

ROOTS & Wings

Spring 2008

THE NEWSLETTER of ECHO HORIZON SCHOOL



Echo Center students shared lunch with Mr. Swiller and peppered him with questions.

Peace Corps Author Visits Campus

On Tuesday, March 11, author Josh Swiller visited campus to speak about his book, *The Unheard: A Memoir of Deafness and Africa*. He spoke in the Library with the 4th, 5th, and 6th Graders and shared a lunch with the Echo Center students.

Mr. Swiller was born with moderate hearing loss and became profoundly deaf by age four. He grew up "on the margins of the hearing world, unable to follow all but the most basic conversations." Under the guidance of dedicated parents and an audiologist, "who did not believe in limits," he developed great skill at lip reading and speaking.



Joking with students.

After graduating from Yale and spending some time at Gallaudet University, Mr. Swiller joined the Peace Corps. He was one of the first volunteers to go to Zambia to help local villagers with water sanitation. Because of the language barrier, people spoke clearly and repeated themselves. He quickly discovered that his hearing aids were "insignificant to the villagers next to the color of my skin... I found a place past deafness."

In August 2005, he had surgery for a cochlear implant. The practical difference in his life is tremendous—he can use the telephone now—but he stresses that the change is more emotional than audiological. He explains, "For me, the lesson of Africa has been that how well one hears really doesn't matter."

During his visit, Mr. Swiller captivated students with his adventures in school,

(continued on the next page)

Global Focus with Challenge 20/20

Huddled around a desk, the 4th Graders excitedly show off their latest projects—an oil derrick, a petroleum processing plant and a factory that creates biofuel from animal manure. Fashioned from reusable and recycled objects like aluminum foil and cardboard, these models are part of the students' year-long exploration of the world's energy resources and how they are used, depleted and renewed.

"This gave me a unique opportunity to teach the Scientific Method while extending the concept far beyond lab and classroom," their teacher, Kim Wynn, says.

They are participating in *Challenge 20/20*, sponsored by the National Association of Independent Schools. The program connects students throughout the world as they work together to solve global problems, such as education inequities, infectious diseases, intellectual property rights, maritime safety and pollution and the Digital Divide—challenges that the world's greatest scientists and experts are working to solve.

Students all around the globe are developing and testing solutions. The fourth graders share their theses, observations and procedures during discussions and with the use of technology. A partner school in Atlanta

(continued on the back cover)



Principal Matters

At the recent National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) Annual Conference, keynote talks by Sir Ken Robinson (*Out of Our Minds*) and Daniel Pink (*A Whole New Mind*) highlighted and affirmed a pedagogical approach that encourages divergent thinking, creativity, innovation and “flexibility of mind.”

Robinson spoke of a revolution occurring in American society, requiring us to think differently about how we use human and other resources. Pink’s thesis was similar, emphasizing the need for “big picture” thinking. “For years, Western society has been dominated by a form of thinking and an approach to life that is narrowly reductive and deeply analytical.”



I was inspired, since this is the kind of learning we endeavor to nurture at Echo Horizon. Children engage in projects and investigations that encourage a variety of responses. Success is often putting things or ideas together in new ways—coming up with unique solutions or different ways to approach problems.

With the current emphasis on high-stakes testing, it is difficult to resist focusing on a limited body of knowledge and strategies to figure out the right answer among several choices. But knowing that insight and divergent thinking will be critical as we confront the challenges of the next few decades, reinforced by such thinkers as Robinson and Pink, is sustaining as we work with our EHS students each day.

Paula Dashiell earned her Bachelor of Science from Indiana University and her Masters of Arts for teachers (M.A.T.) from Harvard University. She has been Head of School at EHS since 1987.

Pink emphasized that we are rapidly entering a new age that he calls “high concept” and “high touch.” “The future will reward “a different kind of mind—creators and empathizers, pattern recognizers and meaning makers—artists, inventors, designers, storytellers, caregivers, consolers, big picture thinkers.”

What does this mean for schools? For decades our dominant model has been a factory one—teach children basic skills and a specific body of knowledge that can be tested. Success is measured by supplying correct answers to a set of

“We have Two Gifts to Give our Children

One is Roots, the Other, Wings.”

