

PRESS KIT: AUGUST TO JUNE Bringing Life to School
A film by Tom and Amy Valens www.augusttojune.com 415 488 4656

TRAILER <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7LI-pT9MgE>
PRODUCTION STILL PHOTOS:



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Directors' Statement

Improving public education in America is considered a high priority by most of our leaders. Policymakers associate this almost solely with increased accountability as measured by student performance on standardized tests. This has stirred considerable outcry across the community of public educators. Many note that the isolated focus on so-called basic skills has eclipsed all the other functions of school, often to the detriment of children's joy in learning, sense of belonging, creative expression, and self-confidence. These are not easy things to measure, but they are visible and palpable in a vibrant community of learners. We are interested in showing how respecting both individual needs and the needs of a classroom community can translate into reaching our aspirations for a lively, creative, democratic society. Capturing how one unconventional classroom approaches academics within the context of a much larger picture helps bring into focus a broader vision of what education should and can be.

Whether it is described as progressive, humanistic, holistic, democratic, or alternative education, there are educational leaders, teachers and parents all over the US who resist a one-size-fits-all model of education. They have in common a desire to nurture the fire in each child, to recognize and support the whole child. Their approaches are alive and well, but often either under attack or under the radar in this time of testing and standardization. We have aimed for a film supporting these approaches that is not didactic, but rather specific, personal, engaging, and energizing!

Production Notes

"being almost invisible"

Tom's camera and tripod were practically a daily presence in the classroom, and the children all knew that he was there to film "everything that happens in school." They also

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knew that they could ask him not to film if it felt uncomfortable to them. At the beginning of the year there were often moments when a student asked him not to film-- particularly social situations where there was conflict. Time passed, and children got used to walking around Tom and his tripod, as if they both were just pieces of classroom furniture. They took turns attaching the radio microphone to their clothes, coming back to Tom to have him remove them when the battery made their pants sag, or the microphone got itchy. Sometimes they would talk to Tom via the mic--saying things like "Tom, if you're there wave your hand." But basically they ignored him. One day out on the playground Tom was filming at quite a distance three girls who were talking about friendship issues. One said to the other: "You know Tom can hear you." to which the other replied, very matter of factly: "I know! Who cares?" Tom was not invisible, but he was trusted. By the time the school year was over, he had captured 300 hours of interactions that would take him and his wife (the teacher) four years to form into a 95 minute film.

News and Reviews

"Yahoo, Good News!"

SusanOhanion.org (August 04, 2009)

http://www.susanohanian.org/show_yahoo.php?id=465

"It's one thing to deplore the assembly-line model of schooling, with its emphasis on mindless compliance and rote memorization. Far more useful is to see the alternative take shape in front of you. In August to June, we have a visual record of a community of learners, a series of moments -- discoveries and setbacks -- through the school year that accumulate like sparkling beads on a string. The result is as engrossing as it is illuminating."

-- *Alfie Kohn, author of The Schools Our Children Deserve and other books*

"At a time when a wave of standardization is turning our schools into test prep programs and impoverishing our visions of what schools can be, this film reminds us that powerful, engaging, child-centered, curriculum-rich, community-rooted schooling still lives. Never shouting or preaching, this film is both a detailed depiction of a year in the life of a vibrant learning community and a quiet call to arms to defend and expand authentic education for all children."

--*Monty Neill, Executive Director The National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest) and chair of the Forum on Educational Accountability*

"AUGUST TO JUNE is a wonderful movie that documents the entire year of an 8-10 year old classroom presided over by a veteran teacher whose husband is the film-maker. The classroom is in a small, long-established progressive, public school of choice out at the rural edges of Marin County in California. The teacher narrates; this is her last year of teaching. I'm particularly struck by the arts-laden work it describes because I am part of a group that is starting a k-8 arts-based charter school in Gloucester, Ma.

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“In our time of extremes of standardization and increasingly obsessive test prep this film demonstrates painstakingly the fruit of a powerful, engaging community-and-arts as well as a child-centered curriculum. This classroom is guided by a number of commitments on the teacher's part that unfold over time: an emphasis on children's choosing and planning; a focus on the arts and a commitment to children as disciplined and avid individual readers and writers; public projects and performances and democratic community discussions that are catalysts and culminations of kids' individual experiences; a tradition of parent participation and parents-as-teachers, taking in a lot from what the community has to offer. The patience with which the film shows the viewer how a culture is established and classroom routines flower into rich learning is extraordinary.

“Particularly interesting, given the age-old stereotypes of progressive practice, is the way that this teacher really pushes individual children hard, both in subject matter areas and in the crucial zones of what might be called emotional and civic intelligence. She is tenacious and tough, and she is on their case in scene after scene. The teacher has a philosophy and says what it is, but most often the screen shows the viewer precisely how learning unfolds; the film does not need to preach. The result is a series of portraits of individual children growing into active, informed, disciplined, enthusiastic participants in the life of the school, and creating in the process a terrific, democratic community together.

“The democracy piece, as evidence accumulates in the viewer's mind, is central to this school's practice. These children are used to working hard matters out in public and working together in a way that is very rare in US schools today. The children's growing initiative and educating and rearing of each other; the really outstanding quality of the art work; the music and dance that fill the air of each day; the general atmosphere of hard, hard work and sheer pleasure; and the way the viewer comes to see vital evidence of individual children's intellectual and esthetic and social passages over a whole year's time, make this one of the best films of progressive practice I've seen. It's also a fine portrait of the true necessity and awful complexity of good teaching, and the huge even operatic emotional range and strong stomach the work requires.

“ It's also just a flat-out gorgeous, beautiful movie, a brilliant poem of childhoods in motion over time. Among a myriad of other questions, this film dares to raise is the brave, too generally unasked question of whether children in many of our schools today are happy. It establishes through its multiple stories and varieties of evidence that great curriculum, hard work and opportunities for creativity and an intense and directed social life that respects the individual and draws him/her out are what young children need to grow well AUGUST TO JUNE makes me reflect that without this kind of record of children's lived experience over time, most other sorts of educational evaluation and writing about classrooms look awfully thin and paltry; here it's impossible to lose sight of the kids or forget them after the film stops. They have signed the air with an individual presence that honors both the film and the education they are getting.”

--Jay Featherstone, author Schools Where Children Learn, and Dear Josie, emeritus faculty leader Michigan State University's acclaimed teacher education program

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