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LETTERS FROM  
MALCOLM MCKENZIE

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2017 – 2019



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# Malcolm M<sup>C</sup>Kenzie

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### **About the Author**

Malcolm McKenzie is Keystone Academy's Founding Head of School. He grew up in South Africa, and studied at the Universities of Cape Town, Oxford, and Lancaster. He holds degrees in Literature, Philosophy, and Applied Linguistics. At Oxford, he was a Rhodes Scholar. Mr. McKenzie started his academic career as a university lecturer, but moved into school teaching, and school leading, over 30 years ago.

He has been Head of four schools, namely: Maru-a-Pula School in Botswana; The United World College of the Atlantic in Wales; The Hotchkiss School in Connecticut, U.S.A.; and Keystone Academy in China. In 1999, he was the first Bicentennial Fellow at Deerfield Academy in Massachusetts. Mr. McKenzie has also served on the Board of the Round Square Association, which numbers approximately 200 schools worldwide. He was co-founder of the Global Connections Foundation in 1997 and is now Director of this confederation of schools.



## **Foreword**

Keystone Academy has frequently broken new ground in the field of education in China since its establishment in 2014. This should not come as a surprise, because many novel concepts in the Academy have become the building blocks of this exciting new world school.

Our Head of School, Malcolm McKenzie, has captured some moments of vitality and wisdom in the Keystone community through his weekly letters published in the newsletter *In the Loop*. At their basic level, these messages give a deep understanding of what Keystone is all about. But they're more than that: they have a life of their own. His letters are masterfully crafted and touching, providing a literary visualization of the collective dreams of our community.

Many Keystone community members have grown fond of reading Mr. McKenzie's convivial yet personal letters, creating a unique tradition in the Academy. His writings also form part of a broader roadmap for the community as we head into uncharted territory in China's ever-expanding education field.

We endeavor to document his thoughts in this second volume of *Letters from Malcolm McKenzie*. More than just being a selection of his messages from the start of the academic year 2017-2018 to mid-2019, this anthology also reflects his legacy at Keystone.

“Although we are still a new school,” Mr. MCKenzie says in his 2018-2019 end-of-academic-year letter, “We are in a place of learning built on a firm foundation of age-old values, newly interpreted. Because of this, our values are meant to last more than a lifetime, and they will promote happiness and wholesome lives, lived both individually as well as with and for others.”

We share with you warmly these *Letters from Malcolm MCKenzie*, a labor of love of an educator committed to sharing a lifelong curiosity for learning and passion for education.

Enjoy reading.

**A Note about Order and Format**

At Keystone Academy, we live by three keystones. We also speak of learning from the world, and learning for the world. These 40 epistles are presented in equal groups of 10: Hearthstones; Touchstones; Learning from the World; and Learning for the World.



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CHAPTER 1

# Hearthstones



### **No Legacy as Rich as Honesty**

One of the five values so important in our school, and in the education that we offer our students, is honesty, *xin*. The habit of honesty is hard – hard to develop, and hard to hold onto. One reason that it is hard for young people to develop honesty is that they are surrounded by examples of powerful, influential adults who have gained their positions through dishonesty and corruption, and who sometimes maintain their status through continued deceit. This situation is compounded by our global media taste for elevating the sensational at the expense of the sensible. One result is that trustworthiness and truth can be a very hard sell to students.

It saddens me that dishonesty surrounds us. Money buys some things in our world that should never be for sale. Here at Keystone, it is not surprising, therefore, that our Admission Department has been offered bribes to admit applicants to our school. In addition, some agents claim to be able to peddle influence, and purchase places. Rumors continue to circulate that a position at Keystone can be bought for cash. It cannot.

I am choosing to write on this topic of honesty today, the start of our graduation ceremonies for the Class of 2019, as I wish fervently that Keystone graduates will take from our school a lived appreciation of the worth of our five values. Of these, honesty may be the most important one for their next few years, while they are at college or university. Those institutions to which they are proceeding know already that Keystone is a school that does not fake college applications or standardized tests in any way, that we discourage the use of paid college agents, and that as a learning community we insist on

and are scrupulous about academic honesty. We are proud of this, and we intend to uphold and maintain these attitudes and policies, so that over time they become tested traditions.

Some students think that it is acceptable to lie, and pretend, when they are questioned about wrongdoing. It is not, even though it is an easy first response to breaking a rule. This short paragraph was written to me recently by a high school student: “I didn’t face the problem and take the responsibility at first. I was being dishonest, indirect, and hesitating. I was worried and afraid at that moment. I have no good excuse for my failure to demonstrate honesty.” The first three sentences express feelings that are familiar. We all know them. The fourth is an acknowledgement that is not nearly common enough. It pleased me hugely. We all make mistakes, but we don’t all recognize and then admit them. Owning an error through sincere admission redeems it, sometimes almost completely.

Last week, I was asked to attend a Grade 10 theater class, in order to respond to questions that the students wished to put to me about some of my *In the Loop* letters. These students had selected a small number of past letters to analyze, and then use as prompts for expressive performance. One question that I was asked centered on something I had written a few years ago about the importance of each individual finding her or his voice, and by extension the need in schools to create a climate which encourages this. I said that I believe that each one of us has our own voice, like a fingerprint or a signature, which is individual specific even if it might be species generic. Finding that voice is an ongoing quest of life, and for life.

How does this link to honesty? It’s simple, for me. It is not possible to find our voice unless we are honest. Academic dishonesty, plagiarism, is the use

of someone else's voice. How can I learn to think independently if I depend on copying another? The same holds for honesty more generally, in our daily lives. I cannot live independently, as my own unique self, unless I uncover and discover who I am, honestly, and express that authentically. The Chinese word *xin* carries with it a connotation of keeping promises. We need to keep our promises to ourselves if we are to find our authentic voices. If we do not, we fall into the trap of inauthenticity, what the French existentialist philosophers called bad faith (*mauvaise foi*), the pitiful condition of charlatans and impostors.

At the beginning of each academic year, for two weeks before the students return, the teachers enjoy an orientation and preparation time. In the first part of this coming August, our theme will be 'Values Added.' 'Values Added' will also be the theme of a major conference that Keystone will host in March 2020. Schools strive to add value to their students' learning. Keystone strives, in addition, to add values to our students' lives. I hope that our graduates heed, respect, and live this. As Shakespeare wrote in *All's Well that Ends Well*, there is 'no legacy so rich as honesty': all will indeed end well for our school and for our students if honesty is our Keystone legacy.

Published on May 24, 2019

### **Building Character Throughout Our Residential Setting**

Our second 'keystone' at Keystone Academy focuses on residential life. I think that we all know that. What we might not be aware of is that the first iteration of the Keystone Mission articulated this as 'building character and community in our residential setting.' When the mission in its entirety was reviewed a few years ago, one small but very significant change was made. Our second keystone now refers to 'building character and community throughout our residential setting.' Why substitute 'throughout' for 'in'? The reason was simple: 'in our residential setting' seemed to refer exclusively to our boarding students, and to those teachers who live on campus, whereas 'throughout our residential setting' tries to suggest that our residential culture is pervasive, and impacts all that we do, and all who learn and teach at Keystone, no matter whether they live on campus or dwell elsewhere.

I believe this to be true. The fact that many of us live at school, and eat all our meals here, and are part of the Keystone enterprise day and night, affects the culture and the atmosphere of the place in many positive forms. Primary school students are aware of this, in ways large and small. They know that the Head and the two Assistant Heads of their primary division live on campus, and are a part of the residential program even though the primary section at Keystone is a day school. And they are aware more and more of the example of the older students, those who have the privilege of boarding, as they look forward to the time when they themselves will have that status.

Our boarding students value deeply what the residential life program offers them. One significant possibility it provides is that of honing their leadership

skills through becoming proctors, students who manifest unusual levels of responsibility and are therefore trained and placed in positions of guiding and leading their fellow students on the dorm floor. An unusual feature of the proctoring opportunity at Keystone is that our proctors are not necessarily seniors – we recognize that younger students can display and act on the qualities needed to be a peer leader, and we allow these to be nurtured and developed earlier than their final year. Our proctors are, in fact, appointed to run from the second semester of one year through the fall semester of the next. This in itself is unusual. In the recent proctor selections, almost 50 of them, here are just two short statements taken from the written applications of candidates:

It is fair enough to say that residential life is playing the most important role in shaping us a person. Our behavior, our thoughts, our values. All of them are based on our residential life experiences...

The residential life program prepares students very well for college as it shows them what dorm life in college and university may be like. It also trains students to form good studying and life habits that will benefit their health and studies in the long run. This was one of the reasons why I personally chose to come to this school. I found that as to building good habits, I also build character. I am able to build character from not only my habits but also from interaction with other people. Character building is one of the three keystones and this is why the residential program plays such a big role in the Keystone Community...

The students, as is so often the case, ‘get it.’ Not only does our residential program prepare our students superbly well for college, a fact attested to unequivocally by last year’s graduates when they returned in December to

answer questions about their college experience to date, it also gives them life lessons in the formation of character in community. We even go so far as to assess this in the award of our Keystone Diploma, a bold innovation that is gaining the attention of college admission officers.

For a full year before Keystone opened, a planning group of senior administrators worked in downtown Beijing to finalize our curriculum: classroom; co-curricular; and residential. We felt then that the residential program of Keystone might be difficult for some, perhaps many, of our families to value and to embrace. This has not been the case at all, quite the reverse. All of us seem to have taken to boarding with enthusiasm, commitment, and a shared sense of the many enhancements that it brings to our growth as individual learners and as a community. This success has been in large measure due to the expertise, energy, and ebullience of Juli James, our founding Dean of Residential Life. Juli has given five remarkable years to Keystone, and we are deeply grateful for that. She departs in June, to return to California. Next year will see a slight restructuring of the administration of Residential Life at Keystone. Kelli Sanchez will become the overarching Dean of Student Life, and she will have two Directors of Residential Life who will report to her, with each being responsible for one of our residential towers. These two Directors will be Amanda Chen and Nehemiah Olwande. Both are dorm heads currently. The weekend program for boarders will be coordinated by Vera Su. I hope that more and more parents come to see the rich value of these weekend activities.

I am quite confident that the James legacy will continue to be nurtured and to develop under the guidance and leadership of these three, ably assisted by dorm heads, dorm parents, and many others.

### **Breaking Out of Our Own Molds**

On a clean and crisp Friday evening two weeks ago, we held the Keystone matriculation ceremony for all students new to our secondary division. Matriculation at Keystone is a formal induction into our secondary school. In our fifth year, it is already a traditional rite of passage. Every new student has the chance to announce themselves: their name, grade, and where they come from. Their time in the spotlight is short, but strongly symbolic. As we say in the preamble to this celebration, we are giving every new student "... a chance, in a formal way, to begin to find your voice in public, on the shared stage of our fellowship and community."

Our matriculation is a ritual that operates on many levels. Perhaps the most important is inclusivity. Every student at Keystone should feel included within our community as completely as they wish to be. To be sure, the process of gaining a place at Keystone is not fully inclusive. We know that our limited number of places in the school is far exceeded by the number of applications we receive every year, and that this will only intensify in the future. Our admissions process, therefore, has to be exclusive to some degree. But, once here, we want all our students to feel that they are welcome, valued, and fully accepted members of our vibrant community. We want our students to feel confident and expressive in the voices that they find for themselves. We wish for them that they grow their individual characters successfully through feeling included both in and by this community. The same applies, in slightly different ways, to all of us, employees and parents.

It is far easier, however, to pontificate about inclusivity than it is to practice it. Too frequently, when we think of being more inclusive, we focus on those

groups who are so obviously in the minority. One such group at Keystone right now is the small set of students who are not Chinese. Our number of international students will grow as we become bigger, and more established, but at the moment it is not large. For those students, feeling excluded can be all too common. It is the responsibility of all of us, all students and all adults, not just the Chinese students, to make international students feel more included.

But when we look more closely at our community, the microscope reveals other particular subsets that we might miss with the naked eye. Some of us need to be aided to see and be sensitive to minorities that might be grouped according to sexuality, socioeconomic status, faith orientation, place of origin, and many other more granular specificities. Even personality type can be significant in this regard. And it is all too easy, in a world where we place a high premium on feeling at home, and loved, for those who feel marginalized to conceal the fact that they are often overlooked and underappreciated.

When I try to envision a truly inclusive community in a school like ours, my gaze goes in two directions. The first is outward, to sizeable communities in the world at large. It saddens me that there are few examples of successful and thriving inclusive communities on this stage. I see mainly division, and the brutality that stems from a fear of difference. The many refugee and migrant crises all over our planet are a sorry confirmation of that. The second direction is inward, to our own Keystone community. Would it not be singular, and strong, if we succeeded in creating here, in miniature, the type of inclusive community which we humans find it so hard to replicate in larger groups? Such inclusivity would make it even better than it already is to work and study here. It would make our students happier and more fulfilled while here, and powerful builders of exemplary communities after they graduate.

Does this require unusual sensitivity, commitment, and courage? No, and yes. No, because we have so much of this going for us already in our young school culture. Yes, for to gain and then maintain this promised possibility we must try to recognize, welcome, and celebrate difference in its many guises, as often as we can. We need as individuals to break out of our own molds. We should want to engage every day with the diverse elements of our community, not just with those who are like us, who speak our language, and are our age or grade. We know what skills are required, and what effort it takes – we just need to push ourselves a little harder.

The prize is worth it. So, come on, let's try it, together. If we succeed, we shall make this challenging and inclusive paragraph from our matriculation ceremony vibrate with realized truth:

And so we welcome you in this same manner, greeting you with our minds and hearts fully open. What does that mean? Our open minds mean that we have no preconceptions of you. What background and which part of town you come from are not important. What is important is that you have earned a place in our community through your talent, motivation, and hard work and through your clear demonstration that you want to make full use of the varied opportunities offered to you here. Your honor will be earned internally, not through some status that you bring with you from outside.

Published on September 14, 2018

### **The Keystone Fingerprints**

A few weeks ago, I wrote about the reflective self-study that we are engaged in, as a faculty and as a school community, while we prepare for reaccreditation by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). One of the focus groups in this process is charged with researching and refining the overarching purpose of our school. The Keystone Mission and our five Confucian values are, of course, an integral part of that purpose. In considering this purpose further, however, this committee has rediscovered a document written by the founding administrators of Keystone in the year before the School opened. It is called Keystone Fingerprints, and is a short, complementary adjunct to our “three keystones.”

This document opens as follows:

Just as fingerprints are unique to individuals, and are a reliable way of recognition, so these fingerprint practices will define significant dimensions of the Keystone experience. The first two paragraphs of our mission statement refer to the three strands of our educational philosophy, and the keystones that form the foundation of our program... We must keep both these philosophical foundations and keystones in the foreground whenever we think and talk about our school. Our fingerprints, by contrast, are more individual and they imprint on our school culture, in specific detail, important aspects of daily life and ritual. These are the fingerprints that will complement our keystones.

I quote on the next page from the body of the “Keystone Fingerprints”:

Our fingerprints are grouped into three categories:

- Review and Reflection
- Meeting and Mentoring
- Gardening and Growing

These pairings provide a shorthand summary of our approach to much of what we do and what we take seriously. Our learning is animated by individual review and reflection. These twin processes inform our meetings, informally and formally, with others in our community. We try to make all our meetings thoughtful, reciprocal, and productive. Giving and receiving guidance, and being open to mentoring, are part of this. From these attitudes and practices, we grow, personally and collectively. We tend the garden of our own growth and of our community's wellbeing. The physical activity of planting and harvesting is a visible expression of this.

Each one of these three pairings contains signature practices, which will certainly change from time to time. The list below is where we begin.

### **Review and Reflection**

- Students and teachers are encouraged to review regularly and to reflect on what they do, and how they teach and learn.
- The Head of School, and sometimes Division Heads, call Review and Reflection (RR) periods from time to time, as a surprise. For a class period, the whole school pauses in its regular routine in order to create time for review and reflection.
- We require students to learn and enjoy poems from our own Keystone poetry collection.

- Keystone Academy has a Director of Creativity and Innovation. The work of this portfolio is tied directly to our RR ethos.

### **Meeting and Mentoring**

Our education occurs in the company of others, and we learn as a community of scholars. We wish to meet others, and to get to know ourselves and our capabilities through them. A South African Zulu phrase sums this up nicely: *umuntu ngamuntu ngabantu*. This means: 'a person becomes a person (becomes human) through others.' To this end:

- All our students are 'met' before the start of classes, by a senior administrator and by a teacher.
- There is a matriculation ceremony at the start of the year for all new students. This allows every new student to meet the community.
- We have regular family meals for the boarding students and their teachers.
- Our House System (a term referring to a body of people and not an actual house or dorm location) will enable a cross section of adults and students to interact in friendly competitions and become more familiar with each other across school divisions (primary, junior, and high school). Day students, boarders, teaching and support staff will all be members of one of five houses. This smaller community within a community is designed to encourage belonging, cooperation, teambuilding, friendship, mentoring, play, and healthy competition.
- We conduct all our work meetings with efficiency, attention, and precision.
- We mentor and coach each other, in ways designed to bring out and encourage the best in every individual.

## **Gardening and Growing**

Review and reflection, and meeting and mentoring, come together in gardening and growing. Growing is a major school metaphor and gardening is a celebrated practice.

