

# Education Newsletter

*Bringing teachers and programs together for better educational outcomes.*

A Quarterly Newsletter

Issue Number 1, Spring 2015

**Mindfulness in the classroom**

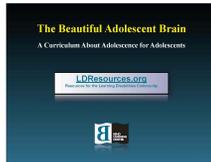
*Therapist reports on study using meditation to help adolescent boys struggling with trauma and attachment regulate their emotions in the classroom.*

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**Brain beautiful**

*Learning specialist dissects the beautiful adolescent brain.*

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**Using relationships to regulate emotions**

*Academic director reports on the importance of emotional regulation in academic success and how relationships lead to greater student control of emotions.*

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**Teacher Awarded**

*Social Studies teacher at Discovery Ranch for Girls receives Service Award at conference*

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**GED Choices**

*More choices in GED exams are available as revamped test proves expensive and difficult to pass. So far, 19 states allow alternatives to standard test. Is your state one of them?*

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**School focus at coming conferences**

*Check out the list of upcoming regional conferences with more focus on school*

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CURRICULUM

## Why Do I Have to Learn this?

*Structuring a Course through Goal-Driven Learning Re-Engages Students While Strengthening Executive Functioning Skills*

**By Martin Naffziger & Heather Tracy**

*New Summit Academy*

Schools around the world face the extraordinary challenge of engaging students in meaningful learning while developing the skills needed for success. The inherent nature of therapeutic schools and programs compounds that challenge, as each student who enrolls has experienced a breakdown in patterns of success due to social, educational, familial or personal difficulties. These struggles present in all aspects of therapeutic learning: traditional classrooms seeking to meet objectives, wilderness programs teaching experientially, and therapeutic groups building personal awareness within the milieu.

When students struggle academically and enroll in therapeutic programs, it is often due to one of endless permutations of focus difficulties, deficits in executive functioning skills, anxiety and disengagement due to negative learning experiences, and to schools

which do not or are unable to differentiate instruction based on individual learning styles and needs. Students' experiences seriously affect their perspective on education – their confidence in and engagement with the learning process.



In light of these challenges, educators must develop a structure, whether in a traditional classroom with four walls or the experiential classroom of the mountains or desert, which re-engages these students so they are able to experience true learning and skill development.

One model which has proven successful with students from such varied backgrounds is Goal-Driven Learning. This is not a new model, and has been researched and practiced for years, encompassing

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Editor  
Bob Burroughs

Problem or Project-Based Learning, Service Learning, Thematic Teaching and more. However, Goal-Driven Learning works particularly well with these diverse student populations, and it is important to outline how it works, and why.

## How Goal-Driven Learning Works

The challenge for educators who facilitate goal-driven learning is maintaining student engagement while developing skill and content mastery. To put it another way,



teachers need to be capable of organizing the course, guiding students in reaching a collaborative goal while meeting mandated objectives, and meeting individual student learning needs.

The key to the first challenge – organizing the course – is to begin at the end and work backward. The goal or the end product is, ironically, only the beginning, as educators must start with the goal and outline the steps necessary to get there. An example of a group goal that is accessible for most schools is the documentary film. In order to create a film, there are some skills that need to be learned, some content which students will need to know, and some steps that need to occur. A simplified version of these steps might include studying the history of the subject, identifying a key question to investigate, writing script or narration, conducting interviews, etc.



Once the steps have been collaboratively outlined in detail, teachers need to ensure that – by completing them – they are meeting educational objectives, the content and skill standards. This is where educators must go above and

beyond to match steps with objectives, but if the project is robust, then skills such as reading, analysis, writing, interviewing, etc. become necessary for completion.

The third challenge for the educator in facilitating a successful Goal-Driven experience for students is meeting individual student learning needs within this framework, which brings us to an explanation of *why* Goal-Driven Learning works.

## Why It Works

Goals provide purpose, and purpose provides motivation. If a class collaborates in forming a goal, students will see steps in a greater context and will be internally motivated to complete them. A Math assignment practicing the Pythagorean theorem by completing problems 1-30 (but only the odd numbers) may feel like a chore, like busy work to disengaged students. However, the same skill can also be mastered by calculating materials needed to build a greenhouse, rendering that chore a meaningful exercise to reach a larger goal.

A course with a collaborative goal broken down into concrete steps also provides continual assessment opportunities. A common profile in our organization, and I am sure it will be familiar to many, is the student who shuts down and refuses to engage in schooling because of anxiety. Often, these students have flown under the radar for the



majority of the semester or year, and when the time comes to produce, the implosion occurs. With a Goal-Driven model, students are not able to move forward until each step is mastered, providing teachers or facilitators with assessment milestones to ensure everyone is keeping up.

