

## **OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS**

### **The Making of a School: A Philosophy of Growth, Put into Practice**

Anna Logowitz, Teacher

Thank heavens for good neighbours! I thought as I stumbled through snow drifts to my classroom. Cold weather had killed my car battery. This had left me stranded with ten minutes to get to my micro-school, and in desperation I had run down the hill to ask a friend for help. Since I never came to school with less than three large tote bags containing everything from lightbulbs to salt (the tool kit of a progressive educator is vast!) this frantic dash was quite the spectacle, accentuated by the salad bowl (perfect for felting wool in) which, with hands full, I had to carry over my head like a wide blue helmet.

At the time, I was the founder and sole teacher at the Falcons Integralis Learning Community, a one room schoolhouse I created in Northampton, Massachusetts serving children ages five to fourteen. Integralis refers to the pedagogy that I have been composing throughout my teaching life and which now forms the core of the program's approach, while "Falcons" was chosen by the students as a tribute to the birds. Founded in 2016, the program represents a complex amalgam of home-school strategies, community-based pedagogies, and progressive philosophies that work together to create a joyful learning environment, different from any I had experienced myself or indeed, studied in school. In the following essay, I describe how I came to create the school, the beliefs that undergird my work, and the way a typical day with the Falcons operates.

On the day I describe above, with a dead battery delaying my arrival, I entered the school to see the ten Falcon students wholly engrossed in the work of the day. With no adult to guide them, they promptly supplied me with a detailed description of how Kim would write the Problem of the Day and Maria already had a plan to lead Gathering, and how of course they could check one another's work as we always do—with absolutely no indication that a school day without a teacher might in any way be a problem! Intrigued, I decided to spend the rest of that day as merely "a fly on the wall": the students, just as they had planned, ran the day without me, seamlessly and joyfully. It was clear to me then, as I had already suspected, that my school was working.

I came to this work through much the same process that my students use to acquire most of their learning in my school: by making things. The Integralis approach rests on the belief that students can make useful objects and make useful ideas, and that, by doing so, they both learn the content they need and sustain the community in which they learn it. These were the lessons I received as a young student at the Cambridge School of Weston, a Massachusetts progressive school where time, space, and interpersonal culture all served as materials in

constructing a creative learning environment. The school year followed a seven-term block schedule, the campus consisted largely of flexible spaces, and civility and support suffused interpersonal interactions. These factors shaped my early learning experience as much as the academic content did, and gave it a power that content alone could not achieve. As I went on to work in other progressive environments, these early lessons were deepened: I began teaching in a Montessori school, and saw there how student initiative and the development of “habits” could be harnessed by teachers to help students learn. Next, teaching in a Waldorf school, I saw how reverence for beauty and celebration, and a focus on “stories” could develop the imaginative inner lives of children. Finally, special education work taught me that students with different abilities can work together in the same community. These forces all became my materials in building ways to learn.

Despite these positive lessons, however, I also saw in all these schools how some students still struggled. Some struggled with the content, but others struggled with the demands of the learning environment itself—the desks and chairs, the fixed structure of lessons, and other aspects of traditional schooling. I saw how the environment determined students’ quality of life, and how the skills the traditional environment demanded of students got daily exercise, while those covered only at certain points in the curriculum gathered dust. These observations led to the designs that, eventually, became the Integralis method and the Falcons program.

### **The Philosophy of Integralis**

Visitors to the Falcons classroom—at least the kind I like best—often ask “why?” “Why are the students nailing holes through those stacks of paper?” “Why are so many ages in one room together?” “Why don’t you give tests?” and, ultimately, “Why does the classroom work the way it does?” To answer, we need to ask a bigger question: Why go to school? This question is always particularly close to the surface for us in Falcons because all members of the Falcons class are registered with their districts as home-schoolers. Their families have renounced school once, gained sole responsibility for and power over their children’s education, and yet sought out a classroom again anyway as part of their home-schooling. Why? What is it that children get in school that learning at home or in a fully self-designed way does not give them? What is school for?

