



BEGINNING WITH THE MIDDLE NICK NOYES REMEMBERS

The seventh and eighth grade program at CRS was developed in 1972 by a team of teachers who put their hearts and souls into creating an innovative and cooperative learning environment for adolescents. Bryan Johnson, Nick Noyes, Judy Hamp, Jill Beth, Dan Gray, and Alice Fryer were instrumental in developing the program. The following excerpts are from an interview with former faculty member Nick Noyes.

WAS ADDING SEVENTH AND EIGHTH GRADE TO CRS A HARD TRANSITION?

Adding a middle school program to CRS was a natural follow up. However, the early years of the program had some challenges. For example, in order to make the program work financially, the school took in many non-

CRS trained students. CRS students typically made the best seventh and eighth graders because they already knew themselves as curious explorers and responsible community members. New students had to learn how to become part of a community that fostered cooperation and sharing.

AS TEACHERS, YOU INSPIRED CONFIDENCE IN STUDENTS. TALK ABOUT A FEW OF THE UNIQUE APPROACHES YOU TOOK TO HELP ADOLESCENTS FEEL COMFORTABLE, AND SOME EXAMPLES OF CREATIVE TEACHING THAT EMPOWERED THE STUDENTS.

Rather than authority figures, teachers were partners in the learning process. To foster that image, most of us were very comfortable being called by our first names. We believed in respecting each other, and tried to eliminate all teacher tactics that might undercut self-respect -- like ridiculing mistakes or sarcasm. We said "no" to lists of who was best at what (grades), and said yes to compliments. We used choices of how to spend your time as a way of inculcating responsibility and self-control. Students faced choices for everything -- here is a shelf of books, let's choose one; choose one of these five science projects to work on by yourself or with a partner; choose one of the three levels of sex education that fits what you want to know.

THE TEACHING TEAM HAD A MIDYEAR CHANGE DURING THAT FIRST YEAR, AND THIS IS WHEN ALICE FRYER JOINED YOU. COULD YOU SHARE THE STORY OF HIRING ALICE?

When a homeroom teacher left, we advertised the open teaching position and narrowed the applicants down to three great candidates. We invited all three to spend the day in the classroom. They spent the whole whirling day; one at a study table helping students with homework and another in the hall working with individual students. Alice spent considerable time sitting on the floor, talking with one or two students. Students seemed to come to her like hummingbirds to their special feeder. Here is why our partnership worked: Alice shared directly, whereas I approached students by talking with them through the medium of a shared piece of writing, a book or a poem. These two talking approaches were what made us such a fine team -- between us we knew everything about those seventh and eighth graders. I knew one or two things, and she knew all the rest.

HOW DID YOU ASSESS THE PROGRESS STUDENTS WERE MAKING?

With daily morning teacher meetings in which we discussed each student in alphabetical order over the course of a month or so, we all knew who was making progress where and who needed to be shored up. We tried to look at progress in terms of the program rather than just individual subjects: writing in a science project was accepted by the English teacher as weekly writing, and extra hours spent in the math area on algebra were accepted as a

substitute for a skimpy science project. We wanted to build on a student's strengths rather than insist on equal time for each subject. There was, however, a minimum that had to be met.

CAN YOU PROVIDE AN EXAMPLE OF THE CLOSE BOND YOU AND OTHER TEACHERS HAD WITH THE STUDENTS?

One year, a mother complained that we were praising her daughter too much. "You are rewarding her for what she does so easily, this does not deserve praise. Life is not like that," she said. I was tasered into silence. The mother continued, "I threatened her with going to all her teachers and telling them to be mean to her if she didn't work harder. And you know what she said? 'My teachers would never do that.'" My heart swelled with pride at our teaching team's success with this girl that I cut in, She has that right! We never would. I cannot imagine a conference like that at any other school but CRS.

Now in its 35th year, the seventh and eighth grade program has preserved the original team's philosophies of idea sharing and teamwork. These ideas continue to foster a lasting rapport with students and a lifetime love of learning.