- At the start of each academic year, everyone writes a personal letter to themselves, anticipating growth points for the year. This is sealed, and then opened by each individual at the end of the year.
- Gardening and growing are the summative focus of our reporting systems, our teacher assessment, and our professional growth.
- Academic and experiential capstone experiences are growth points for students.
- We tend and care for our own spaces and we grow plants and produce in community spaces.
- We seek opportunities for personal growth through leadership and good citizenship roles for all.

These three literal and metaphorical pairings are powerful ingredients for a recipe for a fine school. Some of their attendant goals have been achieved, and some have been ignored or forgotten. It is time to assess anew whether we wish to incorporate any of these latter into our daily and termly routines.

Published on November 9, 2018

### You Can Do Anything

In the second sentence of the Keystone Mission, we speak of blending three traditions of education to create ‘a liberal arts program that is academically outstanding.’ There are those, frequently ill-informed, who consider a liberal arts focus soft, and easy. Our statement, therefore, that places the liberal arts alongside intellectual rigor, is crucial, and not accidental. We teach history and science, math and music, design technology and dance, and much else besides. We believe that each of these disciplines informs the others, and enriches the whole. Yet we are aware that these views, and our practice as a whole school, need to be defended against narrow, more consumerist, perhaps more functional attitudes to education.

Earlier this year, the author George Anders, who writes prolifically on careers and education, published his latest book: *You Can Do Anything: The Surprising Power of a “Useless” Liberal Arts Education*. It is provocative reading, especially for members of the community of a school such as ours. This passage, early in the book, gets quickly to the core of the message put forward by Anders:

Curiosity, creativity, and empathy aren’t unruly traits that must be reined in to ensure success. Just the opposite. The human touch has never been more essential in the workplace than it is today. You don’t have to mask your identity to get paid for your strengths. You don’t need to apologize for the supposedly impractical classes you took in college or the so-called soft skills you have acquired. The job market is quietly creating thousands of openings a week for people who can bring a humanist’s grace to our rapidly evolving high-tech future.

The spine of Anders' argument has as its vertebrae the stories of success and fulfilment of a substantial number of liberal arts graduates. These are women and men who have learned, in their studies of esoteric subjects and topics, the skills of being critical, imaginative, inventive, and above all, of presenting themselves and their personal narratives in compelling and irresistible ways to employers. They are the people who can do anything, specifically because they have not been trained to do something.

Anders is not a proponent of education only for the sake of education. He is also concerned about jobs, and practical earning power. We hear again and again, in our rapidly changing world, that many of the jobs that our children will hold do not exist today. Undoubtedly that is true. Anders likens this situation to the volcanic activity on the southern coast of Hawaii's Big Island, where molten lava hisses into the ocean, creating new terrain and expanding boundaries: "Every year, a few million people choose to work in the equivalent of Hawaii's expanding coastline, making their mark on professional territory no one else has claimed before." Anders claims that these explorers with a liberal arts training are well suited to this type of innovation.

Towards the end of his book, Anders speaks directly to the issue of salaries. He admits that graduates with a liberal arts degree might struggle more to find their first jobs, that they will need great flexibility and perseverance, and that they will not be paid that well to begin with. However, his research suggests that this lower compensation changes, and that in mid and late career, such jobs are better compensated than many which have a more obviously functional definition.

Salaries are important. Individual fulfillment is more important. Most

important, however, is the contribution that educated people make to their communities and countries. A liberal arts education, as was the case thousands of years ago with the then liberal arts range of skills required by Confucius, holds out hope for this.

Published on November 3, 2017

### **The Seven Laws of Salem**

I have written about Kurt Hahn before. He was a German-born educator who lived from 1886 to 1974. Hahn founded many schools, and schools' organizations. The Round Square association of schools worldwide, of which Keystone is a committed member, is dedicated to the memory and the educational philosophy of Kurt Hahn. To my knowledge, the closest equivalent to Hahn in the Chinese tradition is our great educator and thinker, Zhang Boling.

At the start of the last academic year, in August 2017, I made reference in this column to Kurt Hahn's five essential qualities. Here again, in his words, is that famous statement:

I regard it as the foremost task of education to insure the survival of these qualities:

- an enterprising curiosity
- an undefeatable spirit
- tenacity in pursuit
- readiness for sensible self-denial
- and, above all, compassion.

I like to wonder what our school would be like if our graduates left us having developed these qualities to a high degree. Of course, we have our five Confucian values, and they are deep and enduring. We shall be doing very well indeed if our graduates leave us knowing how to practice and live those values.

The first school that Hahn founded was Schule Schloss Salem, in southern Germany, in 1920. In 1933, he was imprisoned by the Nazis as he had urged his students and young graduates to resist the growing power and reckless cruelty of Hitler. When he was released, he moved to the United Kingdom. At Salem, Hahn developed a succinct set of guidelines for defining that school community. These he called *The Seven Laws of Salem*. They still exist there. I remember the excitement with which I wrote them down in my personal notebook the first time I visited Salem school, many years ago.

I want now to share three of those ‘laws’ with you. Law number three is this:

**Give the children the opportunity of self-effacement  
in the common cause**

Hahn understood the value of working in teams, in ways where individual gratification is far less important than bonding collaboratively to ensure effective results in support of unifying causes and worthy projects. The ‘self-effacement,’ or modesty, or humility, that is the opposite of rampant individualism, is a quality that Hahn believed to be crucial in the development of civil communities, in schools and elsewhere. We would certainly benefit, in my opinion, from a lot more self-effacement in our contemporary world.

Hahn’s fourth law is short, and sweet, and silent:

**Provide periods of silence**

Almost one hundred years ago, the visionary Hahn could see that modern living was being overrun by noise and distracting speed. That insight has been made so much more relevant to our lives since the electronic,

technological revolution of which almost all humans are beneficiaries. How do we find poise, and quiet, in this rush of incessant imagery and surfeit of superficiality? How do we balance the undeniable benefits of information technology and social media with the never-ending demands that these benefits place upon us, and to which it is so easy to become addicted? Reflective periods of silence are vital, and more and more endangered. We do not protect and preserve silence sufficiently at Keystone.

But it is perhaps law number seven, the last in the series, that is so important for a school like Keystone. Here it is:

**Free the sons of the wealthy and powerful from the enervating sense of privilege**

For ‘sons,’ we should now read ‘sons and daughters.’ Hahn was worried that the children in his expensive school, whose parents were wealthy, might end up weak and enfeebled by the privileged position in society that they occupied. They might think, as young students, that they need not work hard, or push themselves, or develop resilient and strong characters, because they were going to inherit powerful positions regardless of their own efforts. We need to keep on reminding ourselves of the wisdom of that phrase. If our students, your children, feel that they are entitled, or inherently privileged, we must as teachers and parents undermine that ‘enervating sense.’ It is in their interests that we should do so. And it is in all our interests that we must diversify our student enrollment, and raise more and more financial aid to do so where necessary.

So, let me end with the paragraph that we read to all our students when they join the secondary school, and contribute to the joyful matriculation

ceremony held near the start of every academic year. This is how we welcome them:

And so we welcome you in this same manner, greeting you with our minds and hearts fully open. What does that mean? Our open minds mean that we have no preconceptions of you. What background and which part of town you come from are not important. What is important is that you have earned a place in our community through your talent, motivation, and hard work and through your clear demonstration that you want to make full use of the varied opportunities offered to you here. Your honor will be earned internally, not through some status that you bring with you from outside.

Published on November 23, 2018

### **The Five Student Qualities**

I hope that you read my column last Friday. I ended with reference to the 5 qualities that Kurt Hahn considered to be vital for students to learn in school. These are: an enterprising curiosity; an undefeatable spirit; tenacity in pursuit; readiness for sensible self-denial; and, above all, compassion.

In his view, expressed many decades ago, these qualities were under serious threat. I believe that they still are, and that their survival is even more important now than it was then. However, it is sometimes challenging to understand exactly what Hahn means in the condensed and poetic phrases that are typical of his speech and writing. Here are my brief interpretations, in our Keystone context today, of what he might have meant.

#### **An enterprising curiosity**

At Keystone, in our mission, we speak about an ‘enterprising, global, and diverse community.’ We humans are an enterprising species. We like to apply our knowledge. We create businesses, we value entrepreneurship, we make things happen. Curiosity is good in and of itself, as it makes us ask questions and love learning, but it becomes doubly strong when it is allied to real life applications. This is the curiosity that is enhanced by enterprise.

#### **An undefeatable spirit**

I love the notion of spirit that is undefeatable. We know that humans have extraordinary capacities, when called upon, to persevere, sometimes in circumstances of unimaginable hardship. The migrant crises in some parts of the world right now are a sad but apt example of this spirit. In schools that are well-resourced, like ours, and where we all enjoy unusual privileges, we need to foster self-reliance and stamina. Cultivating an undefeatable spirit is admirable training for a life of good work.

### **Tenacity in pursuit**

Tenacity is a tough, old-fashioned word. It refers to the capacity that some people have to hold fast, to hang on and not let go. It is the quality that dogs have when eating bones – dogged and determined. We need that quality as we pursue learning in all its forms, especially when the going gets rough. Learning is not always fun. There are times when it is a hard slog. That’s when tenacity is so important.

### **Readiness for sensible self-denial**

Self-denial is often associated with some types of religious austerity. Certain people choose to deny themselves the pleasures of a normal life. This is not what Hahn meant. Sensible self-denial tells us not always to expect an easy or quick gratification of our wishes. There are times when we have to wait and there are many things worth waiting for. There are other times when we need to realize that denying ourselves might mean opening up possibilities and opportunities for others.

### **And, above all, compassion.**

We know about compassion at Keystone. It is the *ren* that is the first of our five shared values. However young or old we are, we all need to learn and to continue learning how to think with our hearts as well as with our brains. Compassionate caring for others is one of the finest qualities of humankind.

Published on August 25, 2017

### **Differentiated Instruction**

We talk frequently amongst ourselves as teachers, and with parents, about the need for differentiated instruction within our classrooms. What this phrase refers to, in essence, is the attempt by the teacher to provide individualized instruction, as much as is possible, that is appropriate for the learning level and style of each student. Differentiated instruction entails planning actively for the learning differences of every student in the class, or group, so that each one can learn to the best of her or his ability. This requires great patience, sensitivity, and experience on the part of the teacher. It can be especially complex in a bilingual setting. But it is made much easier by small numbers in class sections, such as we have at Keystone.

In the American context, one of the influential writers on, and ambassadors for, differentiated instruction is Carol Ann Tomlinson. Carol Ann is a professor in the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia. She taught for many years in the public-school domain, and so she is hugely experienced as a practitioner, trainer, and theorist. I enjoy reading what she has to say, and so I was drawn to a short piece in the February edition of *Educational Leadership* called ‘Measuring Doesn’t Come First.’ She writes here, at a more overarching level, about those things in schooling that she believes are really important for young people to learn. Well aware of the context of our current obsession with measuring through repeated testing, Carol Ann asserts firmly that we need to decide what it is in learning that matters most, before we decide how, and how frequently, to measure anything.

I quote, to give a flavor of the article: “I’d like to see our students engage deeply with ideas; grow in their appreciation for the power of the human

mind; value the humanity in all people with whom they share space on this planet; give rise to a dream and know how to nurture that dream wisely...” I think you get the sense of what Carol Ann is promoting, ‘sense’ meaning both general direction as well as common sense.

Here are three of Carol Ann’s thoughts, aptly expressed, that really made me ponder:

**“I’d want them to come to know the difference between a right and what’s right”**

In the English language, the pun on the word ‘right,’ first as a noun and then as an adjective, makes this statement unusually powerful. Too often, especially in elite schools where privilege can be assumed without questioning, complacent entitlement takes the place of creative energy. We need to direct our students (and ourselves) to think more and more about right and wrong, and not about what the world owes them. Education and ethics must be partners.

**“I’d like to see them develop a growing sense of self-efficacy and a healthy dose of humility”**

At Keystone, we try as teachers to make our students independent, able to manage themselves, and take important decisions about their lives. This is one virtue of our boarding program. But we set this process in motion in the primary years. We want our students to be the agents of their own lives. Sadly, there are many examples in the world at large of agency going hand in hand with arrogance. This is where the ‘healthy dose of humility’ comes in – we aim for agency without attitude.

**“I think it’s important for learners to see knowledge as the story of all the people who came before them, and to find knowledge in their own story”**

Many people are unaware that over 100 billion humans have already inhabited our Earth, this blue planet. We stand not only on the shoulders of giants, but on the histories of our species. Learning to know and tell our own story, each to his or her own, to find knowledge in and from this, and then to link that backwards and forwards to other narratives – what could be more joyous?

This is why a school like ours is so exciting.

Published on March 2, 2018

### **Warmth of Spirit**

At Keystone, we have a two-week break to mark Christmas and the Western New Year period, and we have a break of the same length about one month later, to mark the Chinese New Year and Spring Festival. International schools in Beijing tend to have a longer break now, and a shorter one later. With the Chinese public schools, it is the other way around. Because we see ourselves as a Chinese school with multiple dimensions that we relate as often as we can to our larger world, it is apt that we give equal weight to these two festivals. Our Chinese Thread provides a precise motivation for such equipoise.

For Christians, this season is one of giving, crowned by what is for them the great gift of the birth of Christ. Regardless of our background, we can all think at this time with gratitude and appreciation of our families and our good fortune, and with compassion for those who might not be as privileged as we are. I think with deep thanks, among many things, of the diligent, committed work of all who are employed by Keystone. We have enjoyed another fine start to the academic year, our fifth one, and I wish all my work colleagues a relaxing and recharging break.

In particular, I thank those administrators who have taken on extra in order to cover for those who have been or are away on different types of leave: David Beare for me; Jia Lili for Mary Jew; Kate Burden-Chen for Gary Bradshaw; Meredith Phinney for Paulina Aguilera; Audrey Moh and Kalian Wang for Kelli Sanchez; Emily Huang for Pei Lu; Cher Weng for Echo Cai. We have a very strong and collaborative administrative team, and this is one of many strong points in our school.

Yes, many strong points. I often marvel at what we, all of us, have built in such a short time. A few weeks back, I took a walk around the academic buildings with two American visitors. It was most revealing to hear them comment on the facilities and resources that we have already provided to deliver our academic curriculum, and the obvious depth and breadth of that curriculum as made manifest through those material things. These ‘building blocks’ are definitely strong points.

But it is the things that cannot be seen so easily that matter more. Wonderful learning does not necessarily take place in wonderful buildings. Just as sports spirit is more important than winning games, so learning spirit is more important than being top of the class. In schools that rank students, which we do not, there can, by definition, only be one who is top of the class. But all in the class are there to learn. That’s where learning spirit, nurtured by disciplined yet creative teaching, comes in. I am always more interested in how we learn and teach than I am in the buildings where this takes place. This is why we now have a taskforce, which includes parents, working under the wise guidance of our Dean of Curriculum, Jia Lili, to develop a short statement which will be our Keystone ‘definition of learning.’ What an exciting project!

The spirit with which we lead our lives cannot be seen, but it is real. I am not sure that we are consistently strong in this area. To be sure, it is one of the most difficult of life’s tasks to be consistently strong in the ways that we live. I ponder this conundrum as we develop more policies and grow more practices, policies to cover things that may go awry, and practices that may be fun but can also, at times, be a distraction. There are moments when we seem to be consumed by a congestion of rules and rituals, and sometimes we lose sight of the ‘simple and elegant’ lodestar of our start.

Almost 20 years ago, between two school headships, I had a visiting fellowship for one year at Deerfield Academy in Massachusetts. The most famous head of that school, about whom books have been written, was Frank Boyden. It is hard to believe that he was head there for 66 years, from 1902 to 1968. At that time, it was a school for boys only, and there were no written rules or prescribed penalties for poor behavior. Mr. Boyden expected his teenage boys to behave as gentlemen-in-the-making, and he and his wife would simply say, and say simply: “We don’t do that sort of thing at Deerfield.”

Let’s remember what we don’t do at Keystone. We mustn’t forget that we are a values-driven school, and that our five Confucian values are sufficient, like the pole star of old, for navigation. Our older students recently wrote, directed, and performed a powerful play, *Junzi*. In challenging and provocative ways, their drama posed these questions: Who are the *junzi*? How do *junzi* behave and conduct themselves? Why is such behavior and conduct important, for individuals and for whole countries? I went to the play on all three evenings of its production, so proud was I of their questing spirit.

I am not a Christian, although most of my values come from a Christian upbringing and from attending a Christian school throughout my boyhood. It seems fitting, at this time of Christmas, to end with a message from a famous North African bishop of the early Christian church, Saint Augustine of Hippo. A sermon that Augustine once delivered on the First Epistle of John was a meditation on this short sentence: *Love and do what you will*.

Love and do what you will. Whether you hold your peace, through love hold your peace. Whether you cry out, through love cry out. Whether you correct, through love correct. Whether you spare, through love must you

spare. Let the root of love be within. For of this root can nothing come except that which is good.

Learned theologians down the ages have written varied interpretations of these words. For me, Augustine’s message is simple and elegant: If we root everything that we do in a spirit of love, then we will ‘get it right.’ I feel exactly the same about *ren, yi, li, zhi, and xin*. If we follow those ‘big five,’ all will be well.

I am going to Cape Town for most of the vacation. It will be summer there. I shall be warm, and I hope that I shall also be warm in spirit. I wish you warmth of spirit, too, whatever the outside temperature.

