - Hold teacher and parent healing retreats and teacher training institutes at our model school.
 - Run a community farm and sell the excess in our larger community.
 - Offer courses in permaculture and sustainability.
 - Offer LIVE online courses that homeschool families around the country/world can access.
 - House student boarders from around the world as international fee paying students which will also create a network that our children can access for similar experiences.
 - Offer boarding for children from the surrounding area on a weekly basis.
 - Other: endless possibilities here including children run businesses.
- Community members within and without the school will be asked to offer classes. People will be able to post the class online and then children and adults alike can sign up for them. Adults choosing to do this will agree to an orientation prior to working with our children.
- Parents of enrolled children will commit to volunteer hours on a weekly or monthly basis. Parents can volunteer the skills they are most passionate about sharing. And we will require folks to schedule time and give the full time co-learners time in the afternoons for planning and gathering

materials. As an example: with 16 children and two parents each, in most cases, that would be one afternoon every six weeks or so.

Also:

What's coming in public education and why that's relevant...

I have been surveying the school choice movement that many decry as a direct attack on public education. I say all schools are public because all children are members of the public.

So why is this relevant?: A bill has been introduced into the Colorado State Legislature, actually as of January 2011, they were gathering signatures, and the language had been approved for submission. This bill will authorize tax credits (not deductions) for parents who pay for school tuition up to 50% of the school's tuition or 50% of the state per pupil allocation, whichever is less. This will open our school up as a possibility for many more children and parents. As it stands at \$400 per month, tuition is \$4800. When the tax credit passes which it will eventually, that may reduce tuition to \$2400 per year or \$200 a month.

Forming A Board: The board oversees and protects the school. Meetings are held monthly.

1. Head of School: Zahra Lightway
2. Legal person:
3. Capital finance person:
4. Marketing person:
5. Co-Learner (adult):
6. Co-Learner: (child)
7. Parent: Joanie Origer
8. Other: