

# SCHOOLBOOK

a JOURNAL of EDUCATION

**Paideia School  
Atlanta, Georgia**

I N T H I S I S S U E

**Summer 2016  
Vol. 22 No. 1**

*From Bletchly Park to the Black Box*

Greg Changnon

*The Joys of Watching Children Learn*

*Never Grows Old*

Paul Bianchi

*Discipline—An Educational Opportunity*

Paul Hayward

*Why I Teach: The Power of Words*

Sarah Schiff

*Student Lessons Evolve into Lessons for Teachers*

Martha Caldwell and Oman Frame

33

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- 3** *From Bletchly Park to the Black Box*  
By Greg Changnon  
Writing original plays for junior high students.
- 6** *The Joys of Watching Children Learn Never Grows Old*  
By Paul Bianchi  
The student body keeps changing but the joys remain the same.
- 14** *Discipline—An Educational Opportunity*  
By Paul Hayward  
Paul Hayward shares insight on student discipline gleaned over 40 plus years.
- 18** *Why I Teach: The Power of Words*  
By Sarah Schiff  
Words and stories can have a transformative effect.
- 22** *Student Lessons Evolve into Lessons for Teachers*  
By Martha Caldwell and Oman Frame  
How teaching students about race, class and gender evolved into an summer education institute for teachers.

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**2 Paideia School, located in northeast Atlanta, has some 990 students ages three to eighteen. Founded in 1971 by a group of parents, the school “actively strives for a heterogeneous population and attracts students from throughout the metropolitan Atlanta area. The ancient Greek word Paideia reflects the conscious pursuit of a series of educational goals by a community. It conveys the concept of a child’s total education: intellectual, artistic, and social.**

Because it is a school, turnover among students at Paideia is a given, but happily the things drew many teachers into the classroom including the joy, challenge privilege of cultivating young minds never change.

Jennifer Hill  
*Editor*

**3 Greg Changnon** taught the junior high with Martha Caldwell and wrote original plays for their students to perform. The plays tapped into their class studies and explored the emotions and feelings appropriate to junior high age students.

**T**IME DISAPPEARS after the 9:30 a.m. train from London Euston passes Wembley Stadium, 15 kilometers out of the city. It will take me six stops and 70 more kilometers to get to Bletchley Station and with each town passing by, the fields get bigger and the anonymous grey apartment buildings dissolve into sprawling farmhouses pieced together nearly a hundred years ago. The trip is only an hour out of the city on the rails but it feels as if I’ve traveled decades.

At Bletchley, if I ignore the falafel joint next to the Subway sandwich shop east of the station, I can still pretend it’s 1941; the year hundreds of Brits followed orders and came to this station to report for war duty. A short distance west from the train station, a wooden sign fighting a losing battle with the weather reads “Bletchley Park.” Here, at this estate, code breakers led by Alan Turing once broke the Enigma code, intercepting messages from the German war machine sent to troops all over Europe and U-boats in the Atlantic. The successful efforts of the mathematicians, the physicists, the radio operators, the linguists and so many other gifted men and women—nearly eight thousand during the peak activity at Bletchley—are said to have shaved at least two years off World War II, already the deadliest conflict in human history.

After a short walk down a gravel road lined by messy green shrubs, another sign points east into the estate. Anonymous concrete buildings built quickly to accommodate elaborate decoding apparatuses called Bombe machines in the war years are now used to greet visitors. And further into the park, behind a modest lake fringed with trees, is the main house, the drab, honey-colored stone belying the intrigue and historical significance of what happened here 70 years ago. Chosen because it was located almost halfway between Cambridge and Oxford and accessible by train, Bletchley Park may just be one of the best-kept secrets of modern war history. On the early August day I came here, only

a handful of enthusiasts walked the grounds, and certainly no Americans who probably had more touristy things to do at the Tower of London or the Tate Gallery.

What brought me to Bletchley and 75 years back in time was a junior high curriculum challenge; how to present the history of WWII to a group of adolescents without relying on the conventional approach: give a lecture, lead a review, administer an exam. For the past three years, in order to energize our literature and social studies curriculum, my co-teacher Martha Caldwell and I integrate theater into our Paideia junior high classroom, hoping to enliven what we present to the students. Martha and I are convinced that if students are invested in a class production—everyone working together creatively to put on a show—then the learning becomes immensely more active and engaging: the kids get closer, goals are set and accomplished leading to rising levels of confidence, and school becomes something more than any of us expect. This year, we would create, rehearse and produce a play about teenagers at Bletchley Park.