Most of us have asked this question at some point in our lives. It is a very fair question. We learn early that we put on our coats to stay warm, eat healthy foods to care for our bodies, etc. For everything worth doing there is a “why,” and that “why” gives us incentive for doing it. For school to have any value, it, too, must have a clear and logical reason that even, and especially, a child can understand and endorse.

The reality is that, unlike the relationship between a thick coat and warming up, or saying something kind and getting a smile, the correlation between school and its purpose has gotten so convoluted over the last century it is no wonder so many students (and adults) are forced into abstract conjecture. They have not experienced many of the problems that our schools were created to solve, and the concretion of decades of such solutions piled higgledy-piggledy on top of one another has created such an edifice that many of the solutions now fail to work in any case—if in fact they ever did. Somewhere under all of the overdeveloped infrastructure

and assessments, architecture and standards, we have misplaced the point. We go to school to learn.

The trouble then becomes defining learning. Does it mean good grades? Passing all the tests? Graduating? Is it the word for knitting a scarf when one couldn't last week, or writing a name when one couldn't last year? Is it being able to answer questions about big topics like suffering or injustice—or is it asking them because one understands the value of listening and the difficulty of easy solutions? And is it something that comes from outside of us, or from within?

Biology offers a useful metaphor for the process by which all of these things (except maybe the grades!) occur. In the physical world we take in substances from outside of ourselves—food, water, air—and make them part of us, gaining strength, energy, and mass in the process. The act of converting these materials from outside of us to part of us quite literally increases us. We call it “growth.” “Learning” it seems to me, describes a nearly identical process that occurs in the non-physical aspects of ourselves: our thinking, dexterity, muscle memory, working knowledge, and the complex places where all of these and more weave together. It is the process by which a piece of knowledge or a skill that begins outside of us becomes part of us to such an extent that it influences all we do, and also how we do it. It, too, increases us.

All models of learning influence how we carry out the task of teaching, and when we approach learning as growth, several characteristics of its behaviour suddenly become obvious—at least to anyone who has ever tried to garden. First, growth strives continuously to occur. As Sir Kenneth Robinson has noted, you can't grow a plant; a plant grows itself. Once extant, plants tend towards growth no matter what is in their way, as indicated by the many trees that have intermeshed themselves with chain link fences. While unfavourable conditions can slow growth it never actually switches off, merely changes shape (sometimes quite problematically) in response to the obstacles and blockages that it encounters. Plants render this process vividly visible, but animate life forms—humans among them—work the same way, albeit often internally. We may not always grow into the shapes expected, or even in shapes that are healthy, but our ability to grow never halts, it merely changes shape, using whatever is available to fuel itself as it does so.

The act of growing is also the act of growing back: of repair, recovery, or healing. When we break an arm or gash our skin, the same force that created flesh and tissue now powers the conversion of resources into new flesh. When we suffer a non-corporeal trauma, the process by which we convert mental damage into wisdom requires much the same meaning making and skill-building as more peacefully-acquired learning. This means that injured beings have very similar needs to growing ones, and for similar reasons: the more conditions favour growth, the more growth (or growing back) can occur. The less conditions favour it, the less it can occur, the longer the injury remains, and the more it disrupts growth efforts in other areas.

Both animals and humans, when properly nourished, grow strong; when deprived of food and water, growth first slows, then stops. Nourishment also increases our ability to grow back after suffering damage or strain. In classrooms, what is the ideal amount of strain, and why? In his book *Lost at School*, Ross Green reminds us that, “kids do well if they can,” (Greene, 2008, p. 10) but students whose abilities fall short of what their surroundings demand of them

must resort to coping strategies to compensate for what they cannot do. Failure is frightening and can lead to unpredictable results, so children who cannot rely on competence to keep them safe from these must scramble to gain control of the situation through whatever means they can find, which accounts for many “behaviour problems.” This dynamic intensifies with students with trauma histories because they have experienced situations that overcame their skills with terribly destructive results, and this visceral understanding drives them to avoid situations that could put them out of their skill depth as a matter of life and death, which for them such situations often have been.

