

## PLAYING AROUND AT TRINITY

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It has been said that human beings are the only amateur animals; all the others are professionals, who have no leisure and do not desire it. They live to make honey or chase rabbits or dive for mullet, and when they are done they rest and then go at it again. C.S. Lewis quipped that when God made the beasts dumb He saved the world from infinite boredom, for if they could speak they would all of them, all day, talk nothing but shop. Leisure is a distinctively human activity—or state of mind. For Aristotle, leisure was the natural purpose of human life: “We wage war in order to have peace; we work in order to have leisure.” *Homo sapiens* might also be called *homo ludens*— the “playing animal.” And in this, as in all things, we show ourselves to be imitators of that divine Wisdom, who is described as God’ playmate at creation (Proverbs 8:30).

Play and leisure get a bad rap these days, probably because they are too easily associated with activities that make us more like vegetables than like the pinnacle of the animal kingdom: television and video games. But the sort of play that Aristotle had in mind is at once more enjoyable and more demanding: leisured activities like conversation, sport, art, and literature. These do not come naturally to humanity—they require training and a development of taste and discernment. Any school which purports to offer an education—as opposed to mere vocational training—will be concerned with the development of a capacity in its students for this kind of leisured activity. I would go so far as to say that this is, far above any technical capacity, the true mark of an educated person: Is she someone who spends leisure time doing something interesting for the sheer love of it?

At Trinity School we aspire to teach students how to play. Most of us are comfortable with this goal for our youngest children, but we think that somewhere between kindergarten and college it’s time to get down to work not for the love of it but for the score or admissions or the bucks. We too quickly forget that what makes us all human, from the least of us to the oldest, is this capacity for civilized leisure. Thus it is that we aspire as a school to offer a “rich yet unhurried education.”

Hurry is the enemy of leisure—try writing a poem when you’re late for an appointment. And rushing through our days and years will not make us into very interesting people.

When I say that we teach play I mean that we teach students how to go on a nature walk and choose a flower to bring back to class to watercolor. I mean that we read books to them at lunch time not to keep them from talking but to keep them dreaming. I mean that we teach them to draw and sing even though most of them will never earn a dime from doing so. And I mean that we turn them loose for imaginative play on the playground.

Which brings me to the Natural Learning Initiative (NLI) and the surveys we're sending home this week. If you are a parent, you will find a Schoolgrounds Master Plan survey in your child's Friday folder. As a school we are excited to be working with NLI in order to develop a masterplan and a phased plan for our schoolgrounds. Our Schoolgrounds Committee selected NLI as a consultant because we are excited about the work this Triangle-based, nationally and internationally renowned group has accomplished in other schools. Several of us have visited a school in Southern Pines whose outdoors NLI designed, and we came away amazed and thrilled with the prospect of using our schoolgrounds for extending our education, in its broadest sense, to our outdoors.

Let me give you one example. At Southern Pines the parent organization, in cooperation with NLI, designed a kid-sized log cabin. Along with this fixed structure, NLI helped the school take large beams and saw them into blocks two or three feet in length. These blocks, which are too heavy for one child to move but quite movable when two or three children cooperate, have endless possibilities: furniture in the cabin, benches outside circled around the campfire in front of the cabin, horses for riding. Bruce Cunningham, the head of the Southern Pines project, described the difference between this sort of play structure and a factorybuilt jungle gym as the difference between painting freehand and painting-by-number. We might say that this is the sort of structure that encourages genuine leisure. NLI will also help us with more traditional play areas on our campus.

The potential for our campus, along with its nature preserve, to be used to foster this kind of play is enormous, and we are excited to be working with NLI. They will be working with us to integrate our athletic facilities with the other outdoor education areas. They will consider the sort of leisure that is appropriate and important to kindergartners and to high schoolers and to every age in-between.

For this valuable planning we need your help. We are asking all of our families to complete the enclosed survey and return it to the school (either office) by Thursday, April 12. Students will be completing their own surveys, as will teachers and non-teaching staff. Our school will be an educational space for us all, and we want to hear from everyone. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.