Published on December 20, 2018

### Reinterpreting Age-Old Values

Another annual cycle has ended, our fifth, a fine and festive year. Earlier this year, I shared with you a one-page document from my old school in Botswana, Maru-a-Pula School. I was Principal there from 1991 to 1999. You may remember it, a catalogue of the distinctive qualities of a truly special school, simply called “What we are, What we are not.” I love the alloy of sure self-awareness with humble satisfaction in this short log. I wrote the following about it at the time: *For those who know Maru-a-Pula, these words have the ring of authenticity and truth. For those who do not, like you, they speak of an educational institution that is unusual, distinctive, and aware of its special identity.*

I said then that I wanted to produce a similar statement for Keystone, as we become more aware of our special identity, and I asked you to contribute your thoughts to this process. Here is a paragraph from a parent’s letter back to me:

I want to make two points. One is on Keystone habits. The other one is on Keystone character. Both are concerned with the long-term benefits that Keystone provides to its students beyond their years on the campus, extending to the rest of their lives. As Albert Einstein said, education is what remains after one has forgotten everything one has learned in school. Students are spending their most important part of their lifetime at Keystone, forming their values, characters and habits which they will carry with them for the rest of their lives. I believe these are the things that differentiate Keystone from its peers.

I like to think that we have peers doing similar work, yet I agree that our approach to Keystone ‘habits’ and ‘character’ is unusual. Although we are still a new school, we are a place of learning built on a firm foundation of age-old values, newly interpreted. Because of this, our values are meant to last more than a lifetime, and they will promote happiness and wholesome lives, lived both individually as well as with and for others.

I was reminded of this at our moving and memorable graduation celebrations a few weeks ago. Steven Shi delivered a remarkable speech on this occasion, as the representative of the Class of 2019. I think it was the most insightful, sensitive address that I have ever heard from a student in a commencement context. Steven spoke about the ‘art of being a student.’ He scrutinized this ‘art’ quizzically through the lenses of curiosity, friendship, passion, and gratitude, the last focusing especially on the appreciation of one’s parents. Most crucial of all, he concluded, in perfecting the art of being a student, was the ability to know oneself. Steven said this:

In his famous book *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu says “Know yourself and you will win all battles.” I think that is exactly the last and final piece of the art that Keystone has taught us, knowing ourselves. At Keystone, we learned to know ourselves, our passion, our goals, and our values. No matter where our next stop is in this world, knowing ourselves would be the most powerful tool which we can wield to solve problems, face challenges, and to win battles, to win all battles.

I spoke before Steven, and invited our graduates to look on our values through a different lens, that of an august English sonnet, ‘Ozymandias,’ by Shelley. This poem tells us that the once enormous statue of the Egyptian Pharaoh Rameses II, whose Greek name was Ozymandias, and who ruled

before Lao Zi and Confucius were born, is now a ruin. What is left, ‘two vast and trunkless legs of stone,’ is partially covered by the dusts of the desert. The face of the once enormous statue has been broken off and lies half sunk in the shifting sands. There is almost nothing left of this ‘king of kings,’ and of his works there is no evidence, no memory, no impact. As an extension to all this, the poem offers an ironic meditation in rhyme on the ravages of time, on the hollowness of arrogance, and on how would-be-great rulers are reduced in the end to rubble.

Such vainglory is the opposite of what we are trying to do, and for the most part succeeding in doing, at Keystone. And so, I presented a new version of this sonnet as a gift to our graduating class. Here it is in similar format, as ‘Ding Shi,’ not ‘Ozymandias’:

### Ding Shi

I met a graduate from a new world school  
 Who said: “In Houshayu, we built our brand:  
 ‘*From the world, for the world*’, will no doubt stand  
 The test of time. Confucian values cool,  
 Show that a *junzi* is more than a tool.  
 Here there’s no wrinkled lip, nor cold command:  
 Character true, community kind, these lead  
 Our hands to act, our hearts to service need.  
 And on our chop, Chinese, these words we stamp:  
 Our name, Ding Shi, Keystone, school among schools.  
 Look on our values shared with joy, reflect.  
 We term them compassion, justice, respect,  
 Wisdom, honesty: both springboard and ramp.

All else will fade. Our deeds will light a lamp.”

If we both understand, and live by, our values, we will do good in the world, both the world of our school, and the world beyond our gates. I wrote to you recently about honesty, one of our cardinal virtues. This is how I ended that short piece:

At the beginning of each academic year, for two weeks before the students return, the teachers enjoy an orientation and preparation time. In the first part of this coming August, our theme will be ‘Values Added.’ ‘Values Added’ will also be the theme of a major conference that Keystone will host in March 2020. Schools strive to add value to their students’ learning. Keystone strives, in addition, to add values to our students’ lives. I hope that our graduates heed, respect, and live this. As Shakespeare wrote in *All’s Well that Ends Well*, there is ‘no legacy so rich as honesty’: all will indeed end well for our school and for our students if honesty is our Keystone legacy.

I hope that you enjoy a magical summer holiday, and that this time away from school adds both value and values to your lives, individually and as families.

Published on June 13, 2019

CHAPTER 2

# Touchstones



### Get Up Early

What is the best way to start a new school year? This is a question that we all ask ourselves, students, parents, and teachers. Our students in particular have been given much advice during the past week, from their parents and teachers, from their friends and, no doubt, themselves. They have been asked to reflect, to write down goals, to discuss targets. Much of this is future-oriented, gazing down the trajectory of the next 10 months. That's fine. It is a powerful tool to have a sense, in advance, of the shape of the coming year.

My answer is simple, and focused on the here and now: *Get up early*. Remember that the early bird catches the worm. I do not necessarily mean that we should rise before anyone else on a daily basis. I am more interested in starting early, from the beginning of this past week, and maintaining that early momentum as the year winds on. A senior administrator and colleague reminded our teachers, just before all our students and families arrived, of the saying attributed to Will Rogers: You never get a second chance to make a first impression. I think that this is also true for the way in which we start a year. Make a good first impression on the new year, and you will not need or want a second chance.

What might it mean to start the year early, to get going immediately, to rise bright-eyed with the dawn of a new academic year? Here are five possible answers.

- Envision the year as a whole from the beginning
- Enjoy and protect your August energy and excitement
- Stay full of purpose and passion

- Set your own targets, making sure that they will stretch you, but also that they are attainable
- Choose one skill that you need but do not yet have and make sure that you begin to master it.

If you wish to try a slightly different recipe, here are five essential ‘qualities’ from Kurt Hahn. Hahn was a giant contributor to the reshaping of educational philosophy and practice in 20th century Europe, and his influence grew to be global. He was German, and publicly resisted the Nazis in pre-Second World War Germany to the degree that he was imprisoned and then had to leave his homeland and emigrate to England. The Round Square organization to which Keystone belongs is dedicated to the essential vision of Kurt Hahn. Hahn once said this:

“I regard it as the foremost task of education to insure the survival of these qualities:

- an enterprising curiosity
- an undefeatable spirit
- tenacity in pursuit
- readiness for sensible self-denial
- and, above all, compassion.”

We have five shared values at Keystone. Kurt Hahn’s five qualities are a fine accompaniment to these values. Get up early, get going right away, and think on these things.

### **Turning Over a New Leaf**

Welcome to 2019. At the start of a new calendar year, many people make resolutions about their behavior. The change from one year to the next has become a natural inflection point for individuals to try to change habits, and to set out on new paths. On Monday evening this week all our boarding students made their own resolutions. I have my resolutions: do you have yours? In English, we sometimes talk about this process metaphorically, using the phrase ‘to turn over a new leaf.’ The expression goes back to the 16th century, and uses as its reference point the leaves of books or journals. To turn over a new leaf is to turn a page, resolutely we hope, so as to carry on with the story, whether as a reader of a book or as a writer of a journal. We like to think of the story of our lives in chapters, or episodes, and also that we are able to exert some control over our own narrative as it unfolds. Forming resolutions is an expression of that, and a commitment to new patterns.

It is most certainly possible, and desirable, to make new starts. But it is worth noting, by contrast, that we have another proverbial and well-known expression in English: “There’s nothing new under the sun.” It is fitting that this expression is itself very old, and not at all new. It originates in the Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes, 1:9: “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.” Most likely written by King Solomon, looking back on life from the vantage point of old age, the phrase ‘under the sun’ is used 29 times in Ecclesiastes. Here it seems to mean that all has already been tried and already achieved, at least on Earth (under the sun), and that it is not possible to find things to do that are meaningfully new. Everything has been done before, by others, or perhaps by ourselves when younger. Framed within a timeless perspective,

and viewed through the lens of eternity, human nature and human action simply do not change.

Both of these proverbial sayings, and the thoughts behind them, can have validity in my opinion. On one level it is paradoxical and inconsistent to claim this, but on another it seems plausible to see with double vision that it is possible to turn over a new leaf and at the same time to acknowledge that there is nothing new under the sun. Life abounds with such riddles. Let us make resolutions to do new things, therefore, but let us also realize that this is a very complex task, and that even if we succeed, we may be walking old paths.

Here's something that does not change for teachers. One of the many delightful aspects of teaching is that the students with whom we work always remain the same age. This is because although they come and they go, students are replaced every year by others who are exactly as old as their predecessors were one year ago. This keeps us teachers young. A different consequence of this is that, as teachers, we hear students express the same enthusiastic ideas again and again, year in and year out, uttered as if they are completely new and never been felt before. It may indeed be that there is nothing new under the sun, but the compassionate educator conceals this, and encourages student enthusiasm, passion, and a commitment to change. How deadening and churlish it is to say to an excited student or students that this has been done before, even if it has. How important it is to understand that newness is often, like beauty, in the eye of the beholder.

And the optimistic educator remains open to the fact that sometimes, just sometimes, something genuinely new does come along. Maybe there are a few new things under our sun after all. Or perhaps under our keystone, or

under our archway. I am thinking, for example, of the two truly spectacular theater productions just before the winter break. I mentioned *Junzi* in my letter to you all towards the end of December. That was a ground-breaking play for us, written by students, and focusing with sharp insight on a pivotal moment in modern Chinese history. And then soon after that, we enjoyed a Middle School Musical, a first for us, *Once on This Island*. Both were indeed novel, and outstanding. We may have been walking old paths in each, well-known history in the first, and a much-performed musical in the second, but we did so with a distinctively new style and strut.

Published on January 11, 2019

### **Practice Makes Perfect**

Learning is fun. This is, as we know, one of the signature statements of the International Primary Curriculum (IPC), which we use in our primary division, alongside the Chinese National Curriculum and other curricular material and models. That ‘fun’ feeling or sentiment is important. Learning which is fun is enjoyable, and engaging. But learning is not always fun. Some learning requires a patience and a persistence which is not usually associated with fun. Lively fun and serious application can, of course, go together, but one is usually more prominent than the other, and can even eclipse the other, depending on the nature of the task.

Malcolm Gladwell, prolific author and popular psychologist, published his third book in 2008. It is called *Outliers: The Story of Success*. Although Gladwell did not invent the 10,000-hour rule, it is his book which is often credited with the widespread acceptance in certain circles of this ‘rule’. The rule states, somewhat simplistically, that it takes a human individual 10,000 hours to master a significant skill, such as learning a language, or playing the violin, to give just two examples. Although this number is surely suspect, and differing accomplishments must surely differ numerically, it does affirm a truth known for millennia: practice makes perfect. In order to perfect anything really substantial, one needs more than talent and opportunity. One needs to be prepared to practice, practice, practice, and to make the time for that. I prefer Jia Dao’s words to Gladwell’s: “Grinding a sword for ten years, but the blade is yet to be tried.”

Ken Lee provides a similar perspective, this time from a chef practitioner. He is one of only about 10 *jook-sing* noodle masters left in Hong Kong. These

bamboo-pole noodles are an esteemed part of Cantonese cuisine, and are made by the master straddling a long bamboo pole that hangs off the end of a heavy wooden table. The kneading of the dough is done by the master riding the bamboo, a little like a see-saw, bouncing up and down as the bamboo presses the dough into the special consistency typical of these noodles. Quoted in a recent news report, Ken Lee says: “The more you practice, the more you’ll know how to make the noodle, depending on the humidity and the weather. Nobody can teach you this -- you have to learn and understand this yourself. It took me about six to seven years to master the skill.”

There is, perhaps, a cultural dimension to all this. When we opened Keystone, intent as we were and still are on bringing together the best of three great learning traditions, we invited a distinguished scholar, Jin Li, to spend time with the founding faculty. We wanted everyone to read and become familiar with the ideas she expresses in her remarkable book, *Cultural Foundations of Learning: East and West*, published in 2012. In comparing and contrasting the teaching and learning habits and cultures of the East and the West, Jin Li is erudite and sensitive. In the domain of learning practice, she notes this enduring aspect of the Confucian tradition: “Most Confucian writings discuss the core set of learning virtues that any learner has to develop and to exercise in their learning.” Jin Li then identifies seven of these core learning virtues. They are ‘sincerity, diligence, endurance of hardship, perseverance, concentration, respect for teachers, and humility.’ The first five of these virtues lead directly to the hours and hours of practice and application that mastery requires.

So, let me return now to my opening. We try, at Keystone, to get the balance right between fun and seriousness in our teaching and learning. These are not two features of our educational project that are exclusive. We try to enjoy

what we do, but also to spend hours perfecting it, and then documenting and disseminating it. I mentioned a few weeks ago the publication of our first book length study, on the Chinese Thread at Keystone, *Local Culture in a World School*. This year, we are working on another, this time about critical thinking and deep thinking. Like the first, it promises to be fun, and serious, in balanced measure.

Published on September 28, 2018

### Wander to Wonder

Beijing in the fall is beautiful. The temperature becomes more moderate, and the air seems not only cleaner but also more invigorating. Two weeks ago, I was at the Great Wall at Mutianyu with my older sister and her husband, who were visiting me. From there, we could see downtown Beijing clearly and could even make out the irregular yet iconic shape of the CCTV building.

It has now become natural, during this limpid autumnal season, for our thoughts at Keystone to turn towards camping. During the month of September, before the colder weather sets in, all our students in Grades 4 and above will either go camping or will set out on a longer expedition. We have done this from the first year of Keystone, and spending a few days and nights outdoors, with classmates and teachers, has become a school tradition to look forward to and to relish.

Each year, we endeavor to make the camping experience more enjoyable, meaningful, and safer. We are finding additional locations in the hills around Beijing that are both magnificent, yet also rich in local history and interest. We have been building a camping curriculum, so that we are more deliberate in nurturing the skills and attitudes that we want our students to develop, and also more grade specific in scaffolding these. And this year, for the first time, we have employed a Coordinator of Experiential Learning. He is Chris Cartwright, a man of huge experience in outdoor pursuits who possesses a remarkable range of qualifications and certifications to go with this. Chris has been working in Mongolia for the past decade.

Chris will now oversee all our camping trips in the fall, as well as the week-

long expeditions to different parts of China in the spring. Please remember, and note, that Keystone covers the cost of the fall camping, but that parents pay for the spring tours. We shall, as always, try to keep this additional cost low, whilst at the same time making these May explorations both instructive and safe.

But, you might still wish to ask, what is the answer to this question: *Why do we go camping in the first place, and why do we place so much emphasis at Keystone on this type of experiential learning?* One reason is that it is yet another aspect of our Chinese Thread, about which I wrote last week. It is important to remember that experiential learning has long been a part of the Chinese educational tradition. The post-Confucian philosopher Xunzi wrote: *Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand.* The type of involvement and engagement in learning that flows so easily outdoors is a good in and of itself, but also something that washes back into the classroom, both for teachers and students, and by so doing improves teaching and enhances learning.

There are, however, many other reasons for our experiential focus. A few years ago, I wrote an article for *Independent School*, the magazine of the National Association of Independent Schools in the United States. My final sentence was this:

Without question, experiential learning enhances scholastic learning. This type of learning builds confidence, encourages risk taking, reduces the fear of failure, gives oxygen to collaboration, nurtures imagination, promotes problem solving, allows reverie, and grows a taproot from which scholastic learning flowers.

This list of attributes covers much of what we support in our IPC and IB learner profiles. Confidence, independence, the capacity to sort out issues in teams, and to keep on trying again when necessary: all these are vital to the learning which we know to be both effective and enjoyable. And being outdoors, especially in lovely locations, also inspires our imaginations, and encourages us to wander and to wonder, in that dreamy state of reverie which is so vital to creativity.

Every one of the five schools where I have worked has had a flourishing outdoor learning program. In Botswana, this involved camping in a wild, wilderness area on the banks of the great Limpopo River. Huge hippos basked just in front of the tents, crocodiles sunbathed on the sandbanks, and elephants would wander through the camp from time to time. What we do in the hills around Beijing is a little tamer, but just as illuminating. So, I conclude with an inspiring sentence from Emily Dickinson, the reclusive American poet of the second half of the nineteenth century: “I hope your rambles have been sweet, and your reveries spacious.” May this be a mantra for all our campers.

Published on September 7, 2018

### **Learning on the Way**

Our Experiential Learning Program (ELP) trips to different parts of China come to an end today. These journeys, and I use that word deliberately, take most of our students away to fascinating and culturally rich parts of China, and they also offer a creative break from normal routine. The image of the journey, for me, implies much more than mere travel or tourism. We live now in an era where travel for the sake of travel, to visit iconic monuments or destination getaways, often promotes congestion and/or superficiality. By contrast, for me, journeying suggests progressive movement along a road, both literal and metaphorical. Motion like this traces a critical path from a current point of knowledge and experience to a richer and deeper place, one that grows with and into us as we move onwards.