The key to successful growth for plants or animals is to find that place where the organism is both comfortable and challenged to move beyond itself. In a classroom, that sweet spot is well defined by the linguist Stephen Krashen who describes the learner entering a class at a place of “i.” Comfortable learning happens, writes Krashen, at  $i+1$ . Stress arises when the demands of school impact children as more than  $i+1$  and boredom sets in when the demands fall short of our starting abilities. Given adequate nourishment and minimal strain, we will grow, and thus grow back, after an incident that exceeds our ability to the point of damage, but this process cannot happen if strain follows strain, or if nourishment cannot rise to the challenge. The traumatized students that I worked with in my special education teaching, by contrast, went from shattering strain to shattering strain, producing chronic survival mode rather than productive learning, and many far less shaken students experience a lesser version of a similar equation.

Consider a reasonably safe and materially-resourced student attending school in a high-stakes, fast-paced learning environment. She pours her energy into rising to the greatest hazard before her—often the test on Friday or the paper due next week—with little left over for wonder, curiosity, or conversion of the material she is facing down into part of her long term working knowledge: she is fielding her education, not growing from it, and the format of her schooling provides the strain that makes this necessary by diverting large amounts of energy into performance and keeping up, and thus away from converting experience into growth. Simultaneously, resources like time, relationships, and pleasant experiences cannot keep up with the demand, and the child wears intellectually thin. We see this attitude so often with students of so many types that many teachers think it normal and mistake it for learning, but those who have seen students truly growing and revelling in their education recognize the difference.

### **Life in the Integralis Classroom**

The Integralis pedagogy is based on the premise that the demands of a learning environment have as much growth, damage, or regrouping potential as learning activities do, and often far more long-lasting effects. Creatures adapt to, and thus learn, what we live, and as a result, learning communities should be designed such that daily life in them requires and rewards the same skills and knowledge that we want students to learn—by allowing each student to participate at their own level, and progress at  $i + 1$  pace from there. The activities that are not specific and deliberately taught lessons, e.g., transitions, selecting supplies, solving problems, and, above all, interacting with one another and the learning environment, all teach as much as, if not more than, teachers and teaching materials do, whether we intend them to or not.

Adjusting to these features of the school day demands adaptation growth from our students, and by harnessing this to our own ends these aspects of classroom life become powerful tools for education rather than competition or hindrances. Any problems within the school day then also become opportunities for learning. As one technology teacher said to me on a day when her computers had crashed, “If there is a problem accessing the curriculum, make the problem into the curriculum.” Integralis operates almost entirely on this approach, applying the resources to embrace the learning potential of problems constructively and through this process enlisting students in the ultimate Project-Based Learning assignment: growing up.

This requires very high engagement from the students, so as each new student joins us we focus on building engagement skills first, fitting initial expectations to the skills the child arrives with. Some need mandatory activities to feel safe, some just watch, one spent weeks watching from the hall before joining in and needed to know she could run back to the hall at any time. We fill the room with enticing objects and circumstances and when the children reach we say “yes.” When they speak, we say “good job.” As students settle in, we then start to shape behaviours and challenges, pushing those who are most settled, and constructing or capitalizing daily classroom life to provide the in-context learning experiences that build the skills we want the students to acquire.

One manifestation of this is that students typically run as much of the Falcons classroom as is constructive for them to take on. In fact, the first assignment I give all of our intern teachers is to do nothing, watch, and see how much the children can do alone, including reversing and correcting their own missteps. Only after the novice teachers have mastered this awareness of child capabilities do budding Integralis teachers progress to the art of providing support for students, which consists of picking up where the students leave off and providing the resources students need to face challenges at i+1 level. The resulting classroom looks a bit like a Montessori school, but with the added element that students assist in the continuous design, creation, and evolution of the learning community. This served us well in the early days of the program when so much needed to be created for the first time, but it also keeps the program developing and in constant response to the specific children and challenges of the moment.