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Echo Horizon School is to educate hearing, deaf and hard of hearing children in an inclusive environment in which independence, self-reliance and mutual respect are valued and encouraged with a curriculum designed to be challenging and developmentally appropriate for each learner.

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Swiller Visit

(continued from front page)

Africa and life and they marveled at his photos from his Peace Corps work. That evening, he posted an entry on his blog about his experience:

Echo is unique in the state, perhaps in the country—there are about 25 implant and hearing aid wearers in the school of 280 or so (K-6) and they are folded seamlessly and ingeniously into the regular classes. Hearing impaired children are pushed to learn at the same pace as everyone and, perhaps most importantly, they and their classmates learn to see hearing impairment as irrelevant – not that it isn’t there, but that it doesn’t matter—the world is wide and open to all.

Sharp kids, tough questions, all of it done with a smile. Can the world really be such a mess if we’re giving kids such a future?



Many of our Echo Center students were intrigued with Mr. Swiller’s cochlear implant.

EHS Cookbook!



This wonderful family cookbook, compiled by the EHS Parent Association, *Beet Roots & Chicken Wings*, contains over 400 recipes from 157 members of our school community (current and alumni parents, faculty, students, grandparents, alumni) and features current student artwork.

This collection will bring back warm memories, including old favorites from *Back-to-School Night* and *Open House!*

\$25 for one, \$20 for two or more. Order forms are in the Office.

Testing the Waters

Through actual and virtual field trips, scientific probeware, videoconferencing and blogging, 6th Graders are exploring issues impacting the world's water supply on another continent and in their own backyard.

Last fall, Technology Coordinator Elaine Wrenn was approached as an Apple Distinguished Educator to travel to Peru to model technology integration and global awareness projects for teacher education students at Kean University in New Jersey. Piggybacking on the January trip, she teamed up with 6th Grade teachers Cori Gafni and Marci Vogel to create an interdisciplinary unit addressing Science, Social Studies and Language Arts goals.

EHS students explored water quality factors and how changes affect the organisms that depend on that water for life. They used digital probes to record data on water from Ballona Creek and mountain water sources at PALI Institute. Ms. Wrenn took the equipment to Peru and transmitted more data back for students to analyze, as well.

In videoconferences with water quality expert Dr. Randy Yerrick and Ms. Wrenn, students examined water quality issues as well as the environment and culture of Peru. They also corresponded with them through an online blog.

As a result of this project, Mrs. Gafni says, "students are making connections between the locations—how humans have impacted the environment and what might be done to lessen any negative results." Jackson said, "It makes you think twice about what happens when you pollute the water." Lydia concluded, "Everyone needs to take part in saving our water."

Visit the *To Peru and Back* blog at:
<http://web.mac.com/elainewrenn>



Students test water samples and record data.

Focus through "Mindful Awareness"

Students drift through the Performing Arts room, pretending to be snowballs. Then, sitting barefoot and cross-legged on mats, they draw imaginary bubbles around themselves with their hands and pretend to zip themselves inside. "This bubble is made of special material that can't pop," says Susan Kaiser Greenland.

The imagination exercises are helping them to become more focused on their thoughts and feelings. This will help them to better self-regulate in times of stress.

The founder and Executive Director of the Santa Monica-based *Inner Kids Foundation*, "Ms. K.G." as the students call her, teaches Mindful Awareness. She has designed the classes for children who live in a world that bombards them with electronic media and pressure to perform.

Ms. Kaiser Greenland explains that she left her career as a corporate lawyer, "to teach skills to help children see what is happening in their minds, bodies and environment, without reacting in a habitual or automatic manner."

Both the Pre-K and 6th Graders (who are preparing for the transition to middle school) are participating in the program. "Their thoughts and feelings are constantly changing," she says, "just like one's breathing changes."

In fact, paying attention to breathing patterns is a key element in the process. "Everyone, run inside your bubble," she tells the students as they jog in place. "How fast is your breath now?" Responses include, "As fast as a hamster!" and "As fast as a rhino!"

Pre-K teacher Ellis Enlow believes that the classes have affected her students.

"They are slowing down and paying attention to what is going on both inside and outside," she said. "Some children use the techniques to relax before going to sleep. They are choosing where to place their attention."