During such breaks from the all-embracing schedules of a busy school, stimulating spaces are opened up, and reflection thrives. I hope that all our journeying students, and teachers, have been inspired to smell new internal flowers, mental and emotional, this past week. The students will have been asked to make their reflections concrete, in contemplative writing at the end of most days. I hope that you, the parents, ask your child about these thoughts and assist them, after their return, to make this new learning a vivid and permanent part of their mental maps.

As you know, we are gradually designing a developmental curriculum of cultural experiences that relate to the work of each classroom in the grade year of the student, and that build on each other as the child moves up the school. This is important, and complex work. John Dewey, a deep and revered thinker on the topic of experiential education, wrote about how vital it is to

craft a continuum of experiences that build on each other over time, so as to avoid the singularity and attendant brittleness of the merely episodic. We are trying to do that here. That is one reason why we ask you to value each expedition as of the same worth, and why we now charge you the same for each. There is philosophy underlying your payment.

I have written many times about Keystone's huge stake in experiential learning. In the spirit of reflection, here are a few more thoughts on this theme:

- We value the depth of learning that comes from direct and dedicated experience;
- We know that students bring these experiential lessons back with them to enrich both their own lives and their academic work;
- We hope that our teachers are emboldened by this process to try more experiential teaching strategies in their classrooms;
- We prize the pleasures of taking our Chinese Thread beyond our gates into the lives led by others;
- We love the sharing engendered within traveling teams, and the joy of students and teachers building experiences together, not quite as equals, but often with far less distance between them than at school;
- We like to think that your own journeys with your children, to places near and far, within and without, will be enriched by their ELP experiences.

Aldous Huxley, the British writer who lived his later years in California, is perhaps most famous for the dystopian novel *Brave New World*. Huxley was an avid traveler, and in 1928 he published *Along the Road; Notes and Essays of a Tourist*. One of the opening essays in Huxley's travel compendium was sardonically titled "Why Not Stay at Home?" Tourism then, nearly one

hundred years ago, was completely different in scale from now. Yet, even then, Huxley was concerned that too many traveled without really looking at, feeling, and learning from the differences of the peoples and places that they were journeying through. His title applies sarcastically to people like this, and hence his suggestion that it might be better just to stay at home if your mind is closed and your heart cocooned. Ours must be the opposite of this. In order to promote such openness, I leave you with a lovely wish from another celebrated writer, Emily Dickinson, a wish that I have used before in a similar context. As we all return from a week away, I join with Dickinson in saying: “I hope that your rambles have been sweet, and your reveries spacious.”

Published on May 10, 2019

### **The Chinese Thread at Keystone Academy**

A defining feature of Keystone Academy is our Chinese Thread. This has been a guiding idea from the very first planning meetings, about two years before we opened. It quickly became a foundation stone for much decision making. It has been exciting to be a part of the creative energy that this initiative has released into our school as it has grown in all realms of our work and play.

This is how we describe the Chinese Thread on our website:

Our mission as a school is to bring together the best of three rich, deep educational traditions: the Chinese, the American, and the global. What we do inside and outside the classroom is like a brilliant cloth of three colors: however, it is the Chinese that is the main thread in this weave. We want all our students, Chinese and non-Chinese, to be knowledgeable and proud of the powerful past and promising future of China. To achieve this, our Chinese Thread brings out the pattern, in every grade of the school, of the language, history, culture, and identity of China. This focus on China and its contribution to the world allows our teachers and students to achieve a richer, more nuanced understanding of the world and their place in it. It imparts to students the critical thinking skills that will help them get ahead in the world of global exchange, politics, and culture. It inspires in students a love for learning, a respect for their own traditions and cultural differences, and a recognition of the relevance of high-level scholarship.

The fact that we draw from three great traditions of teaching and learning means that our emphasis on China is contextualized by reference to communities and contributions in other times and from other places. This

is perhaps most evident in the Middle School course called China in the World, where students study aspects of Chinese civilization in Chinese, world civilization in English, and the visual and performing arts from both. In Grade 10, the MYP (Middle Years Programme) Personal Project is chosen individually; but this is followed by a Capstone Project embedded in the culture or history of China. In the two IB (International Baccalaureate) Diploma years, we teach the Theory of Knowledge course with two teachers for each section, one Chinese and one non-Chinese, as yet another thread in this fabric. It goes on, in our KAP (Keystone Activities Program) offerings, in the residential program, in our meal menus, in a growing number of our interior spaces. Most of all, the Chinese Thread is part of the spirit of the place – as such it is not always spoken, but felt frequently.

One of the standing committees at Keystone, and one that I am involved with directly, is the Chinese Thread Committee. This committee comprises teachers and students, and it draws from the whole Keystone community as it discusses and refines this central component of the Keystone philosophy. The work of this committee is not only to discuss and refine the Chinese Thread in our school. It is also to publicize and present it, to different groups and in various ways. In a recent morning meeting, Primary School students watched a lovely video that showed examples of the Chinese Thread in action in their grades. On a much grander scale, two Keystone founders, Dai Min and Sally Booth, are writing and editing a full-length book on the Chinese Thread at Keystone. This will be widely available inside and outside our Keystone community, and will be presented to each member of our first graduating class, the Class of 2018. And I am writing this short piece, at the request of the committee, to try to deepen your understanding of this bold and beautiful concept, and practice. I hope that I have succeeded in this task.

In conclusion, here is a final set of thoughts related to the Keystone Chinese Thread. We describe ourselves, at times, as a ‘world school.’ You all recognize our slogan: “A new world school, a new model of education in China.” It is the Chinese Thread, perhaps more than any other connected practice, that makes us a world school. As an educational institution, we are rooted in this country, and proud of that, but we look outwards from this foundation to the rest of the world, ever mindful of the rich and creative reciprocal interactions between our Chinese people and our global planet. National and international students, and adults, all benefit from this. Nationals grow into proud and knowledgeable ambassadors for their country, as they enter their larger worlds; and guests, like me, deepen our appreciation of this amazing culture and represent it with feeling, as friends, in our other worlds.

Published on January 19, 2018

### An Open and Magnanimous Mind

On Friday night, at the end of last week, we hosted the first of the Keystone Education Salons for the year. Zhou Guoping, the renowned philosopher, entertained and enlightened a full audience in the intimate setting of our multi-purpose hall. It was a heartening experience, not least for the younger students there. When it came to question time towards the end of the evening those students showed, with wit and wisdom, that Zhou Guoping is right: you do not have to be old to be a philosopher. The natural curiosity that children have for the great questions and puzzles of life leads them to start asking philosophical questions from an early age. We adults and teachers need to be alert to this, we were told by our speaker, and to listen carefully to these junior philosophers. Zhou Guoping is an educator and counselor, as well as a majestic philosopher.

In my welcome to the audience, I said that the tradition of Keystone Salons is an expression of our school's desire to reach out to anyone and everyone interested in the worlds of education and ideas. We say this in our mission: *Our ambition is to share successes generously and to learn from failures bravely, to open our doors to many, and to engage fully with the world of education, and the world at large, beyond our gates.* These salons were initiated in the year before Keystone opened, and they have grown in a lovely way since then. It is satisfying to note that our expressed public purpose as a school is becoming recognized: more and more people not connected directly to Keystone are coming to such events. This is a tribute to the outreach of Sabrina Liu and her marketing team, Sabrina being the leader and caretaker of the salons since we started them.

Zhou Guoping spoke to the topic: *On keeping a philosophical mind*. He began by saying how impressed he was with the title that had been given to him. He did not expect a school to be interested in philosophy and in the mental attributes and attitudes of the philosophical approach to life. He commended Keystone for including philosophy in its curriculum, a reference to the Theory of Knowledge course in our final two years of high school. It is interesting to note that we teach these philosophy courses with two teachers in every class, one a native Chinese speaker, the other a native English speaker, and they teach together in both languages.

Our guest then ranged over a wide range of philosophical issues. He mentioned his own daughter, about whom he has written, and delighted us with tales of the searching questions she used to ask as a baby: Why does time have to fly by? Where's the end of the sky? From there, Zhou Guoping spoke about the philosophical mind originating from curiosity, doubt, and uncertainty; about the importance of reason for the philosophical mind; about ontology, epistemology, ethics, and morality; about objective reality and subjective happiness; and about the value of philosophy.

I felt throughout that I was in the presence of a deeply human individual, a man of great wisdom. Zhou Guoping claimed that one of the benefits of philosophy is that it produces 'an open and magnanimous mind.' He himself is a wonderful example of that. This was again in evidence when students asked questions at the end. He listened attentively, and responded courteously, to such curiosities as these: If the questions you ask cannot be answered, are you asking the right questions? Is your life boring as a great philosopher? Do you become more stupid the more you study?

In my introduction of our guest, I referenced Nietzsche, the German

philosopher about whom Zhou Guoping is an expert. I quoted from the first pages of Nietzsche's work *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, about the process of artistic creation: "One must still have chaos in oneself in order to be able to give birth to a dancing star." Zhou Guoping gave birth to many dancing stars last Friday, and there will be more to come in future salons. Don't miss them.

Published on September 15, 2017

### **Great Libraries Build Communities**

Many of you, I hope most of you, have been into our High School library. We are fortunate indeed at Keystone to have three fine libraries, growing in use every day. But the High School library is different, as it is a really imaginative expression in interior design and furniture of the combination of East, West, and International traditions that is a hallmark of our school. The architects of this magnificent and sensitive space are Luke Hughes, who works in London and specializes in library design around the world, and Kacy Song, the Director of our Keystone Libraries.

I love this place, as do our older students. It is a rare pleasure to be in a reading space that is so calmly resonant with both meaning and beauty. For me, it fits perfectly some thoughts that I had about libraries some time ago, that I described then in this column:

A library is a place to get lost in. Libraries are for browsing, for dreaming and reverie, and for finding out (randomly at times) about things you never realized existed. I discover new aspects of the world, and myself, in libraries.

Although our High School Library has been in use for almost a year now, we have not yet had an official opening ceremony or dedication. This will happen on Sunday afternoon, October 15, starting at 4.30pm. Owing to space constraints, only families in Grades 10, 11, and 12 are invited. If you come early, from 3.30pm onwards, there will be an opportunity to have a guided tour before the speakers begin. We shall have a short address from Luke Hughes and Kacy Song, and then a speech by Simon Winchester about the famous British scholar and lover of China, Joseph Needham. Simon is

a prolific and renowned author, and wrote the book about Needham called *The Man Who Loved China*. I have known Simon for some years. He is coming from the United States specially to speak at our ceremony.

Let me conclude with two additional comments about reading and libraries. Here is the first. It is so lovely to see parents, with their children, reading together in the Primary School library in the late afternoons. What a fine way of doing something educational with each other and supportive of each other. This reminds me of the quote from the librarian and writer R David Lankes, that is posted prominently in our High School library: *bad libraries build collections, good libraries build services, great libraries build communities*.

And now the second. A few days ago, at the main gate in the morning, a little boy strode into school all on his own, reading a book intently, in Chinese. I caught up with him, walked with him, and asked him what he was reading. “Is it a story?” I inquired. “No,” he said, “It’s real.” I love that piece of childlike wisdom. Stories are not real, but books are. Another quote in the High School library, from Zhang Chao, is this: *writings are mountains and rivers on the desk; mountains and rivers are writings of the earth*. That little boy knows this profound truth already, without needing to know anything about master Zhang.

### **The Grace of Great Things**

One of the enjoyable aspects of being at home is that I am surrounded by hundreds of books, most of them old favorites. The temptation to re-read a few has proved irresistible. One of these has the bold and evocative title, *The Courage to Teach*, by Parker J Palmer. This was a gift to me from Deerfield Academy, in Massachusetts, as a token of appreciation for a talk that I gave to the faculty there in February, 2003. I only recall this detail because there is an inscription on the opening page, with that date. I mention the book now because some of Palmer's comments about teaching connect nicely with my remarks in this column last week.

Here is a sample. One of the features of powerful communities of learning, for Palmer, is that they are rooted in 'the grace of great things.' This is a phrase borrowed from the Austrian poet, Rilke, in an essay that he wrote about the French sculptor Rodin, in 1919. In that essay, Rilke points out that he himself borrowed the phrase from a medieval monk. So, as with many things of great worth, it has a long-lived pedigree. I found this phrase so intriguing that I looked up and read the essay by Rilke. In it, the poet praises the sculptor for devoting his entire life's work to expressing, in three dimensions, the essence of forms. These were forms many and varied, but all studied with unerring insight in order to reveal their inner being when crafted into sculptures.

For Palmer, reflecting on 'the grace of great things' in an educational context makes him realize that "our conventional images of educational community ignore our relationships with the great things that call us together – the things that call us to know, to teach, to learn." Palmer suggests that these

things require graciousness to be discovered, and uncovered. Learners need to search out the inner life, the essence, of what is being studied, and to be satisfied with nothing less than that. Deep diving, and not shallow swimming, is what characterizes such learning for life.

In my own reflections on ‘the grace of great things’ and its application to our school, one thought I have is to ask us all what the essence or inner being of Keystone is. There is no single answer to this question, but surely one is to be found in what we call our Chinese Thread. We are all familiar with this concept and practice. In our mission, we express it in this way: ‘promoting Chinese culture and identity in a world context.’ We feel that this third keystone expresses a deep and essential truth about Keystone as a ‘world school’. Through it, we focus in all areas of school life on the language, history, culture, and identity of China, our host country, but we try always to do so within the perspective of the relationships between China and the other countries and regions that make up our connected world.

All of this leads me to conclude by going back again to my last week’s column. In writing about some of the essential qualities that we look for in the hiring of Keystone teachers, I left out one that is obvious. That is a love for and of China. Like Joseph Needham, ‘the man who loved China’ and who is memorialized in our High School library, we seek Chinese and non-Chinese teachers who are inspired by our country, and who wish to continue learning about our rich heritage and proud place in and of the world, and imparting this love to our students.

### **A Courteous Community**

What does a school born and bred on courtesy look and feel like? I have asked this question before. I ask it again now. It seems appropriate to do so in a week that is ending with parent-teacher conferences. These should be engaging and productive meetings where teachers, students, and parents come together to explore, within a framework of courteous and constructive conversation, the learning journey of precious individuals, your children, our students, here at Keystone. This three-way partnership is crucial for all of us if we are to bring optimal benefit to what we do and to what our children learn.

For me, and my senior administrative colleagues, courtesy begins each day with greetings at the school gate, and this year also at the back of the school, where the buses now drive in. I believe strongly that our presence there, saying hello to our students as they enter the school, sets a tone of civil behavior for the whole day. We do something similar with the boarding students when they come to breakfast, and when they cross the quad to enter their academic building for the beginning of classes. Courtesy such as this is linked to a feeling of stability and security. Both these are essential for a productive learning environment. What we do at the start of the day is not some musty old-fashioned mannerism – it is part of the context for learning that we all share, and should all nurture. And, for many, it carries on through the day. Visitors to Keystone often comment on the genuinely civil way in which they are greeted as they walk around.

I would go further. Courtesy is connected to caring, to what was called *caritas* in ancient Rome, a word from which our modern ‘charity’ derives.

Courteous people care for themselves first, and because they are mindful of themselves their considerateness and empathy extend naturally to other persons. This care also extends to things in the physical or natural world. A school filled with courteous people would not be dirty, and there would not be litter thrown or dropped on the ground. A courteous community would care deeply for its immediate surroundings, and by implication and extension for the state of its city, country, and earth. You can begin to see why I think that courtesy is so important, and how it can and should influence so much of what we do.

And you can also begin to see why I become upset when there are provoking examples of discourtesy at Keystone. Perhaps I should have put this concluding paragraph at the start of my short piece for the week. But I needed to frame these final comments within the context of the links among courtesy, learning, and our Keystone culture. I hope that you have all read to this point. I want now to wag a finger at any and all of us who think that it is appropriate to raise our voices and shout, in order to emphasize the strength of our feelings and to try to get our way. Some parents sometimes shout on our campus in a manner that is offensive and unacceptable. And others take to WeChat in ways that are the social media equivalent of shouting. That does not work here at Keystone.

I tell teachers from time to time that the only occasion when it is right to shout at a student is when that child is in physical danger. My response to other types of shouting is simple: if you cannot behave according to our 5 shared values, and our Community Partnership, all of which you know about, you should not come onto the campus until you decide to abide by our ways. Please remember that the courteous culture that I have been trying to describe does not just occur, without effort. It takes time and attention

to build and sustain it. And we must never take it for granted, or allow it to be undermined by those individuals who raise their voices inappropriately.

*Published on November 17, 2017*



CHAPTER 3

# Learning from the World



### **What Path Are You Taking?**

My piece this week is written almost entirely by someone else. Jenny Lu was born in China and emigrated to the United States when young. She wrote this piece a week or two ago for the personal section of the Huffington Post, a web-based news provider in America. It was headlined thus: "Why I Dropped Out Of An Ivy League College Just 3 Weeks Into Freshman Year."