Goal-Driven Learning can also meet individual student needs by differentiating education based not only on student challenges, which is the typical approach, but on student strengths and interests. Student buy-in increases as their interests drive collaborative goals, and their contributions to the process are determined by their strengths.

Finally, Goal-Driven Learning provides real, experiential opportunities for students to build critical Executive Functioning skills, as the very process creates the need to practice and develop those skills. Executive Functioning challenges will often reveal themselves in the classroom as students struggle with goal-setting, staying on task, problem solving, and self-initiating. Goal-Driven learning creates a structure to internalize Executive Functioning processes as steps toward success, rather than relying upon simply applying skills (which may be underdeveloped) to succeed.

Goal-Driven Learning is able to involve our students, with their unique combinations of interests and strengths, challenges, and academic and social histories, in deep, meaningful learning. Students feel motivated to work toward a mutually developed goal, and validated in applying their strengths to a project. They build social skills through collaboration, and recognize the value in daily tasks as they apply knowledge and skills to real-world situations. As therapeutic schools and programs continue to strive to offer the richest educational experiences possible, Goal-Driven Learning can serve as a model to help them reach that goal.

For more information:

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## CONFERENCES

# Mindfulness, Testing, and the Brain Cited in Recent Talks

By Michael Koehler

Calo

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**Affiliation(s):** Academic Director, Calo

**Email:** [bburroughs@ca-lo.com](mailto:bburroughs@ca-lo.com)

**Date:** March 27, 2015

**Title:** "Using Relationships to Regulate Emotions in Classrooms"

**Summary:** Students with attachment and trauma issues face many challenges in a conventional classroom. Chief among those are emotional regulation skills. This workshop stresses the role of relationships in helping students with trauma and attachment issues regulate their emotions in the classroom.

Examples are provided from the education component of an RTC specializing in attachment and trauma. An intervention developed by Calo academic staff called the



"Henry method" illustrates how relational approaches to working with developmental trauma can achieve effective but not necessarily efficient positive changes in individual student academic success.

**Author(s):** Michael Koehler, MA, LPC

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**Email:** [mkoehler@ca-lo.com](mailto:mkoehler@ca-lo.com)

**Date:** March 27, 2015

**Title:** "Mindfulness in the Classroom: A Case Study"

**Summary:** The classroom environment can often be triggering for adolescents suffering from reactive attachment disorder, developmental trauma and other diagnoses such as ADHD and oppositional defiance. In an effort to create a learning environment more conducive to increased attendance, material retention and reduction of disruptive behaviors, mindfulness through meditation was taught to a small classroom of male students at a residential treatment center in Missouri. This experience was conducted over the course of a month to measure if in fact regular meditation practice can produce these desired changes. The study was conducted by a residential therapist utilizing insight meditation, or Vipassana. Results indicated positive changes in lowering classroom rhythms and creating a calm atmosphere for learning.

**Author(s):** Michelle Grappo, Ed. M. NCSP & Dana Reder, Ed. M. NCSP

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**Date:** February 6, 2015

**Title:** "Thinking Like a School Psychologist: Unpacking Assessments and Understanding Learning Disabilities"

**Summary:** Among the most important cognitive abilities for determining learning and academic success are fluid reasoning, crystallized knowledge, short-term memory, long-term storage, retrieval and executive functions. Specific learning disabilities, or SLDs, impact these basic psychological processes and manifest themselves outwardly as difficulties in listening, thinking, speaking, reading, spelling and mathematical calculations. Perceptual disabilities, brain injuries, dyslexia and developmental aphasia are a few of the common SLDs. Identifying learning disorders (LD) and SLDs vs. general learning difficulty (slow learners) is an important distinction to make in tailoring appropriate academic accommodations. Differences in etiology in learning difficulty are often rooted in variable neurological function. Interventions that focus on a student's particular area of deficit, i.e. reading,

## Thinking Like a School Psychologist: Unpacking Assessments and Understanding Learning Disabilities

Michelle Grappo, Ed.M. NCSP  
 RNG International Educational Consultants, LLC  
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 Harvard Graduate School of Education



writing or math, aid in improving cognitive skills essential for academic success. Case studies were presented to illustrate the impact of impairments in academic function as well as the administration of apposite interventions.

**Author(s):** Sanford Shapiro, M. ED.  
**Affiliation(s):** LDResources.org; Bend Learning Center

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**Date:** February 6, 2015

**Title:** "The Beautiful Adolescent Brain: A Curriculum About Adolescence for Adolescents"

**Summary:** Understanding the anthropological, neurological and spiritual components of adolescent development is an important determinant in the design and

facilitation of appropriate academic curricula. Early development and onset of puberty, particularly in adolescent females, may cause a variety of potential challenges for healthy brain development as well as needs inform educator approaches. Individual bias skews evidenced-based approaches and disregards empirical certainty in favor of supporting one's own intuitive knowing. A fixed vs. a growth mindset illustrates the difference between a way of perceiving that either

Micah is a Studies Teacher at Discovery Ranch for Girls in Mapleton, UT.

