



Donna Leinsing, Larry S. Rosen, and Alan November

## Building a Community of Excellence

I'd love to be part of building a school of tomorrow. . . this might be a pilot operation for the teaching age — to go out across the country and across the world.

— Walt Disney, 1966

*Thirty years after Walt Disney imagined the potential of a planned community in Central Florida, his dream is realized, in Celebration. Within this new American town, five cornerstones — place, community, health, technology, and education — lay the foundation for a way of life that reflects the spirit of days past and an inspirational vision for the future.*

Celebration, Florida, is being developed on approximately 5,000 acres near Orlando in northwest Osceola County. When complete, the town could have up to 20,000 residents in addition to commercial, retail, health, recreational, and educational facilities, including the Celebration School and Teaching Academy. Education in Celebration is being designed to afford learners of all ages unique opportunities to become part of a truly dynamic revolution in education and community transformation.

The school is a unique public/private collaboration among the School District of Osceola County, Stetson University, and Disney. School officially opened August 12, 1996, for a pilot year in a "temporary home" at the Celebration Teaching Academy with approximately 200 K-12

learners housed in multi-age neighborhoods. Next school year, between 900 and 1,200 elementary and secondary learners will move into the K-12 public school that will stretch across a thirty-six-acre campus near the center of the community.

Each multi-age neighborhood accommodates a group of learners and a core team of teachers who make decisions related to their use of time, space, and neighborhood learning designs. Everyone in an educational neighborhood works together to construct exciting and challenging learning environments that connect the school, the local community, and the world through direct contact or electronic means. The more that learners engage in this participative community of learners, the more they can access its potential and become better educated.

Some of the nation's leading educators collaborated with the Celebration School and Teaching Academy to develop the Celebration Learning Design, which incorporates research-based best practices. Celebration School's goal is to explore educational approaches that will empower children and adults to become lifelong learners and to excel as critical thinkers in a diverse and ever-changing world. An integrated curriculum focuses on three perspectives referred to as Diverse Domains — Global Explorations, Human Expressions, and Scientific Investigations — and on four Vital Results — Communication, Reasoning and Problem Solving, Personal Development, and Social Responsibility. Personalized Learning Paths and portfolios focus on authentic measures of success.

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This challenging learning design requires on-going professional collaboration to be successful. The Teaching Academy's professional development programs will highlight educational innovations and best practices implemented in Celebration School. The Stetson University Center at the Celebration Teaching Academy also will develop, study, and disseminate various educational innovations and approaches that are, or will be, implemented with Celebration School learners.

This professional partnership between the faculty of Celebration School and the Stetson University Center at the Celebration Teaching Academy provides continuous pro-

fessional development and collaboration opportunities. Ongoing professional collaboration will focus on educators and administrators learning about learning, changing or upgrading instructional roles and strategies, and renewing their spirit and love for teaching and learning.

Professional Development programs to be offered to the public at the Celebration Teaching Academy will focus on the concept of educational neighborhoods and interactive communities, guiding principles, transdisciplinary learning, personalized learning paths, multi-dimensional assessments, multiple intelligences, cooperative learning, embedded technology, inclusion, and lifelong learning. The support provided by the Stetson University Center at the Celebration Teaching Academy

maximizes not only the content, context, and process of staff development, but also the research and development learning opportunities for multiple community groups, and school-university-community partnerships. In a sense, it provides continuous improvement opportunities for anyone who is interested in excellence in education.

Professional collaboration allows educators who demonstrate a comprehensive learner-focused approach to apply new techniques, strategies, experiences, and conceptual understandings to the educational knowledge base. This professional collaboration research-and-development model provides opportunities for professional

review of hardware, software, and teaching materials in addition to continuing dialogue with educators who share similar realities, responsibilities, challenges, and perspectives. Professional development programs, experiential learning, and on-site observations will take place at both the Teaching Academy and the Celebration School, or may be broadcast to interact with educational practitioners across the globe as part of an integrated continuum of experiences.

Recognizing the key role technology plays in an information-rich culture, while remembering there is no substitute for human interaction, Celebration seamlessly incorporates technology linking educational, residential, and business environments. Innovative teaching and learning in Celebration includes technology that affects the ways people work, learn, and communicate, as well as the ways they produce, store, retrieve, and use information. Learners will experience information that expands their education in multiple ways, with the tools of their times. Every learner's repertoire of communication and problem-solving techniques can be expanded by using technology that promotes self-directed interactive pursuits of understanding and application while providing a showcase for learning. Technological tools support personalized learning paths and electronic portfolios, communication, organization, and multimedia productions that enrich the lives of all learners in the community.

Varied curricular and teaching approaches support interactive learning and communication throughout the community and the world, facilitating success for an increasingly diverse student population. Some of the best practices employed at Celebration School and Teaching Academy include value-based education,

multiple intelligences, and cooperative learning.