Because we rent a space used by many others, each Falcons day begins with constructing our classroom from scratch, using hundreds of objects, which reside in a cupboard in the hall when we are not in session. The students have built most of our materials, and they work as a team to unpack child-made books, measurement tools, and the countless objects that have special significance in our tiny world, putting each in its proper place in a complex twenty minute dance which we do to music. They also assemble the Tool Shed and Materials Box, centralized repositories for the resources we all use as needed throughout the day. Students stock the Materials Box with materials scavenged from outdoors or castoffs from home (we are in constant need of fabric, which comes largely from torn clothes, teaching sustainable upcycling) and whenever a need arises in the classroom, we look together at how to solve it and create a tool—tangible or behavioural—that then becomes part of the Tool Shed. Our rulers, protractors, bevel gage, drop spindles, kit of suggestions for what to do when stuck, useful phrases for class discussions have all been built by students; so have many of our books, our master map and timeline, and nearly all of our traditions.

Students build their own objects for several reasons. First, it has tremendous learning value. To make a ruler, students must reason out which materials will do the job well—paper is too flimsy, and cardboard much too ragged, but wood works well. Next they work that material, practicing their measurement, sawing, and sanding, and in so doing building the depth of awareness described by Carl Bereiter when he frames understanding as “relation between the knower and an object of knowledge.” (Bereiter, 2002, p. 100) Once the wood is ready, students must then add the marks, and doing this requires that they gain a working dexterity with measurement systems and the units that each use, as well as practice with fractions, learning what happens when we divide an inch in half, then in half again, then in half again, and referring to each portion, by necessity, using its proper name. Constant relation—between people, materials, and ideas—forms the fabric of Integralis life.

Students then use the tool for as long as they need it. This serves several very important purposes. First, each use provides a built-in review of everything the student learned while making the object. The fractions discussions come pouring back when a student grabs a ruler to measure snow on a day when 6 ½ inches of it have fallen, or must split a yard of string into quarters to lace a book binding. Second, it demonstrates, constantly, that what children do in school enriches their lives immediately. When we find we need a ruler, or a calendar, or a way to measure angles, we make one, and the act of filling this tangible need becomes the children’s school work for as long as it takes to finish. When complete, the resulting product becomes part of their lives and part of our classroom, enabling us to do that which we couldn’t do before.

Learning works in the same way: by acquiring new skills and knowledge children gain abilities and a richness to their lives that they lacked before, but so much of traditional schooling then asks them to table this for future use that the benefits all become abstraction. In an Integralis classroom, students get to experience the benefits immediately, concretely seeing their quality of life increase as a result. This constantly reinforces the message and the mindset that the learning they do in school has value now and makes them richer in ways that they themselves can feel. Morning setup, in which students lay hands on all of this wealth, serves as an opportunity for reflection of all they have gained and of all they can do. When objects break, which they inevitably do with the constant moving in and out of the cupboard, the task of fixing them again becomes the learning adventure, providing still further review, practice in design thinking and revision, and a chance for older students to pass on the knowledge tied to the object to newcomers who arrived after it was made. Day after day of setup and tool care means that the students carry the initiative and skill for this work within themselves. The only difference on the day I pretended not to be there was one pair fewer hands to build the room.

After morning Set-up, the students turn their attention to Jobs, the Problem of the Day, and Tasks, a series of activities that balance serving the community with developing the self in a manner that allows all skill levels to work in community together. Jobs consist of the more specific chores necessary to the running of the classroom and vary day to day depending on what we are doing. Teachers—and often students, too—create the jobs by looking at what needs to be done to prepare for the day, then delegating all tasks that have pedagogical value to the students. For example, suppose that in Afternoon Lesson I want students to write down as many historical events as they can think of and then put them in the order that they think