Our classroom theater project began three years ago when Martha led our students in a production of Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing*. During the two-month rehearsal period, students explored the history of the English language, Elizabethan gender norms, and Shakespearean double-entendres (anything to raise the level of junior high humor). Somewhere along the way, Martha decided to shake up the cast by reversing gender roles of some of the major characters: Leonato, governor of Messina, became Leonata, a powerful matriarch, and Antonio, Leonata’s brother, became Antonia, an example of a strong female adversary as she vehemently defends her niece’s honor.

4

The gender twist allowed the students to confront male and female stereotypes in not only past centuries but also in their current lives.

After a successful run that challenged the students in new and surprising ways—how to master the complicated yet brilliant language, what kind of experiences and memories to mine in order to underscore the emotions of the characters, where to find period costumes and props on a shoestring budget—Martha and I fine-tuned what we wanted to do in the future, thinking about what would make the students be even more successful as performers and in the process, make them more engaged, active learners. We decided we would follow the kids’ interests, letting them decide what kind of play they wanted to perform and what subjects they wanted to address. And given that many kids in our classroom had little or no acting experience, we wondered how we could guide our actors to more credible and inspiring performances. So no more baby powder in the hair to play grandmothers, no more fake beards, and no more make-up lines on foreheads. We would choose plays that featured teen-aged casts with roles they could understand and therefore, play convincingly.

The perfect play, though, could not be found. There’s a dearth of great, exciting plays for junior high kids that reach beyond the expected subject matter and feature roles exclusively for the age group. So Martha and I figured we’d have to make our own. Following the kids’ lead and their current obsession with dystopian narratives—*The Hunger Games* was their bible that year—we looked for great science-fiction classics to use as examples. Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*, published in 1953 and arguably the classic dystopian novel, stared us right in the face and as a literature unit, I led the class through a discussion of the book, telling the students, “This is exactly the kind of story our play should tell.” During one class conversation, a student asked why we weren’t just doing *451* as a play. “It’s easy enough,” she said. “Just take the dialogue and add a narrator.” And in this moment, our next project was born.

Bradbury wrote his own stage adaptation of *451*, but I shied away from using that script because nearly all of the characters—the fireman who burned books, their wives and the revolutionaries—were adults, and one of our primary goals was to present age-appropriate roles to the students. But the material was too good and the issues—censorship, the rise of technology, the pressure to conform and the denial of self—were too relevant. In the end, there was only one thing I could do and still honor the original objective of this theatrical endeavor: create our own adaptation with all the roles aged down to teenagers. Montag, Bradbury’s protagonist, once a fireman who begins to sense that burning books may be akin to destroying humanity, became Montag, the son of a fireman. And Captain Beatty, the chief fireman, became Beatty, the leader of the student fire brigade desperate to mimic the oppressive tendencies of authority.

As part of the curriculum surrounding our exploration of the dystopian genre, I introduced the students to the 1950s television show *The Twilight Zone*, specifically the episode “Number 12 Looks Just Like You,” about a futuristic society in which every teenager must choose among a limited amount of perfected faces and body shapes then undergo a medical transformation so that everyone will look the same and thus remain superficially happy. Immediately, the class saw the thematic connections between *The Twilight Zone* episode, written by series host Rod Serling, and *451*, and suggested we combine the two narratives into one disturbing dystopian blend. Once we added one *Zone*, why not include others? Very early in the writing process, we incorporated bits of two more episodes: “Eye of the Beholder,” in which those traditionally beautiful are ghettoized by a plain, even disfigured majority, and “The Obsolete Man,” a story about another futuristic society which sees no reason for books, libraries or librarians.

Our version of this fused new story became *Transformation 451*, which followed Montag, a fireman’s son who questions what the state expects of him, and his schoolmate Marilyn who fights against the forced metamorphosis the state requires of her. As a classroom, we studied the play, cast it and in

5

February 2013, put the show up in Paideia’s black box theater. Along the way, students participated in a history curriculum focused on America in the 1950s, the decade which inspired Bradbury’s novel, paying special attention to McCarthyism and the Second Red Scare, two historical episodes that provoked the author to create his censorious and conformist narrative world. The spirit and subject of the play also influenced our literature curriculum; students were asked to consider several dystopian narratives, comparing and contrasting, and to identify common themes and elements. When our stage production merged with our explorations of American History and literary genres

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studies, a dynamic integration occurred in the classroom; issues and topics collided and resonated, creating all sorts of new meanings for students. As a result, we achieved two primary objectives in our junior high classroom—guiding students as they become more advanced critical thinkers and nurturing their personal agency as learners.