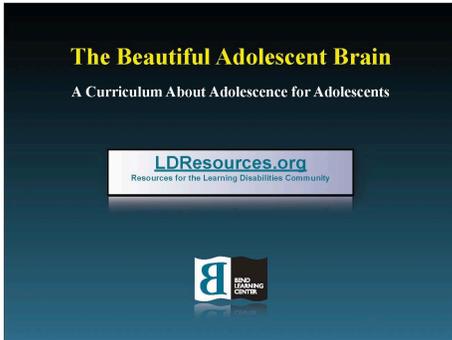
Clint Firth, Academic Director at Discovery Ranch for Girls, notes that Micah is typically "understated." For example, he notes that Micah's self-written biography for the Discovery Academy for Girls website reads: "*Micah Baker is the Social Studies Teacher at Discovery Ranch for Girls. She graduated Magna cum Laude from Southern Utah University with a Bachelors of Science in History Education. She has taught all ages but especially loves working with teenagers. While Micah's passion is with history, she loves learning about all subjects. She also enjoys puzzles and brainteasers.*"

But she is so much more than that, as Clint points out:

"In addition to being the Social Studies teacher, Micah also is in charge of the Experiential program at DRG, and is our Lead Teacher. Her passion for learning in all subjects is the stuff of legend. She is as comfortable teaching students about origami, sculpture, rocket building/launching, the humanities, frog dissection, statistics, and

Pearson Publishing and the non-profit American Council on Education. Exams have been created by Educational Testing Service (of SAT fame) and McGraw-Hill Educational. The alternatives are reported to be less expensive and, perhaps, not as difficult to pass for test takers. For example, the traditional test is \$80, versus alternative versions at \$50-\$54. Check your local state education office for more information.

Source: WSJ online, "High-School Equivalency Degree Loses Its Dominant Position."



remains static or embraces challenge and is responsive to adversity. Adolescents need compelling reasons to change and curricula needs to be based in a mutual and realistic framework. Teachers have a profound impact on adolescent development and therefore must be mindful of their own mindsets and willing to adjust approaches to effect change. An awareness of one's own sensitivities is essential in maintaining a healthy relationship and presence. Understanding adolescent brain development and best approaches to curriculum development entails doing more than covering rote material but more so on independent transfer of meaning.

*Editor's Note: Look for presentation summaries relevant to educators following upcoming conferences. See "Calendar" below.*

**TEACHER PROFILE**

**Baker Wins Service Award at Conference**

Micah Baker has won the Southwest region National Association for Schools and Programs (NATSAP) "Employee Service Award," presented at the group's conference in St. George, UT on March 27, 2015. The award is given annually at NATSAP regional conferences to honor direct-care staff who go above and beyond their job requirements to provide excellent service to clients.



astronomy as she is about history. She seems to be an expert at everything she teaches. Micah is a great example to the other teachers of consistency, hard-work, and classroom management. She is also an example to the students of how to be passionate about what you do, but also taking care of your own needs."

Bottom line: "She is truly a foundation stone that we all rely on here at Discovery Ranch for Girls."

**IN THE NEWS**

**More Choices for GED**

The *Wall Street Journal* recently reported that the revamped GED exam is more expensive and harder to pass, prompting other versions of the test to be created. Currently, 19 states haven chosen alternatives to the standard exam, published by a joint venture between

**Academic Focus at Regional Conferences**

**By Laurie Laird, Committee Chair**  
*New Haven RTC*

It is the goal of the NATSAP education committee to have academic tracks and/or academic presentations at all regional NATSAP conferences.



Typically the focus at the conferences have been geared towards clinical, administrative and residential, and we are hoping that with the addition of the academic presentations, more educators will attend the conferences in their areas. The academic presentations will focus on current best practices and other relevant topics for the classroom along with addressing the unique challenges of working in a therapeutic environment. The conferences will provide a forum to network with other educators and share ideas, strengthening and supporting all of our academic programs. **We encourage all teachers and school administrators to contact their regional conference committees and submit a proposal.**

Below is a list of the upcoming regional conferences:

- June 5**, Utah Regional Conference, Provo, UT.
- June 25-26**, Northwest Regional Conference, Bend, OR.
- September 10-11**, Midwest Regional Conference, Clayton, MO.
- September 29-30**, Northeast Regional Conference, Kennebunkport, ME.
- October 15-16**, Southwest Regional