



THE CASE FOR UBIQUITY The Simultaneous Nature of Experiential Education

By Sara E. Nixon

The serenity and luxury of the campus are what first caught me off guard. Then, in the same manner that a dream unfolds I became aware of the soundtrack accompanying my introduction to this new world. Children's laughter, the flight and inertial responses of soccer and basketballs, adults' encouragement – good noises.

Nestled beneath the branches of mature, voluptuous trees on North Valley Road in Paoli, The Vanguard School protects its lush and verdant campus. Even during the summer months, the grounds are brimming with energy and excitement, for the Extended School Year (ESY) and SUMMER MATTERS Programs have invited them with open arms.

In a delicious culmination of uncertainty and confidence, I allow myself to be engulfed by what's happening around me. I know immediately that this is where I want to work, spend my days, contribute my time and efforts. This is a career worth earning.

As I gain familiarity with the campus and its constituents, I am aghast at the amount of talent and virtuosity harbored in a community of which I was previously unaware. Holly Zipperer, the Director of Summer Programs, has an arm's length of credentials – and puts them to exceptional use. ESY boasts a litany of offerings to support student learning, so as to reduce the incidence for regression between school/years.

SUMMER MATTERS, on the other hand, defies commonality and glorifies uniqueness. Also bursting at the seams with experiential opportunities, this program provides hands-on learning in real-world settings, their costumes of recreation veiling standards-based initiatives. They have achieved the impossible – a solid curriculum which is fun for the students! Sailing, horseback riding, sports and adventure camps and an RV Road Trip only scratch the surface of the SUMMER MATTERS agenda, rife with social learning, independence and community-building endeavors.

Teachers are well-versed in the theories and methods of Best Practice, Data-driven analyses and other performance indicators. Attention to detail is crucial when compiling individual reports on each child; this is not an effort performed in solitude. Team meetings and professional development prepare teachers for these specific strategies and summertime accommodations. Guided practice and brain-based approaches are revered for their casual-yet-imperative natures, and flow unflinching into the waters of SUMMER MATTERS.

Lesson plans reflect the diligence and creativity required for shedding light into the craggy depths of a nebulous mind. Adaptations and Differentiated Instruction play integral roles in conducting exercises from which all participants will benefit. (Some adaptations might include occupational therapy devices, hand-over-hand assistance, modified resources or rules, etc.) Teachers encourage eye contact with empowering words and reminders, gentle tones and chances for success. Overall, each aspect of the program epitomizes the foci in which it is grounded: Experience-Empowerment-Encouragement.

Saturated with educational fortitude, both ESY and SUMMER MATTERS will continue their reign as breezy fodder for inquisitive fuel. In an effort to expand its reach and broaden its scope, SUMMER MATTERS will be available to non-Vanguard students in Summer 08. What better way to celebrate a 2nd year than by sharing the wealth?

The Vanguard School is a non-profit, Special Education school providing services for students ages 4-21. Although most of the students have exceptionalities on the Autism Spectrum, some students have other cognitive or communicative disorders. Please visit us at www.vanguardschool-pa.org.