"It invites us to stop, breathe, observe, and connect with our inner experience," according to

the Mindful Awareness Research Center at UCLA. Dr. Lidia Zylowska, who directs the Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder program, explains, "It improves your ability to control your attention... it teaches you to pay attention to paying attention."

Mindful Awareness has been found to have benefits, such as lowering blood pressure, and has been used to treat chronic pain, anxiety, and depression.

Ms. Kaiser Greenland encourages parents to practice these exercises at home, adding "doing so can create a sense of ease, bringing greater balance to family life."



Ms. Kaiser Greenland guides a student in a focus exercise.

Alumni News

RACHEL COLLIER, '05, a 9th Grader at Archer School has discovered that she has a particular interest in both Science and Math. She recently participated in an "Archer Abroad" trip to Machu Picchu, where she visited the Amazon.

ARISTE SALLAS-BROOKWELL, '99, a Political Science major at University of Michigan, is spending her junior year abroad in Greece. In Ann Arbor, she is active with Community Scholars Program and served on the Board of *Voice Your Vote*, registering student voters. Last summer she worked in Washington, D.C. for Senator Dianne Feinstein.

JESSE WATTS-RUSSELL, '05, a 9th grader at Windward School, has been enthusiastic about robotics since 7th Grade, participating in Legoland robotics competitions. He enjoys math, sings with the school chorus, studies Japanese and has interest in becoming an environmental engineer.

LAUREN WOLFEN, '03, a Junior at Harvard-Westlake, has been focusing on dance and art. She leads a team of students tutoring younger children at a local elementary school and serves as a Student Ambassador, touring prospective families around the campus.

Holocaust Survivors Speak with Upper Grade Students

On Thursday, March 6, two Holocaust survivors visited the school, speaking with 5th and 6th Graders about their experiences in 1940s Poland, Czechoslovakia and Germany.

Joseph and Helen Freeman met in 1940 while living under Nazi occupation in a Jewish ghetto in Poland. The couple was torn apart by circumstance and separately endured forced labor, sickness and terror in Nazi death camps over five years.

When Helen was liberated from Auschwitz in 1945 by Russian and American soldiers, she was overwhelmed. "At first I did not believe them. They had to repeat it many times... 'You are free.'" She returned to Radom, searching for family or friends. For many days, she found no one. She returned to her neighborhood, but her community was gone. "I had doors slammed in my face... I felt like an orphan," she recounted.

Wandering confused through the streets of their hometown, Helen and Joseph found one another—Joseph had narrowly escaped execution on his harrowing journey, through concentration camps, a "death march," and, more than once, being left for dead. Their faith played a large part in their survival.

Shortly after reuniting, the couple was married and moved to Munich. Helen described dealing with the discomfort of living in post-war Germany. She explained, "We signed up to be sponsored in America or Australia, but had to wait for six years." They emigrated to the United States in 1951 and now live in Pasadena.

After the talk, many students asked the couple about their experiences. Some students shared their own families' stories—grandparents who had survived the Holocaust, but had not wanted to talk about it. Joseph explained, "It is because we relive this pain when we talk about it... but it is important." Joseph is 92 and Helen is 85. They are motivated to speak out because they know that their time to share these stories firsthand is finite.



Mrs. Freeman shows students the serial number tattoo she received as a prisoner.

Members of the school's Video Club recorded the talk. The video account will be archived at the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.



Challenge 20/20

(continued from the front page)

presents its findings on water deficits in the form of a Power Point presentation.

The students inaugurated a *Keepin' it Green* column in the bulletin, with conservation facts and tips for the school community. They are experimenting with solar ovens, building prototypes out of pizza boxes and building solar flashlights inspired by a village in Tanzania.

They are performing an Energy Audit, as well, exploring the school building from the inside out. They have learned about the structure's history, sprinkler system, heating/cooling system, lighting, insulation, waste removal, etc. and will deliver conservation recommendations soon.

The lessons are sinking in. "We can't take our earth for granted," says Maud. Putting the finishing touches on his project, Schuyler suggests switching off one of the lights in the room. "He's saying if we don't need to use the resources," Mrs. Wynn told the class, "maybe we don't have to."



Students survey the school's HVAC units.

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