## VALUE-BASED EDUCATION

Because it is a value-based organization, guiding principles influence the decisions Celebration School makes to continuously improve life in an ever-changing learning environment. Founding principles were originally defined by a group of stakeholders representing the School District of Osceola County, Stetson University, and The Walt Disney Company. These founding principles became the fifteen guiding principles that provide a unifying vision for all learners in Celebration School, bond the school with the local and global community, promote human integrity, and enhance the ability to accept the many challenges, problems, and possibilities of life. They are as follows:

- **Accountability:** accept responsibility for personal choices and actions in relation to self and community.
- **Celebration:** discover joy in individual and community experiences.
- **Communication:** engage in effective, open, and efficient verbal, written, and symbolic methods of communicating thoughts and feelings.
- **Competence:** expand confidence through actions of quality.
- **Cooperation:** work cooperatively with others to enhance each person's unique skills and qualities.
- **Diversity:** recognize and act on the belief that including people from a variety of cultures, backgrounds, ages, and abilities builds a rich learning environment.
- **Environmental Sensitivity:** take responsibility for protecting and preserving the beauty and balance of the natural world.
- **Equity:** promote the moral and ethical claim of each person to legal, social, and economic fairness.

- **Human Dignity:** respect the right of every human being to have needs met and potential developed.
- **Innovation:** originate, develop, and express creative ideas for positive change.
- **Insight:** engage in active pursuits of knowledge to construct understanding.
- **Rationality:** demonstrate the ability to think logically and reasonably.
- **Self-Worth:** believe in one's self and demonstrate the ability to take risks and learn from mistakes and successes.
- **Service:** use unique talents and ability to contribute positively to society.
- **Wellness:** pursue a balance of mind and body through the development of skills that meet emotional and physical needs.

tion for understanding should stress a "grasp of concepts, principles, or skills so that one can bring them to bear on new problems and situations, deciding in which ways one's present competencies can suffice, and in which ways one may require new skills or knowledge" (*The Unschooled Mind*, 1991, p. 18). Learners understand best when they encounter real ideas, events, and new knowledge in meaningful contexts, not by studying isolated subjects in separate blocks of time. Learners confront and evaluate ideas and deeper understandings as they engage in projects with other learners or in apprenticeships with experts. An authentic learning model focused on teaching for understanding provides coherent connections between knowledge

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Celebration School educators recognize that values underlie all education curriculum, methodology, and decisions (*Values-Based Teaching Skills* Hall, Kalven, Rosen, and Taylor, 1995). Explicit values identify expectations of excellence and implications for teaching and learning.

## MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

Howard Gardner is a Harvard professor of education, co-director of Project Zero, and author of several nationally recognized books related to the development of multiple intelligences including linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist. He believes that educa-

and life. Gardner believes it is important for educators to watch for *crystallizing* experiences in which learners connect with something that engages curiosity and stimulates further exploration.

Incorporation of existing and emerging technologies can enhance and enrich the development of multiple intelligences, promote self-directed or interactive pursuits of understanding, and provide opportunities to showcase learning. Learners access information in a variety of formats including audio, video, text, graphics, and animation, and demonstrate their understanding using these media to link ideas in a nonlinear form. Technology can imaginatively enrich the lives of all learners by supporting personalized learning, communication, organization, multi-media productions, and authentic forms of assessment.

Learners present documentation of learning in real and electronic conferences with educators, families, and mentors. A variety of multi-dimensional assessments (including projects, performances, demonstrations, and exhibitions) reflects each learner's continuous progress and enhances a richer understanding of each learner's progress and the possibilities for future directions. Clearly, technology offers a multi-dimensional gateway for reflecting and enhancing multiple intelligences.

## **COOPERATIVE LEARNING**

A growing body of research in cognitive sciences suggests that students learn better and retain what they learn when engaged in "authentic" learning tasks. In practice, this often includes groups of students carrying out real-world projects using computer and network software tools and databases. In addition to acquiring knowledge, students develop skills in cooperation, communication, and problem identification with this approach.

Learners engaged in cooperative learning seek to accomplish shared goals that benefit everyone involved in group-learning experiences. Essential components of cooperative learning identified by David and Roger Johnson focus on positive interdependence, promotive (face-to-face) interaction, individual accountability, and personal responsibility to achieve the group goals, interpersonal and small group skills, and group processing to improve future effectiveness. Cooperative learning is transforming Celebration School neighborhoods into team-based, high-performance educational models of interdependent learning (*Cooperative Learning in the Classroom*, Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec, 1994 pp. 9-13).

The Celebration School and the Stetson University Center at

the Celebration Teaching Academy have begun to explore the role of technology in these innovative approaches to learning mentioned in this article. Through programs at the Celebration Teaching Academy, the understanding and insights gained at the Celebration School will assist all educators to better understand how to implement powerful approaches for enhancing learning and excellence in education in the schools of tomorrow.

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## **APOLOGY**

On the night my grandfather died,  
I felt his spirit kiss me,  
apologizing  
for what his son  
would eventually do,  
leaving me with memories  
that now seem unrecognizable,  
like out-takes  
from a movie, or perhaps  
from someone else's life. I remember  
waking that night, shuddering,  
realizing  
that death  
is irrevocable,  
like a harsh word spoken  
to a loved one — it settles in, and scars.

PATRICK J. COLE

Patrick J. Cole's poetry has been published in such literary magazines as *Writers' Forum*, *Prairie Winds*, and *Windsor Review*. He is a recent graduate of Fairfield University in Connecticut where he currently works as an Admission Counselor.