Given that some of our seniors are focused right now on the deadline for applications to Cambridge and Oxford, and some are applying Early Decision and Early Action to highly selective American colleges, Jenny's story is a timely reminder of some aspects of the college maelstrom that can easily be passed over, or forgotten entirely. Jenny's record of her experience is, in my opinion, well worth quoting in full:

At the end of August, I packed my bags and said goodbye to the University of Pennsylvania after having moved into my new dorm as a first-year student only a couple weeks prior. I came home to Medford, Massachusetts, to shocked family and friends, everyone wondering where I had gone wrong, including myself.

I immigrated to the United States from China at the age of 6 with my mother and a much older brother more than a decade ago, with the primary purpose of me having access to an American education and job opportunities. From kindergarten through 12th grade, I buried my head in textbooks and homework, constantly working to be the best student I could be. My elementary and middle school teachers called me "exceptionally bright." My high school teachers told my mother that I had

a promising future. I was ranked number four in my class of more than 300 students; I was the president of the biggest community service program at the school; I had an amazing SAT score.

I was the “model minority.” Here and in China, I have always been the success story that my mother’s friends told their children. “You should be like Jenny,” they said, “she gets good grades and will go to a good college and will get a good job and will make lots of money.” That is the Chinese definition of success. So when I was accepted on a full scholarship to the University of Pennsylvania last December, everyone thought that it couldn’t get any better for me.

But what people saw was an illusion that couldn’t be further from reality. Many nights were sleepless and when I did have time to sleep, I needed medication to help with insomnia. I was not the only one. I saw the cloud of pressure about grades and college loom over others, particularly within the top students in our grade, many of whom I am close with. I believe it is that pressure that has driven students like me to become as academically successful as we are, but it is also a pressure that constantly overwhelms us. It comes from the parents, the system and within ourselves as well.

After being accepted into university, I put on a facade and submitted to the hype and excitement that others felt for me. Inside, however, the coming fall filled me with a sense of dread because I knew deep down that I was only following the path designated to me through expectations. I was following the promise of fortune and success as defined by my parents. Although I wasn’t sure what my own path and dreams were, I knew I would never find out if I kept following somebody else’s. It seems like we have become so desensitized as a society that the depression and exhaustion

that students face is treated as something that is completely normal. As the college application process becomes increasingly competitive, parents place more pressure on their children to work harder with the goal of getting into an elite school.

I believe that this is especially prevalent in Chinese and Asian families. When I scored lower than expected on my first SAT exam, my family pushed me to take an intensive course to improve my score. Hiring tutors is very common among our family friends and in Chinese households in general — not just for the SATs but for homework, essay writing, college interview prepping and just about anything else that could help their children get ahead. Looking outside of my bubble, I felt a pang of jealousy seeing how lenient non-Asian families and parents were with their children's education. Pressures surrounding school and college exist within every culture, but it feels like it's particularly extreme in many Asian families.

I never communicated the pressure and stress that I felt. Mental health was not recognized or discussed in my household. In fact, I'm not even sure how to say "mental health" in Chinese. I was conditioned to internalize these types of emotions, to deal with them alone. The problem is that these struggles are not dealt with. They are bottled up, and many of my Asian American friends have confessed the same.

It took me being physically at Penn — there in the dorm, in classes and on campus — to really know that it was not for me. As I went through the motions of the first few days of classes and navigated through dining halls, recreational spaces, and even the city of Philadelphia, I couldn't picture myself there for another day, let alone the next four years. With my state of mind at an all time low, I made the decision to leave with the help of my

academic advisor at the university, who supported me and gave me the courage to tell my mother the truth. The three of us had a meeting where, for the first time in many years, my mom and I communicated how we felt.

I told my mom that I wasn't going to be happy or fulfilled at Penn, and that I needed a break from the pressures of academia. She told me that as an immigrant, this path that she pushed me to stay on was the only one that she has known, and that she only wanted the best for me. With the help of my advisor, my mom opened up to the possibilities outside of the Ivy League, whether it meant a different school, a gap year or something else. It was a hard, emotional conversation, but it reassured me that beneath my mom's expectations lie love and good intentions. Knowing that I had my mother's support even in her disappointment drove me to keep moving forward despite this setback.

In the weeks that I have been at home, I have been working, volunteering, spending time with people I love, and doing some serious reevaluating of where I want to be and what I would like to do. There are no clear answers to either question yet, though I do know now where I don't want to be and what I don't want to do. More importantly, I no longer feel an extreme sense of urgency to have it "all figured out."

This is not to say that I have no ambition. I will be applying to university again, either for spring or fall of next year, but this time will be different. Though it might not be from one of my family's first choice schools, I know that I will graduate in a field that I enjoy, and make my family proud nonetheless. I want students to know that whether you are applying to schools or feel unhappy at your current one, you are never stuck with only one option. And if you have no idea if college is for you or what career

you'd like to pursue, take a break.

I know I made the right decision for me. I am only 18 years old. I have enough time.

These three final sentences are compelling, and must be haunting to some, especially older graduates looking back on choices that they now wish they had made differently. Let me expand just a little. We must remind ourselves, and our nearly adult children, that thriving at college, not merely surviving, depends on making choices that are right for each individual. Very often in life doing something 'for me' is merely selfish. In the matter of college choice, it is not: it is vital for success. Authenticity, being true to oneself and one's considered instincts, is not just all right, it is all important. At 18, as Jenny Lu reminds us, youth is on the side of the young undergraduate. There is enough time, time for much that is rich and varied, and maybe off the road that is too frequently traveled. In the contemporary and future world of work, where we know that many if not most of our children will have a multitude of different jobs in their careers, taking the right amount of time in early adulthood is ever more important.

Please understand me. Do not get me wrong. Going to a highly selective college or university can be truly transforming. My years at Oxford were some of the most stimulating in my life. But this experience is not for everyone. Nor should it be. Going to colleges where we feel that we belong, where the fit is snug, can be even more transformative. We must allow our children the gift of guided choice, and support them on their journey even if their path is not parallel to ours, or to what we might project onto them by way of wish fulfillment for ourselves.

### **Global Connections**

I have written to you in the past about the Global Connections (GC) group of schools. I helped start GC in 1996, when I was an invited speaker at the annual conference of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS). This Association, of which Keystone is an affiliate member, is an American body and its members are, in the main, American independent schools, with a sprinkling of American International Schools and some other overseas schools. The interest of the NAIS Board at that time, just over 20 years ago, was to encourage American Heads of School to become more global in outlook. The National Association leaders rightly observed that too many American educators were narrowly parochial in their perspectives. And so Global Connections was born. I have been the President of this group for close to 15 years.

The main annual event of this consortium of over 300 schools worldwide is to hold an annual seminar of educational leaders from around the world. This is hosted by a member school, and is in a different country every year. Countries that we have visited in the last two decades include Botswana, China, Colombia, Guatemala, India, Kenya, Macedonia, Romania, South Africa, Spain, Thailand, the United States, and about 10 others. One of the common aims of each seminar, which has its own overarching theme that changes every year, is to learn about successes and challenges in the host country's educational culture and practice. Another feature is that each seminar produces its own summative declaration, written consensually by the participants and adopted at the end of the week's proceedings.

The most recent Global Connections Seminar was held in Melbourne,

Australia last month. I want to share with you that seminar's declaration. Here it is:

**Declaration of the Global Connections XX Conference**

Held at Wesley College, Melbourne, Australia 24-29 March 2019

Educators from across the globe gathered for the 20th Global Connections Seminar on the topic of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship. We were warmly welcomed by a representative of the First Peoples of Australia who asked us to “bring our best to the land of the Aboriginals.”

With the recent heinous killings in Christchurch, New Zealand, we were asked to allow ourselves to be heartbroken but not broken and to acknowledge that it was profound ignorance that had caused the tragedy. We were challenged to support those who build bridges of empathy.

We were asked to see the state of Victoria as a bridge built on multi-cultural foundations: where one third of the student population is born overseas, where 50% of the students come from more than 200 countries, who speak over 260 languages and celebrate 135 faiths. Currently one third of Victoria's state schools have established 483 sister-school links with schools in Asia and are building an education which is globally focused.

In this land of ancient peoples and their enduring wisdom, where we were enchanted by magnificent marsupials, we explored the extraordinary fruits of scientific research at Bosch and the Australian Synchrotron; we witnessed the benefits of experiential learning at Wesley College's Clunes campus and at the John Monash Science School. We learned of an exciting new model of schooling epitomized by the Yiramalay/Wesley

Studio School. We were charmed by the enthusiasm of the students we encountered at the Clunes Primary School.

We were inspired by a wide variety of provocative speakers who offered insights into a fundamental truth of where education is today: a mass enterprise which increasingly embodies the values of a market society. We cannot but be affected by those whose words we heard and the connections we made. In the words of a final keynote speaker, Associate Professor Radhika Gorur: “there is an urgent need for us, as educators, to re-think the purpose of education, and to re-conceptualize creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship” in this 21st century.

I want you to read this for many reasons. It is well written. It speaks of a group of purposeful, committed, and open-minded educators. Most important, it delineates areas of educational endeavor sometimes neglected in our rush for the rapid-fire rewards of grades, results, admissions and the like. Listen to the wisdom of ancient peoples, First People, and other minorities; be heartbroken but not broken by the senseless and ignorance-driven killings of worshippers in New Zealand mosques and, more recently we must add, in Sri Lankan churches; build bridges of empathy; value and applaud diversity wherever it is to be found, and nurture it at home; and realize that there is indeed “an urgent need ‘for us, as educators, to re-think the purpose of education, and to re-conceptualize creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship’ in this 21st century.”

### **The Company of Educational Kindred Spirits**

At the start of our ELP week, just over a month ago now, I went to Hong Kong for meetings of the Heads of four fine schools. These are the Independent Schools Foundation Academy (ISF) and the Chinese International School (CIS), both in Hong Kong, the YK Pao School in Shanghai, and our own Keystone Academy. David Mansfield, the Executive Headmaster of YK Pao, had suggested to me on a recent visit to Keystone that we were a distinct group of like-minded schools which might find an exchange of people, ideas, and practices productive and enhancing. David used to be the Head of Dulwich College Beijing (DCB), and is a good friend. As the representative of the youngest school of the four, I felt honored that Keystone was included.

We met on Monday, May 6, at ISF. We were 5, the four Heads and a second colleague from CIS, Li Bin, the Deputy Head of that school, who has been on the Keystone Board of Advisors since our founding. I had visited ISF shortly after it opened, maybe 15 years ago, but not since then. I was impressed with its growth and vision, and I came away with some substantial and innovative ideas to try here. Like us, they value their Chinese cultural heritage deeply and, like us, they search for challenging and interesting ways to enrich the academic experience of their students. I found myself enjoying my individual ELP journey at the same time as many of our students and teachers were setting out on theirs.

During the course of wide-ranging conversations, we distilled our purpose to these two goals:

- Mutual support of like-minded and commonly focused schools, especially

heads and senior leaders of schools, in our individual journeys to improvement;

- Provision of an outward-facing, sharing, evidence-based, open-sourced forum for advancing our common understanding of best practice.

In trying to define and describe commonalities, we listed 10 qualities or features that we thought, taken together, make us distinctive in the educational landscape of China. They are these:

- We are academically elite in the sense that we are selective, seeking to gain competitive results and placements and attracting, implicitly at least, cultural capital (and hence inevitably economic capital) in our respective areas;
- We share an intense and thorough focus on immersive bilingualism, or dual-language ambilingualism, producing students who are academically, and in all ways, fluent in both English and Mandarin;
- Connected to bilingualism is biculturalism: we seek and promote true east and west integration in values and ideas, developing cultural stereoscopy (viewing and developing perspectives through a double lens);
- ‘Chineseness’ is a hallmark of our curricula: we root our learning in a deep awareness of Chinese culture, history, identity, and language;
- ...Yet we are international, and we focus on being World Schools – global in outlook and program, and in admissions, but committed to advancing China in relation to the world;
- Ethical character development is an integral part of our curricula, and we tie this to clearly articulated community values: moral education, service learning, and character formation are foundational to what we do. These qualities are informed by a deep knowledge of and respect for Chinese traditions, philosophy, and culture;

- 'Holistic' describes an approach that we do not merely talk about in a take-it-for-granted manner, but that we embrace with real commitment;
- We encourage an integrated pedagogy whereby we use western ideas and practices to supplement tried-and-tested Chinese principles, such as the importance of memorization as a foundation for high-level learning, and disciplined approaches to subject knowledge;
- We are all not-for-profit entities;
- We are all independent in that we are not part of a group, a chain, or a family of schools, nor attached to a franchise or sponsor school.

It is always a pleasure, for me, to be in the stimulating and thoughtful company of educational kindred spirits. As schools, we four have a great deal to give to and to learn from each other. Our next meeting of Heads will be in Shanghai, at YK Pao, in the fall. Only good can come of this association.

Published on June 6, 2019

## Top Dog

In this Year of the Dog, it seems fitting that I have just read a book called *Top Dog*. It was published about 5 years ago, and is one of those books (we know the type) that gives advice on how to do well in life, and succeed. ‘Doing well’ and ‘succeeding’ are not treated as complex and ultimately undefinable terms, and one of the problems that I have with the book’s authors, Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman, is that their analyses are often, in my opinion, too glib and superficial. The subtitle of their book is a good example of this. It is this: ‘The Science of Winning and Losing.’ I want to add ‘art’ and ‘craft’ and perhaps a few other words, or concepts, to that mix. And I do not appreciate the assumption that attaching the label ‘science’ to something makes it by definition objectively true and necessarily right.

Be that as it may, the book has many stimulating insights. Here is one that I like so much that I quote it below at length:

We need to make a distinction between adaptive competitiveness and maladaptive competitiveness. Adaptive competitiveness is characterized by perseverance and determination that rise to the challenge, but it’s bounded by an abiding respect for the rules. It’s the ability to feel genuine satisfaction at having put in a worthy effort, even if you lose. People with adaptive competitiveness don’t have to be the best at everything – they only strive to be the best in the domain they train for... They are able to defer gratification, meaning they accept that it can take a long time to improve. Healthy competitiveness is marked by constant striving for excellence, but not desperate concerns over rank. It’s adaptive competitiveness that leads to the great, heroic performances that inspire us all.

The maladaptive variety is what gives competitiveness its bad name. Maladaptive competitiveness is characterized by psychological insecurity and displaced urges. It's the individual who can't accept that losing is part of competing; it's the person who competes when others around him are not competing. He has to be the best at everything, and he can't stop comparing himself to others even when the competition is over.

Amongst many worthy comments in these two paragraphs, the distinction between competing and winning is so important, and so frequently forgotten in competitive and elite schools. Yes, it is perfectly possible, and I mean perfectly, to 'strive for excellence' and not at the same time to be plagued by 'desperate concerns over rank.' Sport is an obvious area where individuals and teams compete, and there are some insightful analyses of various sports performances in the book. At Keystone, as our sporting profile grows, we are seeing more teams do well, in some cases very well. That is satisfying. But what is more satisfying, to me and to our dedicated coaches, is the spirit with which we play. More and more of our teams are being applauded and recognized for their sportsmanship, win or lose.

*Top Dog* ranges widely. There are interesting observations on evolution and competitiveness, on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and on the relationships between competitiveness, collaboration, and creativity, to give just a few examples. I am an admirer of the sound philosophy that is often contained in illustrative aphorisms, witty sayings that use imagery to make a wise point about life and living. *Top Dog* uses just such a saying as its opening, and defining, epigram. It is attributed by the authors to US President Dwight Eisenhower, often regarded as one of the most popular presidents in American history:

What counts is not necessarily the size of the dog in the fight – it's the size of the fight in the dog.

Although made famous in an important speech by Eisenhower in 1958, this saying is often claimed to originate with the American writer and humorist, Mark Twain, and may in fact be an old saying from the state of South Dakota. It matters not, to me, where it originates. Its meaning, value, and truth apply everywhere. Physical strength is less important, most often, than strength of will. Big hearts take us further than big bodies. I value mind over matter, or muscle. That's the most important message that I take from *Top Dog*, and that I want us to remember as our Year of the Dog draws to a close.

Published on December 7, 2018

## **Top Puppy**

Last week, I made mention of a book called *Top Dog*, and shared with you a few simple insights contained in it, along with some of my thoughts emanating from it. This week, I want to reflect on the saga of a 5-year old boy, identified only as ‘Chen,’ whom I shall refer to as ‘top puppy.’ I do not mean to be unkind by using this nickname, and it may even be the case that this young lad does not really exist and is a fiction. However, my top puppy made headlines at the beginning of November, as some of you know, when his parents applied for him to join Grade 1 next year at The Starriver Bilingual School in Shanghai. His story seems to me to be an unusual and telling example of ‘maladaptive competitiveness’ gone crazy, on many levels.

Applications to schools, especially for Grade 1, do not usually generate vast publicity and massive commentary on social media. But this one did. It was all because of the CV, or résumé, submitted with the application. This must have been written by an adult, the boy’s parents, or perhaps an agent or coach. How it was leaked is another matter, but leaked it was. And here are some of its contents.

Chen’s résumé runs to 15 pages. He is a very well-read young man. He has read 10,000 books in Chinese and English, and 408 of these have been read this year. (Is he slowing down?) Chen writes three essays a week, and has a ‘wide variety of hobbies’ that includes sport, playing the piano, dancing, and Chinese board games. A map of his travels shows that he has visited Tokyo and Bali. But the CV is not only about quantity, the number of things already done and achieved in his young life. It includes relatively sophisticated commentary on the character of the young boy.