they happened (a common exercise, as we do a good deal of accessing prior knowledge and then putting it in context.) This lesson will require paper of a useful size for the students to write on—perhaps 2”x 3”. The actual cutting provides great fine motor exercise for the youngest children, while the measuring creates another opportunity for practice that can be built on by writing the instructions in creative ways (for example: “Cut these papers into 8ths,” or “Cut 25 rectangles each with an area of six inches.”) Suppose, too, that I know that I will need the date of the *Amistad* trial for this lesson, but cannot remember it. I could look it up, of course, and tell it to the students that afternoon, but much more learning occurs if one of the jobs becomes, without preamble, “Find out the date of the trial regarding the slave ship *Amistad*, and write it down so we can use it for Afternoon Lesson.” The older children will have to practice their research skills, and in the process of searching for the information will also encounter other events that they can use for the Afternoon Lesson exercise. They will also get a preview of the *Amistad* case, meaning they will have information to contribute to the lesson when it occurs, and just enough familiarity with the story that the new information they receive will have something to stick to. Best of all, each of these jobs provide students with a chance to exercise academic skills meaningfully. There is no need to ask “why are we doing this?” We do what needs to be done to keep the community running—and the fact that we learn while doing it is the way of the world.

In the Falcons classroom, instructions for each job or task are written on pieces of discarded roof slate scavenged by the students, because we determined, as a community, that slate allowed us to save paper by providing a surface we could write on again and again. It also adds a tactile richness and a sense of specialness that endless interaction with paper or screens does not. As each child claims a job, they stack the slate on the “accounted for” pile, so that anyone can see at a glance which jobs are taken and which left to do until they are all done. Systems like this abound in our classroom, most designed by students to solve problems as they arise—such as multiple students doing the same job without realizing it—and Integralis students can read their classroom space in much the way that a skilled guide can read a woodland.

All jobs take different lengths of time, and as students finish they then turn their attention to Problem of the Day. This challenge poses a mathematical question about something we are studying. For instance, the day after the initial *Amistad* lesson, Problem of the Day might be “If the first slaves arrived in Jamestown in 1619, how long had slavery existed in North America by the time *Amistad* set sail?” As with all elements of an Integrals classroom, the Problem of the Day serves several purposes. The first, of course, is math practice, but it also often calls for skills that students have not covered yet, and so becomes the catalyst for learning a new concept, either from one another or from the teacher. This is quite a different dynamic than that of a teacher informing students that today they will learn about subtracting dates and proceeding to show them how to do it, with or without their buy-in. In Problem of the Day, the students have a goal to reach and the habit of wanting to reach it, and the teacher becomes a resource that they can seek out to help them in this quest if they so choose. This puts control and initiative in the students’ hands—while also freeing them up to follow other paths, such as trial and error, asking one another, or using resources around the room.

Meanwhile, the content of Problem of the Day demonstrates that every subject we learn about has a mathematical dimension. If we are working on history, then they grapple with just how far apart events in different eras are, or what it means to group years together in a millennium, or how generations work. When studying cells, they learn to work in the trillions, and practice grasping just how many little pieces we are made of. Percentages, fractions, exponents, geometry all manifest in science, history, and daily life, so we present them as such, rather than in a vacuum, all while equipping students with the mathematical tools to engage with them there. Lastly, the fact that Problem of the Day often demands new skills builds the students' confidence in attacking an unfamiliar problem head-on, a sort of inoculation against the pervasive cultural math-phobia to which they will almost certainly someday be exposed, and a powerful habit to bolster them in engagement with other forms of challenge as well.

When students finish the Problem of the Day—again, all at different times—they check their Task Lists. Tasks are hands-on assignments that resemble Montessori “Works” but with one key difference. Like Works, Tasks are laid out around the room where students can easily see and reach for them, and they often have a few enticing pieces that children want to touch or engage with, creating a draw towards the activity. Unlike Montessori Works, however, where all parts of the exercise are neatly provided on a carefully arranged tray, Tasks usually require students to select at least some of the tools or materials needed to complete them from the centralized Tool Shed or Materials Box. For example, a task entitled “Tool Building” might contain a finished knitting needle and the instructions “Make a set of knitting needles of your own!” Using the example, their own reasoning, and each other as resources, students then identify what materials they will need (likely chopsticks and wooden beads, like the example, but often they come up with fresh ideas that work better) and what tools will have the desired effect (sandpaper and glue) and work their way towards their destination. This builds problem-solving skills and also rewards innovation in a way that can be difficult in, say, a Montessori classroom where combining materials from multiple Works disrupts the running of the room. It also mirrors how we use our minds. If I want to add up my grocery costs, I must first select the right “tool” from my arsenal of mathematical knowledge and apply it to the job. Division will not get me the result I need, but addition will. So, too, do the students practice identifying what they need to get the results they want, using their bodies in the space as well as their minds.

