

Comprehensive Program of Instruction

A. Curricular Emphasis

Philosophy: We had been ‘long-distance’ dreaming (JoAnn Groh lived in Tucson and Santo Nicotera lived in Denver) since December 2000 about starting a school together. Between us we had accumulated more than twenty-five years of experience in public education; we had received awards for outstanding teaching and teacher leadership; we had become national facilitators in a movement to establish professional learning communities in schools across the country; and we had actively participated in comprehensive school reform both locally and nationally. We had seen what was working in these settings (‘best practices’ of individual teachers and schools throughout the country) and we had seen (close-up and first-hand) the many failures of public education. And we had read extensively. The Bibliography section represents a sampling of the books/authors in our library that have influenced our thinking. We felt that we were ready to pool together everything we had learned and start a school of our own.

We dreamed of a school where powerful and transformative teaching and learning were the norm and not the exception; a school where the whole person (body, heart, mind and soul) and the whole community were supported and challenged. We dreamed of a school that would be dedicated to social justice and environmental sustainability; a school closely linked to a ‘sister’ school in Guatemala - where young people and adults from two very different cultures could know each other, learn together and form lasting relationships. We dreamed of a school where diversity among individuals and communities and the unique developmental journey of each would be honored and celebrated. In August 2002 Santo moved to Tucson from Denver to join with JoAnn in making their dream of an ‘amazing small school’ a reality. We immediately began together to form El Pueblo Integral – Teaching and Learning Collaborative (EPI-TLC).

Mission/Beliefs of EPI-TLC: “El Pueblo Integral – Teaching and Learning Collaborative is a non-profit organization seeking to promote powerful, transformative teaching and learning within appropriately structure learning environments dedicated to the integral development of individuals and communities for a more just and sustainable world.” This mission statement grew out of all of our dreaming together and represents our best effort to distil our vision into a concise statement of purpose. We have also attempted to articulate a concise set of organizational beliefs. “EPI-TLC believes that:

- To be powerful and transformative, teaching and learning must be deep, authentic, and developmentally appropriate;
- Integral development must address the whole person (body, heart, mind, and soul) and the whole community (the social, cultural, political, and economic structures) both locally and globally;
- Individuals and their communities are vitally connected to each other, to all living beings, and to the earth itself and these relationships must be sustainable and just;
- To be sustainable and just these relationships must be characterized by the sharing of resources and power, open discourse, appropriate decision-making strategies, constructive conflict resolution, and mutual positive regard;
- Diversity among individuals and communities and the unique developmental journey of each must be honored and celebrated.”

Mission of the School/Special Emphasis: Paulo Freire Freedom School is being designed to carry out the EPI-TLC mission statement and embody its core beliefs. In a brochure that we developed in January 2004 to promote the idea of the school, we have attempted to unpack the school's mission under the tagline "*to know, to dream, to rise.*" An explanation of these three components of the school's mission should also make clear the special emphasis of our school.

To Know: Real knowledge comes from experiences that are authentic and engaging. Young people learn when learning is connected to the real world they live in, to the other things they are studying throughout the day, and to issues they care about. At Paulo Freire Freedom School we will create learning environments that support powerful teaching and learning. Learning environments produce powerful teaching and learning when they are aligned with the following principles of best instructional practice; when they are "student-centered, experiential, holistic, authentic, expressive, reflective, social, collaborative, democratic, cognitive, developmental, constructivist, and challenging" (Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde, 1998). Learning can be hard work, but at Paulo Freire Freedom School we believe that learning can also be a joyful experience. Our students will be encouraged to pursue individual passions, to explore their issues with peers, and to experience the satisfaction of knowing how to navigate through complex ideas and problems. To know is freedom. To know is to have power.

To Dream: At Paulo Freire Freedom School we will not shy away from thinking about the environmental and social problems facing the world - instead we will immerse our young people in thinking about them. Our curricular focus on social justice and environmental sustainability will be reality-based, but grounded in hope. Students will not only learn about issues and problems, but will be encouraged to think about solutions. Students will be required to act on these solutions through an integrated service learning program. And participation in the democratic structures of the school will help students develop leadership, conflict resolution, and peace-building skills. Paulo Freire Freedom School will be partnered with a school in the Lake Atitlan region of Guatemala. Through the development of personal relationships, our students will gain an intimate understanding of the social, economic, and political circumstances of another culture. At Paulo Freire we will not only learn about the world as it is today, we will also dream about it as it can be and work towards the fulfillment of that dream together.