For example, he is described as confident, and courageous, and ‘full of energy.’ He claims the following about himself, beginning with vaccinations: “I never cry when I get shots. Starting when I was a year and a half old, I would get up by myself when I fell down. Everyone praised me as brave.” He, or his parents, or his agent or coach, understand clearly the value of our contemporary emphasis on resilience. Again, he claims: “If I get told off, I can quickly adjust my mood and actively dedicate myself to my studies.” For me, I cannot imagine that such a model of scholastic virtue would ever be told off.

Images of the CV were shared on Weibo. Within a few days, tens of thousands of people had expressed opinions, and a hashtag about Chen had been viewed close to 40 million times. One Weibo user, QVQ, wrote: ‘His happy childhood is ruined for sure,’ but another, this one favorably impressed it seems, opined: ‘He is being nurtured to become a listed company!’

Writing in *The New York Times*, Javier Hernández said this:

The résumé...has provoked a mix of fascination, indignation and debate about whether children in China’s test-crazed system are being raised as soulless strivers.

Some called for the parents of the boy to be arrested. Others wondered whether today’s children would know true happiness, given the intense pressure to perform well and land good jobs.

This all seems symptomatic of tiger parenting taken to a new level, perhaps tiger, lion, leopard, and puma parenting all combined. Yong Zhao, a very well-known Chinese professor of education who works at the college level in the US, and who is the author among other books of *Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad*

*Dragon?: Why China Has the Best (and Worst) Education System in the World,*  
wrote this:

No matter how many good schools there are, people are always shooting for the best. Where their children go to school represents an achievement, an accomplishment for parents. But many don't know what a good education is.

I have no problem with parents wanting the best for their children. I have always wanted that for my son and daughter. But it is Yong Zhao's last sentence that really interests me. What is a 'good education' and how do we educate parents to understand how and where best to find this, whatever their context and background?

It is undoubtedly the case, we have to recognize this with sadness, that many of our world's children do not experience a good education. But what of those like Chen, the fortunate ones? Given his background, and the extraordinary opportunities that he has already been offered and taken up, he has the capacity to do well anywhere. But do he, and his parents, have the sagacity to match his capacity? Going back to the now notorious résumé, Chen says this in reference to his youth: "Life is a marathon, and age is only a negligible detail." All long-distance runners, no matter their ability, know the importance of pacing, of not setting out too fast, of seeing the whole distance as an entire event. In education, that's what we mean by life-long learning, sometimes better put as 'learning for life.'

I worry that going too fast in the first five years might not leave enough energy, or curiosity and creativity, for the long haul.

### **By Leaves We Live**

In the United States and the Caribbean, indeed elsewhere as well, there have been many dangerous, destructive storms recently. For most people who consider such phenomena, including me, these changing and fierce weather patterns are one physical and powerful indication of the warming of our precious planet. A target set a few years ago, of limiting the rise in average global temperatures to no more than a maximum of 2 degrees Celsius, now seems unrealistic. Two separate studies published in late July in the journal *Nature Climate Change* predicted higher average rises than this by the end of the century.

Why should we care? Quite simply, because any average increase beyond that magic but scientifically verified small number of 2 degrees will change lives, ours and many other species, on planet Earth. We shall experience mass extinctions, caused by humans. Our seas will rise higher, threatening our coastal cities, and their intensifying acidity will kill off some sea creatures. Droughts will be more common and more devastating, fires will be more destructive, wild weather will increase, and crops will decrease. The next decade will be crucial, and fast and coherent action across the world is urgently needed. We know all this, but we do not all know yet how to act on our knowledge.

Here is one example of action, on a small scale. When you read this, a group of seven Grade 9 Keystone students and three teachers (I being one) will just have come to the end of a short stay in the Mjejane Conservancy, on the southern boundary of the majestic Kruger National Park in South Africa. We left Keystone on Thursday evening, October 19, immediately after our second

whole-school participation in the Global March for Elephants and Rhinos. I am proud of our commitment to the preservation of these magnificent creatures, and by extension to all species in danger of extinction. The group of students with me were inspired by last year's march, and have spent a year researching the plight of elephants and rhinos. And so we decided to come to see them first hand, which is exactly what we have been privileged to do. Seeing is believing, and believing encourages the desire to preserve and protect.

We are prone as individuals to think that our contributions can only ever be tiny. That may be so, but many tiny actions aggregate quickly. What can we all do, in our homes and workplaces? Here are 5 suggestions, from a recent CNN article about climate change:

- Make small energy saving changes in your home or apartment;
- Be greener in your office or workplace;
- Select your mode of transport with energy conservation as a criterion;
- Become informed, through studying scientifically reliable sources;
- Spread that knowledge, and call out your friends and acquaintances as needed.

In our enchanting and symbolic High School Library, which we dedicated in appropriate style on Sunday October 15, there is a slate carving on the right as you walk in. Its simple inscription is this: "By Leaves We Live." One meaning, specific to any library, is that we need the leaves of books, their pages, for a life that is characterized by learning. A second is that we need green leaves, a stable and supportive environment, to sustain life. That environmental message is crucial for all of us, especially young people. A third meaning is that as humans, we are used to leave-taking. Farewells

define our lives as people.

Let's hope that we are not in the process of saying farewell to our planet, and that we can restrict our goodbyes to bidding farewell to each other. Journeys such as this one to the fragile yet spectacular bushveld of South Africa give me hope, especially when I observe the ecstatic and enthusiastic response of our students. And not all the news is bad: while the rate of rhino poaching remains appalling, and total African elephant numbers are still declining alarmingly, their numbers in four African countries have risen recently. Let's join as a community to do our bit for such preservation, and progress.

Published on October 27, 2017

### In My Element

My first two teaching positions were in universities. However, I found my career passion when I moved from university teaching to school teaching 30 years ago. This move was to a secondary school. I loved teaching teenagers almost immediately. These adolescent years are so impressionable and important for all of us. Now I work in a school that combines primary and secondary. This is one of the many, many reasons that I love working at Keystone. The younger children are so inquisitive, appreciative, and delighted about their learning. I feel privileged that I have been part of five wonderful schools, Keystone being the most recent and, in many ways, the most exciting. I am in my element here.

*In my element.* Although it is a commonplace phrase, I use that English idiom deliberately. I have been reading a book by Ken Robinson called *The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything*. When a person is in her or his element, there is a feeling of complete rightness, of being perfectly at home, knowing that you are exactly where you are supposed to be, and doing what you love doing.

Ken Robinson may be better known for his provocative writings and talks on the importance of creativity in human experience and endeavor, and on how so many schools crush the creative instincts and impulses of their students. His earlier book, *Out of Our Minds: Learning to be Creative*, has been hugely influential, as have some of his TED Talks. Robinson is a mine of brilliant nuggets about how we can make sure that innovation and creativity are nurtured rather than nullified. Such approaches to education, and to life, allow us to get the best from people, rather than the mediocrity that can too

easily be disguised as excellence.

Which brings me back to being in the element that feels right. It is far better to be a fish in water than a fish out of water, gasping for oxygen. Robinson argues that finding one's element is a matter of getting to know well both one's talents and passions, and then making sure to create opportunities where those overlap and can thrive. The book consists of stimulating stories of successful individuals who have done extraordinary things, sometimes overcoming physical adversity as well as the more common barrier and barrage of advice to do something more standard and ordinary with their lives. Personal, social, and cultural forces often make it hard for us to discover what we really want to do. Families and schools can be especially powerful in this regard.

In commenting on schools, Robinson focuses on three features. The first is 'the preoccupation with certain sorts of academic ability.' We know about the rich diversity of human intelligences, yet we are narrow in our limited appreciation of these in many schools. The second is what he terms 'the hierarchy of subjects.' Mathematics and the sciences are frequently at the top, and the arts at the bottom of this ladder. The third is 'the growing reliance on particular types of assessment,' most commonly the standardized tests whose limitations are by now well-known but whose influence is still given far too much importance by some people.

At Keystone, we encourage a wide range of academic interests, and we try to undermine any attitude that regards some as inherently more important than others. Discovery and exploration are a feature of the co-curricular, residential, global, and community service programs. We focus as much as we can on assessment for learning, rather than assessment of

learning only. And when it comes to college applications, and this is a real and understandable concern for our Grade 12 students right now, we ask them and their families to go for what they really want, rather than for what others who do not know them might be advising. Life is too short, and too precious, to settle for anything less than what ignites and inspires us.

Becoming elemental is seldom easy. But it is vital for lives of purpose and passion. Many people are never in a position to evaluate and make the choices that bring them into their element. In a school like Keystone, we are. What a blessing.

Published on December 8, 2017

### **Childhood Is So Fleeting**

Happy western New Year to you all. May 2018 be a year of good, creative growth for all of us, individually and as a community. I do hope that you are refreshed after this short break, and that you enjoyed fine times with family or friends, or both. I spent the holiday at our home in Connecticut, very close to the Hotchkiss School, where I used to work before coming to Keystone. Both our children were there with Judith and me. That was special.

As our son and daughter are well into their 20s, but do not yet have children of their own, I was very aware this holiday of the absence of young children around me. I am so used to the delight of having and hearing the Keystone Primary School students close by. I found myself thinking of their sparkle, and spontaneity. I also found myself going back in my memory, and imagination, to the childhoods of our two dear children, now well qualified and purposeful young adults. Childhood is so fleeting, and that critical period of parenting is swept away so soon.

As parents, we try our best to provide beautiful opportunities for our children. In schools our joint endeavor, as parents and teachers, should be to focus intently on this most important of tasks. At Keystone, we are learning together how to do this really well. We must not allow small differences of opinion, when they occur, to distract us from this work.

But we must also realize that what we offer is quite different from that which is offered, or denied, to so many, many children, all over the world. What a sadness this is. Those who grow up in disadvantaged homes can stagnate, and those who experience domestic violence can be scarred irreparably.

Now, it seems, there are also children who are attacked, mercilessly and deliberately, by warring factions in conflict areas. UNICEF (the United Nations Children's Fund) has just reported on this. I quote from a news report last week:

UNICEF Director Manuel Fontaine said children were being targeted in their homes, schools and playgrounds.

He said such brutality "cannot be the new normal."

The report highlights several conflict zones where it said children had suffered in the past year. It included:

- In the Central African Republic, children were killed, raped, abducted and recruited by armed groups in a dramatic increase in violence
- Islamist militants Boko Haram forced at least 135 children in north-east Nigeria and Cameroon to act as suicide bombers, almost five times the number in 2016
- Muslim Rohingya children in Myanmar suffered "shocking and widespread violence" as they were driven from their homes in Rakhine state
- In South Sudan, more than 19,000 children were recruited into armed forces and armed groups
- Fighting in Yemen has left at least 5,000 children dead or injured according to official figures, with the real number expected to be much higher
- In eastern Ukraine, 220,000 children are living under the constant threat from landmines and other unexploded devices left over from the war

Terror is closer for some than the tiles on the roof of their home. To underline this horrible fact of contemporary life in some communities, Pope Francis has just sent out a seasonal card captioned, in Italian, *il frutto de guerra* (the fruit of war). This photo depicts a young boy carrying for burial on his back his even younger brother, killed by a bomb. The futility and suffering evoked by this image, to say nothing of the awful loss of life and opportunity, is hard to describe in any words.

What can we do about such catastrophes? First, carry on our immediate task of educating our children, the Keystone students, with renewed vigor and purpose. Second, be aware and appreciative of the special and unusual quality of the possibilities that we offer here. Third, train ourselves and our children to be knowledgeable about, and empathetic to, the plight of others who are less fortunate than we are. And fourth, try where we can to make Keystone opportunities available to others who cannot afford them.

Published on January 5, 2018

### **The Things That Matter**

At the end of every week, during the final class period on Friday afternoons, the whole secondary school division gets together in the Performing Arts Center for a school meeting. This is a time for reflection, and for listening to information about events of significance inside and outside Keystone. It is also a time for me to celebrate the good and comment on the not-so-good. I appreciate the spirit of coming together, as do others, that sets us up for the weekend.

Students and teachers frequently occupy most of the stage time. They make presentations, or simply entertain us. Last week, as part of the agenda, we enjoyed a 10-minute magic show by Baron Guo, in which he displayed some extraordinary feats of dexterity with short sections of rope, and then with disappearing and reappearing bottles. After that, we learned from Mr. Arthur Klatt about the lunar eclipse of the super blue blood moon that we witnessed a few days later, on Wednesday this week. More magic, in the skies.

We are occasionally addressed in these meetings by outside speakers. Two weeks ago, a remarkable young man, Paul Lorem, spoke to us. Paul is a student at Tsinghua University. He is studying a one-year Master's Degree program as part of the second cohort of Schwarzman Scholars. About 140 recently graduated students from around China and the world are chosen for this program each year. To be selected is a mark of academic distinction. More than that, it is a recognition of an unusual ability to lead and inspire others.

Paul is now in his late 20s. His life's journey so far is this. Paul was born in the South Sudan, before that country became independent from Sudan in 2011. There has been intense fighting, and war, in this region for decades. As a very young boy, Paul fled with his parents to Northern Kenya, and he grew up in a refugee camp near Lake Turkana. But his parents needed to return to South Sudan, and so Paul had to look after himself. He survived sickness, and schooling that was awful.

However, owing to unusual scholastic aptitude, and even more unusual perseverance given his situation, Paul won a scholarship to Alliance High School, one of the best schools in Nairobi. From there, he won another scholarship to the African Leadership Academy in Johannesburg. When he graduated from this remarkable school, Paul came to Hotchkiss as a one-year Senior. That was when I met him. Then he went to Yale University, where he majored in economics. Upon graduating from Yale, Paul went back to Kenya and started a self-help program in rural villages, before coming to Beijing on yet another scholarship award. What a story.

Paul told us this story, and his own self-effacing testimony made it riveting. At the end, he left us with two messages. The first was to focus on only those aspects of your life that you are able to control, and not to waste energy on things over which you have no control, such as where you are born, or what other people might have that you do not. The second message, related to the first, was to make sure that you appreciate what you have. Standing on the stage in our Performing Arts Center, Paul made specific reference to our very fine school. He urged us to cherish it, and nurture it. We must take this message to heart, in all that we do together at Keystone.

I spent half an hour after the assembly chatting with Paul in my office. In his company, I felt more centered in myself, and more focused on those things that matter. Paul is a rare example of a person who has built an inner strength from a start in life that most of us struggle to imagine. It is odd, and wonderful, that being a refugee from both country and community can lead to such a humble insistence on self-improvement and, through this personal success, to a commitment to improve the lives of others.

Paul Lorem has turned adversity into opportunity, even adventure. Our students recognized that, immediately. I have seldom heard an audience in our theater, which was full, so silent. We all learned a great deal, in a short time. Such is the power of an inspiring life, well witnessed.

Published on February 2, 2018

### **Feel at Home**

As some of you will remember from previous communications from me on the topic of Global Connections, I am the President of this organization. Each year Global Connections holds a seminar for leaders of schools from around the world. This year our annual seminar was hosted by the Indian School Al Ghubra in Muscat, the capital of Oman. It took place in early April, just a few weeks ago, and so I was unable to be there. However, I had visited the country and the school a year ago on a planning mission, and so I knew what an amazing experience the delegates would have.

The theme of the conference this year was *Ahlan wa Sahlan*. This is an Arab phrase that can be translated loosely to mean something like: *you are family, relax, feel at home*. As the one-week gathering progressed, it became clear that the delegates focused more and more in their conversations on the connection between learning, and feeling welcomed. Schools as learning communities thrive, so they came to realize, when all the learners feel that they are in a welcoming community. Below is a paragraph from the seminar declaration, a short statement approved by all participants at the end of the week, that characterizes this:

Our travelling encounters with Omani education, culture and society have been brief but profound. Omani society emphasizes *Ahlan wa Sahlan*. In response to this emphasis, and the welcome we have experienced, we hold up a mirror to ourselves. How welcoming are the schools we lead? How clearly articulated is each school's identity as we live out the culture of welcome? How well do our students, staff, parents, and alumni feel that they belong? How open are we to receiving visitors as individuals and

groups, with the new ideas and experiences that they bring? How do the societies in which our schools exist view our ‘hospitality’ and openness or lack of it? In the organization of Global Connections itself, how well do the practices of welcome permeate?

These are profound questions. We would do well as a school community to pay attention to them. I know that we do at Keystone, but we should not be complacent about this, and we must seek to improve what we already do. For example, we want our parents to feel welcome here, in many different ways. You, our parents, seem both to enjoy and to respect that. In this regard, the occasional rudeness from parents to the security staff, or other staff members, is all the more striking for its rarity, but still quite unacceptable.

I like to think that this ‘culture of welcome’ is already embedded at Keystone. I know that our Human Resources Department, for example, works extremely hard and effectively to make new teachers, and all new employees, feel at home from the day they start. We do the same with students, on their first day at Keystone, and every day. Welcoming students at the gate in the morning; seeing the day students off campus in the afternoon; helping the boarding students create their own home here: all this is more than a courteous community living by its own standards, it is creating a climate conducive to the students’ learning. As the Global Connections delegates wrote in another section of their seminar declaration:

We were poignantly reminded in a conference session that each school’s most precious resource consists of the ‘dreams, thoughts and emotions’ of the students in our care. Each young person is on a personal journey of growth. Our responsibility as school leaders is to nurture these unique paths of individual development.

Students have their own part to play in nurturing this welcoming culture. For the most part, they are extremely welcoming to visitors. They also treat their peers with respect and sensitivity. That is why bullying, which is infrequent here, is so stark when it happens.

