

# A School of Hope

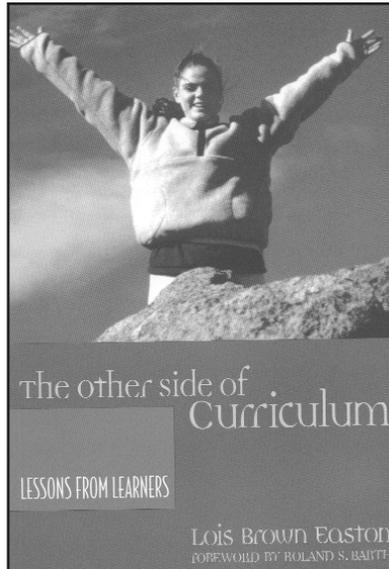
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A book review of *The Other Side of Curriculum: Learning from Learners*, by Lois Easton Brown.

The term boarding school conjures up images of students from wealthy families with future plans that include Harvard or Yale. But Eagle Rock American Honda School and Professional Center is far from the traditional boarding school. Nestled in a valley just outside of Estes Park, Colorado, this private school is home to about 80 students from all over the nation. These students, unsuccessful in other educational settings, include former high school dropouts, druggies, gang members, and students with criminal records. At Eagle Rock, they learn to live in a community where they commit to no drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, or sex; share in KP (kitchen patrol); experience a wilderness trip that would challenge even the most experienced outdoorsman; and live in a culture where learning is at its heart. *The Other Side of Curriculum* is the story of this school.

Lois Easton Brown, the Director of the Professional Development Center, tells Eagle Rock's story in this fascinating read. She introduces the reader to her students and the school as she

illustrates how Eagle Rock has brought to life the notions of progressive education. Each chapter is a learning story exploring topics such as Eagle Rock's refreshing take on standards-based education, curriculum that is competency based, and the



connection of instruction and assessment as seen through the eyes of students. At the same time, the reader meets Eagle Rock students, such as James, the special education student who could not read until he was 12

and then at Eagle Rock read Nietzsche and Schopenhauer – by choice. James shares the secret of learning: to teach ourselves.

Often visitors to Eagle Rock argue that students like James are successful because of the school's unique nature: a well-funded boarding school where students live 24 hours a day, seven days a week far from the temptations back home. Easton gently addresses this concern by posing questions at the end of every chapter. These questions draw the reader's attention to issues that can be addressed in every public school. For instance, she asks, "Who is the head learner at your school? How do you think your school addresses personal growth? Why would you want to change your school?"

Through stories and questions, Lois Easton has written a book of hope, a must read for all educators. □

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Easton, Lois Brown. (2002). *The Other Side of Curriculum: Lessons from Learners*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. Order this book at [www.heinemann.com](http://www.heinemann.com) and receive a 10% discount.

*A Small School Initiative (from page 7)* point: with nine active CFGs and faculty-wide participation during two of the four years of early reform implementation we raised the level of professional discourse within the building dramatically. However, we were not seeing dramatic increases in stu-

dent achievement as measured by the quality of student work or, for that matter, dramatic changes in teacher classroom practice. Something about knowing that the students in our classes would change after one semester, or at the end of the year, and

that our failing students would become someone else's problem within the larger school, lessened our sense of urgency. But now, with three small schools and faculties of only 20-25 teachers, who are responsible for the success of 300-360 students – the stakes are higher. Now, when these

schools. We have come to believe, however, that 'smallness' is a necessary pre-condition for our students' success. Combined with 'best practices' and thoughtful structures that make student/teacher work public, the three small schools at the Manual Educational Complex are now posi-

We now believe that by breaking up Manual into three autonomous small schools we have created an effective and much more humane scale for implementation of the human practices we know positively impact student achievement.

tioned to positively impact upon students in northeast Denver long into the 21st century. □

dent achievement as measured by the quality of student work or, for that matter, dramatic changes in teacher classroom practice. Something about knowing that the students in our classes would change after one semester, or at the end of the year, and

faculties meet together to look at student and teacher work, the question is, "If we cannot figure out how to help our students succeed, who will?"

Certainly, the conversion of large schools into multiple small schools is not a magic bullet; there are bad small