To Rise: At Paulo Freire Freedom School we believe that children grow not only academically and physically, but emotionally, socially, and spiritually as well. The growth they experience in these areas is interconnected with their academic success and with their health and happiness as a whole person. We are committed to supporting and challenging every child to rise to their full potential. Paulo Freire Freedom School will be separated into developmentally appropriate learning environments – each designed to support students' unique developmental needs and capacities. Within these carefully designed learning environments individual students will be supported and challenged to grow and become...to rise and transform...to develop into integrally whole human beings (body, heart, mind, and soul).

Method of Instruction: Given the mission of Paulo Freire to create powerful and transformative learning environments which are developmentally appropriate and given that we had decided to focus (at least in the early going) on a particular developmental level, the middle

years (ages 11-14) – our research quickly led us to Turning Points. Turning Points is a nationally recognized, New American School Design, middle school reform model, housed at the Center for Collaborative Education in Boston, and based on a decade of research by the Carnegie Corporation into the special developmental needs of the early adolescent. We became so impressed with the research (summarized in *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century*, Jackson and Davis, 2000) and the Turning Points model (based on Carnegie’s research recommendations) that we not only have decided to make Paulo Freire a Turning Points ‘demonstration’ school – but El Pueblo Integral has become the Southwest Regional Center for Turning Points (see Detailed Business Plan for a discussion of professional development services provided by EPI-TLC). We believe the Turning Points framework (its principles and practices and its 64 school benchmarks) aligns very well with the mission and goals of Paulo Freire Freedom School.

The Carnegie study found that middle schools must first and foremost understand the intellectual, social, physical, moral and emotional developmental stage of the adolescent. For example, early adolescents are learning to move from concrete to abstract thinking and therefore teachers must ask their students to synthesize, analyze, and apply information rather than just learn facts. Similarly, middle school students are experiencing enormous physical changes and often have abundant energy which necessitates the need for opportunities for movement. Turning Points also recommends that students in their middle years must have the opportunity to develop strong relationships with their teachers. We have created structures at Paulo Freire – advisories, inter-sessions (where students and teachers have the opportunity to explore similar interests together), and ‘looped’ grade levels – which will allow for such relationships to occur. Finally, the work that middle school students do should have intellectual depth and purpose. To coincide with their growing awareness of the world, middle school students need to see and feel the relevance of their work and its connection to important ideas and issues. Paulo Freire teachers will create these kinds of opportunities in their classrooms and additionally, students will be able to practice giving to their communities (while practicing in a real life setting their academic learnings and essential skills) in our service learning program.

Aligned to both the AZ Learns standards and performance objectives and to the Turning Points principles and practices, our curriculum will provide both standards-based and performance-based learning opportunities that have real-world applications. Core subjects will be integrated to highlight the connections between the academic disciplines. Curriculum will be developed collaboratively and designed ‘backwards’ (Wiggins and McTeague, 1998) – meaning that we will start by designating what learning is essential (from the articulated standards and our unique curricular focus), and then work towards planning how to get students to meet those desired outcomes. Because we believe that “less is more” and that it is better to go deeply into a subject than cover breadth superficially, teacher collaboration will be critical to rectify both redundancies and gaps that might emerge. Subjects will be organized around essential questions that are provocative, relevant and multifaceted. While teachers may well use whatever means necessary to make formative assessments of on-going student achievement, the primary means at Paulo Freire for determining what students know and are able to do (and especially for making summative, end-of-unit, end-of-course, and end of grade level assessments of student achievement) will be through authentic demonstrations of student learning. Examples of these kinds of assessments could include students conducting a trial, publishing a school newspaper, or

presenting data obtained from their scientific studies to a regulatory panel. The mathematics curriculum will be delivered separately from the other core disciplines (see the Curriculum Samples section for a discussion of the Connected Mathematics Project and its internal integration of mathematical strands).

Students at Paulo Freire will at times be organized in multi-age groupings and at times in homogenous groupings depending on level. During the first year of operation the 6th and 7th graders will experience the same curriculum for humanities and science with opportunities given for remediation and extension. Teachers will be trained to effectively differentiate instruction to meet the needs of students at different levels of learning and with different learning styles. Because our school will be small (no more than 60 students in 2005) and teachers will have a low teacher-student ratio (about 20:1), we will have structures in place to maximize personalization of learning. One such structure is the 'ILP'. Every student will have an Individual Learning Plan created by students, parents and teachers working together to determine the accommodations needed for each child. ILPs will be part of each student's work portfolio which will be central to the student-teacher-parent conferences and must indicate proficiencies in the articulated learning outcomes before the student is able to graduate from middle school.