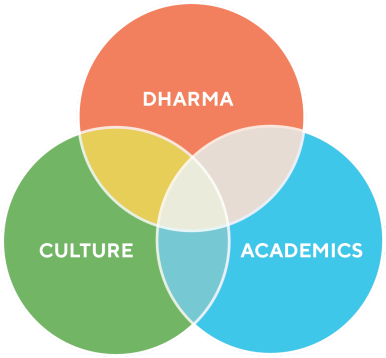
Three Spheres of Engagement

Revised April 2024

Integrating Culture and Academics

In order to function in a variety of cultural, geographical, and educational environments, the Middle Way Curriculum is designed for adaptation. It can be customized to meet the specific needs of a community or system based on the local culture and academic needs or requirements. These three spheres rarely exist in isolation, rather, they are meant to overlap and inform each other. In a formal school environment, ideally, each sphere has a designated curriculum coordinator to help scope and sequence the curriculum and the work as a team to create cross disciplinary connections.



Dharma

Middle Way Education provides the dharma curriculum with scoped and sequenced standards, content, skills, learning indicators and a suite of thematic units that can be easily adapted to any learning environment. Our approach is not to keep the dharma as a discrete sphere or layered on top of the academics, but to have it fully integrated into the program, ensuring that Buddhist wisdom is infused throughout the education.

Academics

It is assumed that all schools will have an academic sphere, however, each school will adhere to academic requirements specific to their location and preferences. Some may prefer Waldorf, Montessori, or International Baccalaureate models; some have strict governmental mandates. This curriculum can be adapted to meet these needs. MWE can offer guidelines but does not mandate the approach to teaching and learning. MWE can recommend curricula that have proven compatible with our framework. In an environment where academics are not required, such as at a camp or extracurricular program, science, literacy, math, and social studies still enhance the learning experience.

> Example ➛ MWS of the Hudson Valley is taking a constructivist, inquiry-based approach, using government standards (New York State Common Core), Learning for Justice, and Education for Sustainability standards and performance indicators as a baseline from which to work. In New York State, independent/private schools are relatively free to design programs provided they substantially meet the State's standards. This leeway allows MWS to select materials from multiple existing curricula to tailor their program to their students' needs.

Culture

The Culture sphere is one that allows educators to tailor their program to the immediate needs of the community and to the location of the school. They may see the need to choose an additional focus, such as

local industry, language, arts, athletics, or some other dimension that is central to the community in which the school exists.

Example ➛ The Middle Way School of the Hudson Valley, is located in a rural community in New York State. Their diverse constituent base has widely different viewpoints and cultural references, but finds commonality in their love of nature. The school adapts to this environment by providing a strong emphasis on practical living skills and outdoor education. Therefore, their spheres are: **1) Living Sciences; 2) Academics; and 3) Dharma**. The focus on Living Sciences prepares children to be custodians of the earth, leaders, householders, fully engaged in the world around them. Practical life skills include plumbing, electrical, general maintenance and repair, sewing, carpentry/building etc. The survival skills component includes water purification, fire safety, first aid, knife skills, natural history and ecology, and so on. Living Sciences also includes community development, teamwork, responsibility, debate, resiliency, governance, and so on.

How it Looks

Example ➛ **BOUNDARY WALK**: In the first thematic unit of the year, *Taking Your Seat*, students walk the boundary of the campus. Younger students might count their steps and name what they see, expanding their vocabulary. Older students develop their mapping skills and make charts. They may sing as they explore, or draw pictures and signage when they return to class, or write a story about it. Every age group will conscientiously clear the path making it safe as they go. They use their senses to be aware of and appreciative of the space within the boundary and to understand the concept of boundaries. And once the boundary is established students and staff join in a procession to honor the sacred space of learning, making smoke and flower offerings and placing special objects as they walk. In these ways, the boundary-setting activity is academic, practical, and dharmic. See the MWS Lesson Plan in detail here.