As we grow bigger, and more diverse in cultural, social, and many other ways, students and all of us will need to extend our welcoming hand and spirit to those who come from unusual backgrounds and who might not fit in quite as quickly or easily as the majority.

Published on May 5, 2018

CHAPTER 4

# Learning for the World



### **The Key Learning Skills for the 21st Century**

Last week I wrote about the importance of resolutions for new and changed behavior, as well as the related difficulty of first imagining, and then doing, new things. I said that a natural inflection point occurs every 12 months, as we move from the old year into the new one. Viewed on a larger scale, another natural inflection point occurs every 100 years, as we move from one century to another. A French term was specially invented, *fin de siècle*, to describe the end of the 19th century, with its characteristic sense in Western Europe of the fashionable world-weariness and decadent sophistication of the time. At the end of the 20th century, looking ahead with renewed vigor at a world of rapid change, many thinkers and writers, especially in education, started talking about 21st century skills. Now that we are almost 20 years into this century, it is a good time to reflect on these skills that are thought, often correctly, to be so important for functioning at a high level in contemporary societies.

Many individuals and groups have written and spoken about 21st century skills. It is not surprising that one of the more thoughtful amongst the groups, or agencies, is called Thoughtful Learning. Founded in 1976, Thoughtful Learning is based in Wisconsin in the USA and comprises a group of teachers, writers, and designers who have recently been describing and analyzing 21st century skills and producing innovative materials for exploring and teaching them. One of their papers lists ‘a set of abilities that students need to develop in order to succeed in the information age.’ These are grouped in three categories: Learning Skills, Literacy Skills, and Life Skills. I want to focus here on the 4 Learning Skills that these thinkers reckon to be crucial right now and for the next few decades. The Literacy Skills are

easier to define more accurately, especially in the realm of digital and related technologies, and have been done beautifully by ISTE, the International Society for Technology in Education. And the Life Skills are, for me, just too difficult to pin down with satisfactory specificity.

Thoughtful Learning focuses on 4 key learning skills for the 21st century. These are: critical thinking; creative thinking; collaborating; and communicating. There is nothing unusual or striking about this 4Cs list in the context of other writings on this subject. These learning skills, along with a few others, have been identified and discussed by many thinkers on the topic. At Keystone we are aware of them and we try as teachers to model them for, and impart them to, our students. Where all this becomes more interesting is when there is an attempt to break down these overarching skills into subskills.

The Thoughtful Learning group does just this. Some of their subskills strike me as being unusually insightful. For example, it is provocative to include cause and effect as a subskill of critical thinking. In this age of Big Data, when it is too easy to confuse correlation with causality, it is useful to stress this. Under the umbrella of creative thinking, the ability to improvise, and the nurturing of the imagination, are emphasized. I like this, and we do both in many ways at Keystone. Communicating has as two of its subskills the art of listening, and the understanding of how important it is to take turns, and not to dominate a discussion or an event. Finally, collaboration includes the sensitive allocation of resources, and also the ability to resolve conflicts.

All of this is valuable – but questions abound. How many of these skills and subskills are actually new skills, or specific to this century only? If some or many are not, do they really have such an unusual and pressing relevance

to contemporary life and, if so, why? Does mastery of these skills inevitably lead to purposeful and successful work? Are we still too early into this century, not quite 20% there yet, to speak so glibly of 21st century skills? The discussion on 21st century skills seldom leads into debating questions like these. Yet it should, in my opinion. It is not enough, for me, simply to have lists of skills and subskills that are good and desirable in themselves. Let's be critical and creative about this list, then collaborate to take the conversation further and, finally, let's communicate the outcomes of these conversations fully and effectively.

Published on January 18, 2019

### **The Local Contexts of an International Education**

On Saturday and Sunday two weeks ago, in addition to our usual weekend activities of sports competition and service work, we hosted some significant events on our campus. Our annual fall Open Houses for prospective parents, Primary and Secondary, were both held on the same day, for the first time. Well over 2,000 interested participants came to hear about Keystone and to explore our campus. Our annual GIN (Global Issues Network) Conference, largely organized by students, took place at the same time. Guest speakers, Keystone students, and students from other Beijing schools all explored together the UN Sustainable Development Goal of access for all to quality education. It was fitting, therefore, that we also had almost 30 young women from Educating Girls of Rural China (EGRC), the remarkable organization which we are privileged to assist on some of its projects, exploring leadership and learning English with some Keystone teachers.

I was away from Keystone. I regret that, but there is never an easy time to be away from our full and intense program during term, and most of our senior administrators travel from time to time. We need to refresh ourselves professionally, and bring new ideas and practices back to our own school. I went to Geneva to attend the world conference of the Alliance for International Education (AIE). This group meets every two years, hosted by an affiliated school, and explores topical issues in global education. The host this year was the famous International School of Geneva (Ecolint), arguably the first International School in the world, and one of the small group of founding schools of the International Baccalaureate. It was a pleasure to be back there, and to meet up with old friends and acquaintances. I had been the opening speaker at the AIE Conference in Dusseldorf in 2004, and the

concluding speaker at the meeting two years later in Shanghai, but I had not attended one of their conferences since then, and that's 2006.

Our individual and personal host was Conrad Hughes, the Head of the campus where we gathered. He is a prolific and stimulating writer on the challenges facing students, educators and schools worldwide. He is also a South African, like me. I have known Conrad for many years. My first teaching position was at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, where I started as a lecturer in 1980, and Conrad's parents were distinguished faculty members of the English Literature department, which I joined. I grew to know them both well. I am no longer surprised by such wonderful connections.

The theme of the conference was this: **Rethinking International Education – Values and Relevance**. Plenary sessions consisted of formal addresses by stimulating and erudite speakers, but we also spent time in small and informal strand groups exploring specific topics in detail. There were 8 strands. Each one addressed a topic in

**Rethinking International Education:**

Learning, Teaching, Pedagogy;  
Purposes of International Education;  
Development of Teachers;  
Curriculum and Assessment;  
Culture and Language;  
Leadership and Management;  
In a Local Context;  
In a Global Context.

I participated in the strand on rethinking International Education in the

local context. I chose it because I have become more and more fascinated by the ways in which older iterations of International Education are being influenced and changed by what is happening in those countries where there is a huge proliferation of International Schools, such as China. The understanding of International Education that grew out of schools like the International School of Geneva, and the United World College of the Atlantic, where I was Principal from 2000 to 2007, was essentially a product of the liberating and expansive aftermath, for some countries, of the Second World War combined with the challenging presence of the Cold War. In my opinion, it was essentially western in origin and liberal humanist and globalist in its philosophical underpinnings. I have no problem with that, but I do have a problem in that it had, in its early forms, little connection with the East, or indeed the South. Some of its practitioners were almost colonial in outlook. People with such orientations find it natural to talk of the Middle East, and the Far East, for example, as if these directions and the places to which they refer have some absolute connection.

But practices and perceptions have shifted. We heard from a research statistician from ISC Research that the growth in International Schools worldwide will mean that in the next 10 years we shall need to find 500,000 more teachers to fill this expanding market. This is not new news, and other researchers have produced similar projections. But where will this half a million come from? In the early years of International Education, and perhaps until very recently, the assumption would have been that many if not most of these new teachers would have been drawn from English-speaking, predominantly ‘white’ countries. That is no longer the case. In my strand discussions, I heard from Heads of Chinese and Indian schools that they were employing more and more local teachers who were fully bilingual or multilingual, whose English was impeccable, and who combined local and

global perspectives on life and on their pedagogy in truly exciting ways. Coming from Keystone, I smiled, and nodded agreement. It is clear that local contexts are impacting on older versions of International Education with powerful and novel force. I thought of our Keystone Chinese Thread book, and its title, *Local Culture in a World School*.

A colleague from India spoke with passion about how she knew her culture deeply, and other, English-speaking cultures as well. She said that she loved Kalidasa and Shakespeare; Tagore and the great English poets; the rich traditions of Indian theater, music, and dance, and those of Europe. Speaking of her European and American colleagues, she exclaimed: "I am more international than they are." Passion always blurs fine distinctions, of course, and a global gaze can be developed by anyone, anywhere, but perhaps now is the time to start talking, or joking, of Europe as the Middle West, and North America as the Far West.

Published on November 1, 2019

### **Kind Thoughts**

There are many lovely aspects to life in China, large and small. One small blessing is that we have two New Year ceremonies close together, and we get to say Happy New Year twice. We are now moving into our second celebration, Chinese New Year and the Spring Festival. Many of us will be going home to visit family: parents in our home towns or cities, family and children abroad, and others. I am going to see my wife, Judith, in Connecticut, on the East Coast of the United States. A mass travel migration, reputed to be the most intense human one on planet Earth, will begin very soon. I hope that we all travel smoothly, and safely.

At this time, as we celebrate, let us remember those many who cannot afford to travel at all, and those migrants in conflict zones around the world who are forced to travel, often by walking hundreds of kilometers. My daughter-in-law, who is from Ecuador, works in the area of public health. She is currently doing volunteer work for the United Nations, assisting with the flow of desperate people walking from Venezuela into Colombia and Ecuador. Here is a paragraph from the *Independent* newspaper in the UK, last October:

Refugees arrive at the Rumichaca border crossing between Ecuador and Colombia, bewildered, emotional and exhausted, some of them walking the entire length of the country dragging and carrying what contents they could fit into makeshift luggage and bin bags. The “walkers,” as they are known, have trekked 20 days and 1,400km down through the mountain roads of El Paramo de Berlin, where 4,200m above sea level temperatures at night plummet to -15 degrees Celsius.

Take a look at the map of this part of South America, and reflect on the fact that this crisis is even worse now, three months later.

But let us not spend all our time on such thoughts at this moment of celebration and joy in the annual calendar of our country. The days are growing longer already, and spring is on the way. Some trees on campus are sending out shy shoots, and if you look closely at the grass in the middle of the campus you will see faint glimmerings of green. All this is energizing and exciting. So, too, have been the performances and displays around our campus in the last few weeks. At the end of our first week back in January, the Middle School put on spirited shows and exhibits showcasing the Chinese Thread. The next week we had *Mulan*, the amazing Primary School musical. The following week, it was back to the Secondary School again, with talented musicians and dancers. And this week we have decorated our buildings with striking art, cardboard chairs of innovative designs, and a special entrance to the secondary school, as well as putting on more performances and a temple fair. Talent, skill, creativity, and tradition abound among us. We sing of and show China in the world with passion and purity. We celebrate China and the world.

I wrote last week about politeness and courtesy, about speaking to others in ways that are not toxic, but kind. The week before that I analyzed some of the so-named 21st Century Skills. It would be nice, but naive, to think of courtesy as a necessary skill for individual progress and advancement in this century. Sadly, I suspect that this is not the case. Current leadership trends suggest that bombast, narcissism, self-aggrandizement, and rudeness will get one to high places now. And if all these debasing skills can be demonstrated regularly via a Twitter account, so much the better, it seems. But this is not a trend that we should either tolerate or follow.

That short word ‘kind’ has a powerful origin. It is linked to the word ‘kindred’ or ‘kin’, and came into modern English from Old English and Old German. It was originally connected to similar words for family, nature, and the natural order of things. To be kind, therefore, is to behave as one does, or would, with one’s family, and according to human nature. If we see others as we see family, we should find it easier to treat them with greater kindness and maybe, just maybe, our world will become a better place.

That’s a good, kind thought to take into the Year of the Pig. Happy New Year.

Published on January 31, 2019

### **Transfiguring Experience**

On Thursday evening last week, as an introduction to the MYP Curriculum Evening, Dr. Juli James spoke to parents about the remarkable range of trips that are being offered this year during school vacation time. These trips are an important part of our extended curriculum. They are led by Keystone teachers, who give their vacation time willingly to offer such opportunities. Our teachers are not paid additionally for this labor of love, and Keystone does not make any money from these expeditions. We cover cost, that's all, and we try to be basic and simple in our choice of places to stay.

Our students are fortunate. Juli James has done a very fine job in inspiring teachers, me included, to lead trips to places near and far. She is a veteran of such work. Juli insists, quite rightly, that our journeys are much more than merely tourist in nature. We include authentic service work, leadership training, environmental and conservancy tasks, physical toil, cultural and intercultural learning and understanding, and written reflection. Our students prepare in advance for going away, and they debrief on returning. We are slowly building some sustainable projects where we travel to the same place year after year. In so doing, we grow genuine relationships with communities whose needs we are able to assist in small but meaningful ways, and from whom we learn.

Despite all this planning and preparation, there are dangers inherent in these trips. I do not mean the physical dangers that can always occur, even after the rigorous risk assessments that we undertake every time we travel. I am thinking of dangers in attitude, in seeing other people and places as things that are there mainly, or even only, for our enjoyment.

To begin with, one danger is complacency. We must never forget that we are unusually fortunate in having the time and the money to travel in the first place. Because we associate with people who travel, it is easy to forget that most of the world's population do not have the means to travel, and many do not even have passports.

But if we dig a little deeper, we unearth other dangers. I have just read a provocative short article by Dan Miller called: "The World Is (Not) Yours." This is how Miller's essay begins:

Picture Sarah, a high school student who has the opportunity and interest to travel abroad with her school. Sarah is studious, kind-hearted, and active in her school community. She decides to go to Kenya, where she explores the country, meets local children, and makes great friends. She comes home, posts all her photos on social media, writes down the highlights so she can use them on a college application essay later, and then largely settles back in to life as it had always been.

What Miller prefers, indeed requires, are experiences that transform our understanding of ourselves and the peoples, pleasures, and problems of our planet. Such transformation, let's call it transfiguration, can only occur if we are humble in the face of new experiences, and listen deeply to the lives of others, in all the meanings of that everyday word 'listen.' Miller suggests that we need to see these experiences as offering opportunities that are 'sacred.' I agree. We must not be arrogant in our attitudes, or in any way profane in our photography or dismissive in our documentation of what we see and do.

I am going to take a small number of older Keystone students back to Botswana next June and July. I loved being there a few months ago, a place

that I know so well through having lived there for 12 years. It was a treat seeing friends and sights that are a powerful part of my life. But it was extra special going with students who had not been there before, and who had never experienced the amazing variety of human life, as well as the animals, birds, insects, trees, flowers, skies, and stars that we became a small part of for two weeks. For them it was a first time. For me, it was a different first time, seeing these wonders through the eyes of teenagers who were appropriately astonished. They gave me the gift of refreshment and reinvigoration. That was my sacred transformation, my transfiguring experience.

Published on September 8, 2017

### **A Better Steward of the Environment**

It is often easy to talk about what we do, or plan to do, but sometimes it is harder to translate words into actions. Here is a case in point, for which I have to claim responsibility. Three years ago, as part of a drive to greater environmental awareness in our school, we decided to have one day in the week when our school meals would contain no meat. At the time, such a move was driven, in part, by students. This is what I wrote to you in *In the Loop* on May 27, 2016, almost three years ago to the day:

In the Keystone Mission, a short document that I think about again and again, as we all should, we make reference to our environment twice. We say that one of the skills that our students will learn here is to be ‘stewards of the environment.’ And in the paragraph describing our graduates, and what qualities they will possess, we claim that they will have ‘ecological fluency.’ This claim is made in the context of saying that we want our graduates to ‘help develop and improve the communities in which they live.’

It is easy to talk about this. Many, many schools around the world say that environmental awareness is an important part of what they offer their students. Some do it very well. Some just talk. Here at Keystone, we are just beginning to explore what this aspect of our mission might mean. Our exciting new summer program in Marine Biology is one aspect of this. But we have a long way to go, both in our classroom curriculum, and in other events and activities that we plan.

Nevertheless, here are two things, amongst others, that we are planning to

do. The first is to have lunches from time to time where there is no meat. Some Grade 10 students gave a presentation to the secondary division last Friday highlighting the environmental impact of the animal agricultural industry. Although it is hard to be precise about the contribution of this industry to greenhouse gas emissions, because different research ranges between an upper limit of 50% and a lower limit of 20%, the contribution is nevertheless significant. And we can all do something about this by reducing our consumption of meat.

In their presentation, our students claimed that it is perfectly possible to eat delicious and healthy vegetable meals. We shall prove them right, and we shall start with our first one before the end of this academic year. Although having an occasional lunch without meat is not going to change the world, it will have an impact on our attitudes, and it will make us think from time to time about giving up some things, and changing some habits, if we want to take our environmental education seriously.

We are now going to do what we say, or said, and introduce this routine. Some might say at last. On Mondays every week, starting next week, we shall ensure that all our meals contain no meat. Some like to call such days 'Meatless Mondays'; I prefer the more positive term 'Ecological Eating.' Every Monday, all meals served at the Academy will be vegetarian. I ask for your support in this. We have worked hard with our caterers to prepare menus that are nutritious, and delicious. And we shall continue to work on the educational aspect to this decision, and to explain and educate our students and adults about the reasons for this small sacrifice.

I write 'small sacrifice' deliberately. Some will come to see this as the opening up of a new eating experience. Others might feel uneasy, perhaps

a little irritated, about having to give up something that they like, or take for granted. To both, and to others who might respond in different ways, I say enter this change in the right spirit. If you find yourself in new culinary territory, that will be liberating. If you reflect on the thought that to forgo a luxury like this is to become a better steward of the environment, that realization too will be liberating.