As children get older, their Tasks call on them to focus and practice greater self-discipline and concentration, while still prioritizing positive relationships to the academic skills in question. Some common Tasks include “Continue the Story,” in which students add onto a prompt such as “Once upon a time, there were four...” Or “Experimentation” in which they use the scientific method to answer a question. Older children often also create tasks for younger children, writing the morning quotation themselves, or whole books for the younger readers, practicing artistic skills by creating twenty-six small pictures for early readers to practice matching letters to, and, once, at a student's suggestion, creating the “Letters That Can Be Silent” announcement on our wall, which students used as a reading reference for the next three years.

## OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS *The Making of a School*

The Task system allows each student to participate in classroom life at their own skill level without undo stretching or too much review, and also helps us zero in on particular skills in which a child is struggling. “Capitalization” gets assigned frequently, as does “Pin the Comma on the Sentence,” and we also create Tasks to address particular difficulties, such as “Part to Whole” for a student who struggled to contextualize information accordingly.

Students self-direct through the Jobs/Problem of the Day/Tasks portion of the day, seeking teacher help as needed, but also guided by the class rule to “Ask three before you ask me” (borrowed from our local Montessori school) with the mandate that the first of those three is always themselves. The result is a student body that accesses teachers as needed, and where teachers sometimes hop in, but that does not rely on them as the primary engine for learning: the students provide that themselves, through high interest and practice engaging with the room.

An hour before lunch a teacher or student will recite a verse to signal clean-up for Gathering. The verses usually relate to a topic we are studying and can be used to plant certain language in the children’s minds that will be useful later. Here is an example we use by the poet Nikita Gill (2021):

We have calcium in our bones,  
iron in our veins,  
carbon in our souls and nitrogen in our brains.  
93% stardust with souls made of flames,  
we are all just stars that have people names.

These kinds of mnemonic strategies reinforce certain necessary factual learning. In this case, it means that students will recognize the element names when they meet the periodic table a few weeks later, and also fuel several Problems of the Day on percentages. Meanwhile, the verse itself plays a role in classroom life by signaling cleanup in a pleasant way. When the verse is over, students all shout “Cite your source!” and the reciter does so. Not surprisingly, this builds a habit (and a sense of levity) that comes in handy for research projects.

The Talking Egg—a stone darning egg that the class has adopted—starts in the center, but children roll it to one another to take turns talking, which allows them to call on one another’s raised hands rather than relying on a teacher to do so. Gathering topics and activities respond to classroom life, ranging from discussions of what learning feels like or how we can create a system to resolve conflicts among ourselves to studying holidays and reflecting on current events. Throughout 2020 many of our Gatherings have focused on helping students make meaning of the era they are living in and building their sense of pride in their ability to weather the hardships of a pandemic that some day their grandchildren will ask for stories about.

After lunch and recess we return for Afternoon Lesson, in which we work together on a topic or project in a manner that lets students participate at their wide range of levels. Often this centers around building a tool as a team, such as our master timeline, in which younger students practiced counting by writing the dates while older students learned the dates’ significance. The finished object then becomes one of the tools we use in our classroom, both

as a reference and often, as with the map and timeline, as a living document to which we add dates of events we have studied and markers of places we have learned about.

To plan the curriculum for Afternoon Lessons, we use a system we call Arc Planning, in which we identify what we want the children to know or be able to do by the end, but leave flexible how we will get there. This allows us to capitalize on the children's interests and the momentum of the class along the way. If the arc plan is that they learn about cells, but (as happened) a pandemic comes along, we can easily veer into studying germs and how they relate to cells before circling back to organelles and cell division. If a student excitedly brings in a human body toy along the way, we can immediately absorb it into a spontaneous lesson on organs and tissues and how cells work together to create them. Knowing where we ultimately want to go allows us to make full and organized use of where we already are, much as a sailor harnesses the winds available to head towards a destination.