What’s more important, perhaps, is that I ask the students—once cast—to develop their roles by exploring the connections between the characters they play with their own experiences, issues and emotions. The self-examination they are encouraged to do ultimately informs and enhances their performances, and often leads to breakthroughs in self-discovery and consequently, self-awareness. Student actors are allowed to embellish lines, design their own moments, and even co-direct scenes. The result: I find the students become much more invested in their roles and in the production. Instead of a teacher-led production, it becomes *their* production.



Once *Transformation 451* closed, Martha and I looked to the future. What did we want to create for the next school year? And what kind of curriculum would follow? When in doubt, we always ask the students. This time around, most of the students asked for something non-futuristic, something suspenseful. Jake, one of my 13-year-olds, a lover of all things military history, said, “How about something with spies? You know, like espionage.” Some students chuckled but I remembered something I’d seen on television about young people breaking codes, all engaged in war-time activity, fighting for something crucial. I thought about the young people in my classroom; could any of them identify something they had the courage to pursue? “Think about this,” I said to them. “Do any of you have something important to fight for?” A difficult question for a 21st century kid. After a long moment, Aldwin, a quiet, dreamy student, looked up from the paper on which he was drawing happy creatures and answered: “The only thing I fight for is the remote control.” I thought more about those teenagers I’d seen on tv and remembered that they had lived their incredible young lives during WWII at Bletchley Park.

During the summer before the next school year, I traveled to England for a research trip that took me the 85 kilometers outside of London to Bletchley. There, I listened.

Five months later, three weeks before the start of school, I’m listening to a codebreaking veteran telling his stories. He rocked back and forth in his wheelchair, one hand stroking the rubber wheel. It was Reenactment Day at Bletchley, something I hadn’t planned for but a coincidence I read as proof that I was onto something with this new play idea. Men and women, too young to be around during the war, wandered the estate in 1940’s fashions. A brass band fronted by woman wearing a gingham dress and Peter Pan collar sung “He Wears a Pair of Silver Wings.” The veteran told me how he and his buddies gathered in the ballroom of the mansion after a shift to watch Rudy Valentino movies, how Alan Turing, the *de facto* leader of Bletchley and one of the designers of the Bombe machine, used to ride around the park on a wobbly bicycle, how he met his wife in the canteen and enjoyed sixty-five

## 6

years of a wonderful marriage. Another woman nearby began to talk about her mother's experience billeted in a nearby town, unable— forbidden actually by the Official Secrets Act—to tell the family she was posted with what she was doing at Bletchley. Another story told by a docent involved a wealthy girl working as a typist who unknowingly corrupted the secret postal routes to Bletchley by asking her daddy to send her beloved piano through the mail. Finally, a video in the main museum building revealed a former radio operator and translator confessing how difficult it was to hide his fear when transcribing a message sent by a German commander with gravelly baritone voice. So many stories sparked so many ideas for a theatre piece about kids tested during difficult times.

Casting for the play took place in December, three months before our scheduled opening night. The students received monologues spoken by five different characters: Olive MacClare, a British teen who survives the Blitz and is called for duty at Bletchley; Aaron Benson, a Jewish boy looking desperately through the Nazi codes for news of his relatives in Poland; Mimi Howes, a local girl who lives outside the park yet yearns to do something important in her life; Babs Dalton, a high society girl whose flashy smile hides her grief over her brother missing in France; and Rufus Shawcross, the leader of the young codebreakers who tries but fails to hide his sense of fun. At casting, I hadn't yet finished the full script of the play, now called *Station X*, after the nickname for Bletchley; it remained a work-in-progress waiting for the students to fine-tune, through collaboration, the characters and events of the plot.

During casting, Martha and I paid special attention to who got what roles. This particular group of students—none of them placed in our class because of extensive theatre backgrounds—had a variety of stage experience: one had a childhood of acting classes and another suffered wickedly from a fear of public speaking. But we didn't cast for talent; we casted according to whom we thought would benefit from the particular role he

or she played. We hoped Katrina, the shy, reserved girl who often teared up when speaking about herself in front of others, would learn about confidence and courage playing the part of Mimi, the young girl eager to do something important in a world in which women, previously marginalized by society, were now discovering opportunities to change the world. Carolyn, an intelligent 8th grader whose self-consciousness did constant battle with her confidence, was cast as Judith Knox, an expert in languages hiding the fact her father was German. And Aldwin, the dreamy artist with a distinct fear of growing up, became Hugh MacClare, Olive's brother, a child whose strategy of using fantasy to ward off the adult world is tested when his neighborhood is bombed.