On a Thursday morning last semester, two Grade 10 students, Jillian Qi and Makar Cherepanov, spoke to the morning assembly of Grades 3, 4, and 5 students. They addressed the issue of climate change. The most obvious reaction from their audience of young listeners was a distressed gasp when they showed a photo of a desperate polar bear perched on top of a tiny block of ice, completely surrounded by water. This small emblem showed the power of a vivid image to young minds, rather than figures and statistics that can often numb the brain. The two students then moved from the global to the local, urging their younger fellows to reduce their use of plastic, to classify it, and to recycle it. Their point had been heard, and their implementation plans were listened to with attention.

We should never underestimate the power of small actions to effect change, especially when the meaning and symbolism of these actions is imprinted on young hearts.

Published on April 19, 2019

**“This Is Me, This Is Jane”**

On Tuesday, November 12, for just over two hours in the early afternoon, many in our Keystone community and a few students and teachers from nine other Beijing schools came together to listen to, and engage with, a remarkable 85-year old woman who described herself as a ‘white ape.’ Jane Goodall entranced us. Advertised as a ‘Renowned Primatologist, Anthropologist, and UN Messenger of Peace,’ Dr. Goodall was all that, and so much more. As I said when I introduced her, I felt many and various emotions when welcoming her to Keystone, but the two that were uppermost were a deep sense of honor, and a lovely, warm feeling of delight in having Jane in our midst for a short while.

Representatives from the Keystone Roots and Shoots club were present in the Performing Arts Center foyer to greet Jane, along with fellow students representing similar clubs from the other schools present. All had poster displays of pioneering and innovative ecological projects in their schools. Jane paused and talked with each group, and had something personal and meaningful to say at every stop. She then gave a talk to our secondary school students, and after that and a short pause she took the stage with a group of over a dozen students. This session was chaired by Head of Primary School Catherine Copeland, and in it, Jane answered questions in a dialogic conversation listened to by our primary students.

Jane’s first address was magnetic. She started her talk with a haunting, whooping greeting in chimpanzee. It meant, she said: *This is me. This is Jane.* I do not speak chimpanzee, but the woman who has lived with and spent so much time among chimpanzees surely does. It sounded absolutely authentic,

as did every utterance that she made. Jane is nothing if not authentic, and genuineness is her demeanor. We were immediately and quietly drawn into the presence of someone who has lived a remarkable life, and done so extraordinarily well and wisely. Even when she spoke of her unrelenting activism her humility about that activism put it in exactly the right context: committed, experienced, educated, understanding, and wise, yes wise.

Jane told us childhood stories. “I was born loving animals,” she said. When very young, Jane took earthworms to bed with her. Her mother, Margaret, instead of scolding her, said gently that the earthworms would die there and needed to go outside. On another occasion, Jane spent four hours in a henhouse waiting to see how a chicken lays an egg. Again, her mom’s response was one of patience and gentleness. In this way, a scientist was born and nurtured, claimed Jane. What simple lessons are here, I thought, for parents and teachers.

Jane Goodall has a profound sense of the individuality of beings. Every individual matters. Every individual has a role to play. Every individual can make a difference. This can be said of humans, of chimps, of other creatures. Considering our human species, Jane commented again and again on the astonishing evolutionary growth of our brain capacity, “the explosive development of our intellects.” Because of this power, she commented that it is all the more ridiculous and ironic that we are destroying our planet, our home. On chimpanzees she opined: “Like us, they have a loving, compassionate side.” But, she went on: “Like us, they have a dark and brutal side.” When I thanked Jane at the end, I asked the primary students to focus on the first side as they grow, and to leave behind the second. That is the goal of learning to be good, and learning for good.

Despite her informed understanding of and deep concern about the perilous state of our planet, Jane Goodall is not a pessimist. ‘Nature is resilient,’ she observed, and humans have ‘an indomitable spirit.’ Let us hope that the combination of these two forces will save the white-headed langurs, of whom there are only about 3,000 remaining in Southern China, and many other declining species. Money raised by this event was for helping conservation efforts to save this endangered primate.

For me, the most stimulating sentence Jane uttered was one which seemed to be almost an aside: “I could spend hours out in the rainforest by myself or with the chimpanzees.” It launched my imagination into thinking how few humans could say something like that. And remember that Jane was talking not just about hours, but days, months, years in rainforests. Almost all of us have no idea what it means to be truly alone in a rainforest. Even fewer can have any inkling of what it means to live closely, with and without fear, with large, wild creatures.

How many of us ‘white apes,’ or two-legged apes, have lived, learned, and earned experiences which allow for statements like that? We who heard Jane Goodall were in the presence, for a few hours, of a truly special ambassador of our species.

### **A Model of Leadership**

Our home in the rural north-west corner of Connecticut is just south of The Hotchkiss School, where I used to work. A few weeks ago, I was a guest teacher in a senior course there, and I shall be going back to that same class in early April. The course is a one-semester elective for Grade 12 students, taught by a good friend and colleague, and it focuses on leadership. It was a privilege for me to engage in a structured conversation on this substantial and vital topic with a small group of enthusiastic and reflective students.

The material that I asked them to consider before our class was this short list of points about what leaders do. I give it to you here exactly as I gave it, in advance, to the students:

- Leaders do not become too involved in detail, they need to stand back and keep in touch with the overview;
- Leaders consult, but not too much, and not all the time;
- Leaders have the attitude, time, and created space to cope with the unexpected, with adversity, flexibly;
- Leaders know what their plan is, and they give clear and coherent instructions for achieving it;
- Leaders do not hide behind higher authority figures;
- Leaders look around;
- Leaders support the team, but not too much;
- Leaders are compassionate, but need also to promote self-reliance;
- Leaders may need to switch modes from directive to less directive and back as situations change;
- Leaders must gather information all the time;

- Leaders need to listen, and show that they are listening, even when they go against what they are hearing;
- Leaders should know their juniors, all in the team or organization if possible, and esteem manual and lower paid labor.

At the start of our discussion I informed the Hotchkiss students that this list had been generated by Keystone students in Botswana last year, on our trip there where one of the focal points was leadership training and knowledge. These points came from night-time campfire conversations, after a day's work where different students had been leading the group. Although it is a mere selection from what could be a much longer list, I find these observations stimulating, and full of insight.

As you may imagine, the Hotchkiss students were delighted, and impressed, that the points had been formulated by peers in another school on the other side of the planet. The class was lively and the comments and questions penetrating. I was careful to make a distinction between Leaders, with the 'L' in caps, and what I like to call 'leading skills.' For me, this list of bullet points is as much about leading skills as it is about Leadership.

Elite schools like Hotchkiss and Keystone need, in my opinion, to be aware of and deliberate about educating and preparing some of the Leaders of tomorrow. But not everyone wants to be, or should be, a Leader. However, we all need leading skills, and we also all need to know when and how to follow. Even Leaders must be followers at times.

One of the background texts for the course is Howard Gardner's *Leading Minds*. The renowned leaders that he uses as exemplars are all intellectually outstanding, and most of them are articulate and persuasive orators. Gardner

makes the point that leadership is often associated with fine public speaking. I suggested that this is more of a western than an eastern characteristic. It may be the case that eastern communities are more impressed by deeds than by words. There were three Asian heritage students in the group, and they agreed with this point. That led the discussion in the fascinating and important direction of possible cultural differences in approaches to leadership.

This was my opening to share with the students the famous dictum of Lao Tzu, which I mentioned in this column just over a month ago:

A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves.

This is a model of leadership that I find most attractive, and that I seek to emulate.

Published on March 23, 2018

### **Follow My Leader**

Welcome back from the brief vacation. This break often comes at just the right time. I hope that you have returned from family, or leisure, or both, refreshed and relaxed. I was at home in Connecticut, during a really beautiful time of the year there. As I did not travel at all during the summer vacation, it was especially good to be home for a short while.

I want now to take you back to June, and the beginning of the much longer summer break. At the end of every academic year, the School Leadership Team (SLT) has a weekend retreat to look back over the year just completed, and to plan for the year to come. Because I was ill at that time, I went only to the final morning of the retreat. But, in the letter that I wrote to all my senior colleagues during the summer, I referenced some aspects of those planning meetings about which they had told me. Below are two paragraphs from my letter:

During that retreat, although I missed most of it, there was clearly a shared sense of the fact that we are moving as a school into a new phase of our growth. Although not a single one of us knows exactly what this means, there is a sense of anticipation about it. On the back of very good IBDP results, fine college placements and, more important than either of these, our collective sense that we have graduated an extraordinary first class, we must turn our attention both to a developing maturity and also to developing that maturity in so much of what we do. At the same time, to borrow some of the phrases used in the retreat, we must keep the flame burning, rekindle passions, look at and beyond visible horizons, and make sure that as many of us as possible share the vision and purpose that has

made and will continue to make us precious.

I like that word ‘precious’... In its original Latin meaning, it referred quite simply to things ‘of great value.’ Two millennia ago it had none of the sometimes-negative baggage that it now carries, as for example when we say that someone or something is ‘too precious.’ We do indeed, put simply and elegantly, have a school of great value, and we have great values. The two go together. I often think that if all of us, that’s just under 400 employees now, lived our five shared values well and advocated our three keystones diligently, we would not need to do anything else in order to be and remain a superlative school. So, let’s make sure that we do just that this year, as administrators, to our best degree possible. If we do, we will create collectively a model that inspires our colleagues. This is one expectation that I have from all of us administrators.

I expect my colleagues to be conscious of the need to model what makes for a strong community. This matter of modeling behavior that others might emulate is so vital in schools, perhaps especially in those that enjoy a residential component. We simply cannot take it seriously enough. Almost 20 years ago, the American educators Ted and Nancy Sizer published a book called *The Students are Watching: Schools and the Moral Contract*. It still resonates with relevance to schools everywhere. Their central claim is that students watch each other and their teachers, consciously and unconsciously, and learn from each other and act accordingly – the modeling of the adults is crucial, and that of the older students in the community equally so. Follow my leader happens all the time, and it works well when the leaders behave and act well.

We are indeed, as I wrote to my colleagues, moving into a new phase of

Keystone's growth. There are many indicators of this. The growth is not merely of size, but of progression and development as well. As we become bigger, with more students, firmer structures, and more formal systems, it is so important that we retain the closeness and conviviality of our early years. In that same letter, I enjoined my administrative colleagues to strive to maintain a 'small school' feeling:

As we grow in size, and in age, we are becoming more structured, and more formal. This is inevitable, and it should be a beneficial aspect of our development. But we must work creatively, please, to maintain a 'small school' feeling. Remember that our Org Chart is deliberately flat, that we work to create a society here that does not rely on enforcing a sense of hierarchy, and that a really successful administration is never attention seeking. We want an inclusive community, for all workers and students, and in these opening weeks I urge you to go out of your way to talk with those who do not fall naturally into your social or daily orbit, especially new teachers and students.

I wrote about inclusivity shortly before the Golden Week break. Being inclusive is a fine way of protecting the intimacy and fellowship that comes of knowing each other, and caring for everyone. It is certainly possible to be compact, collegial, large, and complex, all at the same time.

Published on October 12, 2018

### **Purposeful and Principled Leadership**

In the past few weeks, I have written about changes in leadership for next year in two vital areas of our school. It is entirely appropriate that we think, talk, and act in various ways at Keystone that are directly connected with this crucial matter of leadership. Teachers, whatever their level of administrative responsibility, should model leading skills, and behavior, for their students. Older students should be similar models for their younger fellows. Schools like Keystone should be preparing students with the skills and demeanors to make positive differences in their communities and countries when they are adults. Purposeful and principled leading is lacking in many communities. The values-based approach of our school must play its part in redressing that, in our small way, over time.

Other fine schools do the same. During the New Year break, I visited my old school, The Hotchkiss School in Connecticut, a few times. Our home is in a small village close by. On one of those occasions, I was an invited guest at a senior seminar, an elective, led by a good friend, Dr. Steve McKibben, who is also the Director of the Hotchkiss Summer Programs. In the second semester every year, Steve offers his highly popular course on leadership. Before each meeting of this group, there is required reading to prepare for the class discussion. I decided to ask the students to read three of my *In the Loop* pieces from January. Although I had not focused exclusively on leadership in any of these, I had made some comments about the relationship between leadership and language. I asked the students to consider this topic as they read my pieces: *Leadership and the Discourse of Civility*. I wanted them to reflect on the fact that leaders should see themselves as being responsible for nurturing and growing the culture of the communities that they lead, in

all that they write and say, as much as what they do.

We began by talking about the school positions of formal leadership that the students in the class held, positions such as dorm proctor, sports captain, newspaper editor, and the like. Only three out of fifteen were not leaders like this, but we agreed quickly that all were leaders in various ways – leadership is service, I said, and service is leadership, and so those who serve with genuine commitment also lead by example. This point led naturally to an observation that there are many types of leaders and leadership, that there has always been and always will be a wide variety. I mentioned that a course such as the one they were taking could be descriptive and reflective, cataloguing and classifying these different styles of leadership. Or it could be prescriptive and prioritizing, venturing to suggest how leaders can lead best, and what types we should encourage, and discourage. Or both.

On the prescriptive side, we seemed to agree easily that civil discourse was valuable, and most definitely worth promoting. But we realized that there are many factors that make it difficult. One of these is that some leaders are scarred human beings: they have been demeaned in their lives, perhaps as children, and so find it natural to demean in turn. Psychological wounds are sometimes a prompt for seeking power. We also noted some of the peculiar challenges to civility in our cyber age.

Students were interested in positive 21st century skills, but even more so in the negative ones I had written of. We spoke at length about that word ‘toxicity.’ We used it to try to define ‘civility’ as the opposite of ‘toxicity.’ Civility is toxicity detoxed. I then asked them to describe civility in its own right, with positives rather than negatives. Some of the words they used were these: ‘selflessness,’ ‘good intent,’ ‘manners,’ ‘empathy,’ and ‘positivity.’

They were fascinated by the etymology of the word ‘kind,’ and its link to kin, kindred, and family, and saw this as a deep way of understanding civility. It was uplifting to be in such intelligent, engaged, civil company.

Right at the end of the meeting, I told the students that I have been a Head of School for almost 30 years. In that time, I said, I have lost my temper in professional situations only twice, as far as I can remember. The first was with a parent, and it did not go at all well because I was not in control of myself, and said things that I should not have. The second time was a little different. In dealing with a totally exasperating situation, I pretended to lose my temper. I had planned this in advance, I went through all the motions, and I knew exactly what I was doing. The outcome was the reverse of the first case.

I did not say this to those students, there was no cause to, but neither of these incidents occurred during my time here at Keystone. There has been no need for me to lose my temper, real or pretended, in this place! Long may that last.

### **Dare to Be a Force of Nature**

My focus last week was on leadership, and leading skills. I ended with the wise, and enduring, dictum from Lao Zi: *A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves.* Thoughts about leading skills take me naturally to leading schools. Keystone has been in the news recently in this regard, as we know. I wrote a few months ago, in response to two school surveys, that I am not interested in school rankings. That is true. However, I am interested in leading schools. So here, with apologies to our great sage, is a working description of a leading school: *A leading school exists to do work that is exactly right for itself, with deep thought and humility. If it is indeed done right, its aim fulfilled, other schools will notice such innovation and integrity, and they will emulate and copy this work. If they in turn get it right, they will think that they did it themselves.* Which they did, of course.

Schools that are pioneering in this way are able to initiate what are called virtuous cycles. They do exciting things, and discover new practices, not because they wish to be distinctive or different, but simply because they sense that some old ways are ineffective and need to be invented afresh. Expect such schools to attract outstanding teachers and administrators. Expect teachers and administrators in such schools to be sought after, and in some cases enticed away, by other schools. Expect such schools to introduce initiatives such as our Chinese Thread, which is a central part of our claim to be a ‘world school.’ We are in the final stages of producing a book length study of this important part of our overall curriculum, and this will be presented to our first Grade 12 graduates in May. Expect such schools, as we say in our Keystone Mission, ‘to engage with the world of education, and the world at large, beyond our gates.’

And so it is, to be specific for the remainder of this short piece, that Keystone will host a Round Square Regional Conference as most of us go into our one-week spring break. Some of the leading schools of the world started the Round Square organization just over 40 years ago. As you know, Keystone has been a member of this group of almost 200 schools worldwide since just after we opened. It was a singular honor for a brand-new school to be admitted. It is another honor for us to be able to host this conference. Many teachers and students have been working hard, with imagination and commitment, to design and organize the four-day event. The participants arrive tomorrow. We will be hosting about 200 delegates from 14 schools. I am sad that I shall be missing it.

The driving focus of the conference is a call to environmental action. The theme, ‘Dare to be a Force of Nature,’ is memorialized in a haunting logo designed by our student Evelyn Huang, based on an ancient Chinese stamp. Ricky Li, another Keystone student, crafted the T-shirt, which draws on the TAO, in this case standing for ‘terrestrial,’ ‘air,’ and ‘ocean.’ Seven remarkable keynote speakers, from China and abroad, will make presentations. Most important, perhaps, discussion groups will debate and adopt calls to action. This conference will be defining for our school. In the coming months, we shall need to heed and take up some of its environmental decisions and outcomes.

I say to all of us, in thanking with anticipation the conference organizers:

Dare to be a Force **of** Nature;  
Dare to be a Force **from** Nature;  
Dare to be a Force **for** Nature;  
Dare to be a Force **with** Nature.

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