We also operate constantly on what we call the Ultimate Arc Plan, staying aware of who and how we want these children to be as human beings all their lives, and this tells us when to drop what we thought we were doing in the name of something more important. Sometimes this is small—jettisoning Afternoon Lesson to build a fort together in the snow because the joy and memory of it will be with them forever—and sometimes quite large: a death, a pandemic, or a cut-to-the-core question about racism can cause us to put down the arc we thought we needed to take on something far bigger and more long-lasting. Cells can wait, but sometimes the best time to learn the harder arts of being human is right now when the need of them has broken down the door. Sometimes, too, we realize that a child's approach to a problem is far better than our own, and arc planning gives us the flexibility to reward and integrate that, rather than forcing a choice between the child's idea and our plan.

At the end of the school day, we clean-up, which, again, means packing every single object back into the cupboard (spatial skills! Who needs a puzzle with a cupboard to pack?) staying on task, and working as a team. Often the day ends with a round of applause, and many parents choose to stay so that the kids can play outside. This is when the parents bond, too, which matters a great deal to the health of the community.

### **A Culture of Community**

Cultivating a 'culture of community' is as key to Falcons as is the engagement with space and tools. We build our culture in several ways. First, the constant communality of living deeply in the space and its objects creates many shared experiences, which we then reference constantly, reflecting them back into the community in which they were made. Second, we use the Falcons themselves as one of our primary sources for civics and social studies topics, looking at our school's own history as an example of timelines or dissecting our own oral traditions. Third, we treat traditions as tools, using them deliberately to build the culture of the class, as long as those traditions serve us. Some of these traditions, like birthdays, are familiar to the world outside our classroom, but others, like the systems we use for keeping the journal box straight or the deep significance of the game of Heffalump, are as hard to articulate to outsiders as the subtleties of a regional dialect.

Another aspect of our community culture is the ability to conceptualize our students not just as individuals but as parts of the complex organism of the class. When we choose projects

for the full group, we assess what “the class” is ready for or needs to work on in exactly the way that we do for individual students when setting their Task lists. This does not mean that we look at what each individual is ready for or needs, but at what the ties between them, their teamwork, their collective knowledge, and their ability to function as a whole is ready to develop. In effect, the more-than-the-sum-of-its-parts entity of “the class” becomes another student in itself, and we educate this entity that students make together just as we educate the individual students within it.

This constant awareness of the spaces between community members, and the momentums and movements of the community as a whole—a bit like a school of fish—is perhaps the most powerful feature of the Falcons classroom. That sense of community is constantly visible in the pride students take in the fact that they are part of the Falcons family. This is something students could never get in a home-school setting, and rarely get in a traditional school setting—even the most progressive of schools. Students in my classroom have a deep sense of belonging akin to being part of a tiny handmade nation. For education to be powerful, it must resonate with parts of children that have power, and the feeling of space and group, of ties to others, to community, to place and to history. Integralis is devoted to providing all of this.

### References

- Bereiter, C. (2002). *Education and mind in the knowledge age*. Taylor and Francis.
- Gill, N. (2021). *Where hope comes from, poems of resilience, healing and light*. Hachette Books.
- Green. (2008). *Lost at school*. Scibner.
- Shutz, R. E. (2019). “Summary of Krashen’s Theory of Second Language Acquisition,” Stephen Krashen’s Theory of Language Acquisition. [www.sk.com.br/sk-krash.html](http://www.sk.com.br/sk-krash.html)

### Author details

Anna Logowitz is the founder and head teacher of the Integralis consortium, a collective of linked microschoool classes and support systems for school teachers and homeschool families seeking durable alternative approaches. She has taught in public, private, traditional, and progressive education schools, and is driven by the desire to make healthy education options available to all demographics of learner.

Email: [integraliseducation@gmail.com](mailto:integraliseducation@gmail.com)



This written work by a collective of Anna Logowitz is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Unported