After receiving their roles, students began to research their parts in order to discover what it really felt like to live during the time period and to give oneself over so bravely to a cause. Kathy, cast as Olive, focused on the Blitz; the factual information concerning the Nazi bombardment of London plus the testimonials of the affected British citizens would hopefully add color and nuance to Kathy's performance. Dave, taking on the part of Aaron Benson, gathered his courage to pour over Holocaust narratives in order to gain insight into his character's discovery of Hitler's Final Solution through the secret messages he decodes. Playing the upper class party girl Babs was the motivation for Andrea, an 8th grader who hid her smarts behind an obsession with pop culture, to research how the British gentry moved past privileged lives to do their part in the war effort.

Through January, as the students created the particularities of their characters, the play grew roots and began to develop into a truly collaborative entity. While other actors rehearsed, students worked on their research projects, crafting visual presentations on their subjects so that the entire cast could view all the findings. The class also investigated the archetypal WWII narrative—from John Boorman's Oscar-nominated film *Hope and Glory* to Markus Zusak's novel *The Book Thief* and British TV's recent miniseries *The Bletchley Circle*—determining common themes and elements. Again, integration among the many subjects and activities in the classroom produced a cohesive vision and enhanced experiences and results.

## 7

During the rehearsal period, a former Paideia parent who learned of the project, told me that one of the patients in her oral surgery practice spent WWII as a codebreaker in Washington, D.C., monitoring German naval activity in the Atlantic. Janice Benario, who was eager to share stories of her recruitment and contributions to the Allied victory, welcomed the cast to her residence and gave all of us a taste of what it was like to be engaged in an endeavor that affected so many young men and women risking their lives for freedom. One of Janice's best stories involved her strict adherence to the secrecy oath she took during her training. It would be nearly 50 years of marriage before she told her

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husband what she did in the war. "And they say women will gossip," Janice told us, the spirit of the 20-year-old hero glimmering through her face. "We showed them." Visiting with Janice provided another opportunity for all of us to glimpse the reality of war and witness history come alive.

Our production of *Station X* went up in mid-February and the students were thrilled to be part of what was—as we were proud to say—a world premiere of an original play. The bond created between cast members, between performers and crew, and between teachers and students proved to be extraordinarily strong; their sense of accomplishment coupled with the enthusiastic reviews they received gave them a terrific new insight into what school could be. And Katrina, the young woman who played Mimi, made tremendous progress and won the battle with her fear of being onstage by tapping into her character's courage to break free of female expectations and live an extraordinary life. She gave one of the show's most unexpected performances; in the middle of her monologue detailing the pressure placed on her to remain not only a waitress in the family's cafe but also a wife to the local farmer's son, Katrina fully embodied the character and allowed

spontaneous tears to strengthen verisimilitude of her interpretation.

After the Sunday matinee, Janice Benario, our invited guest, was called up from the audience and participated in a Q&A with the audience, once again giving us a real-life perspective on the fictional events performed on the stage. Janice is a frank, no-nonsense individual, and I feared that she would boldly right any wrongs that the play might have committed—anachronisms, unauthentic details, careless exaggerations—but with a hitch in her voice, she told the post-show audience that *Station X* brought so many memories back to her. "I was saying all the lines right with you," she said to the class. Later, on her way out and back to her life, Janice told me that seeing all the young people acting their hearts out, honoring what she did in the war, was one of the highlights of her experience as a code breaker. When I told my students this, they beamed, immediately understanding what they had done for her.

It's the start of another school year now, and our new 8th graders are deciding what kind of play they want to do next spring. "You've done futuristic and you've done historical," Margaret says, eager to get started. "Can we do something contemporary?" *Thank God*, I say to myself, *no period costumes, no searching eBay or Craig's List for time-appropriate props*. Jackson, another student, remembers civics class last semester when they all read William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies*. The class was particularly inspired by the efforts of the marooned boys to create some sort of system to govern themselves. And let's face it, they loved the dramatic possibilities of kids left alone without adult supervision. I recall how the Snowpocalypse in January—two episodes of cancelled school days and lost play rehearsals—affected all of us and it comes to me: a group of students stuck in school over the weekend during a terrific snowstorm, the single teacher leaving to go seek help and never coming back, the students alone and forced to figure out what to do on their own.

A new play—and a new opportunity for integration in the classroom—is born.

## The Joys of Watching Children Learn Never Grows Old

8

**W**ELCOME to the 25th Grandparents and Special Friends' Day. One year we invited everyone to Grandparents Day but then a hurricane took out the electricity so we had to cancel, but we still count it as a Grandparents Day—a Virtual Grandparents Day. Either way, this is a long and one of the most enjoyable traditions of the year.

After 45 years there are lots of traditions here. Let me tell you about one of my personal ones. As you may know, I have been here since the get-go so I get to have my own tradition.

My tradition is the “Whining Light.” About 15 years ago, I got a whining light for my office. I don't know what made me decide that this was a good idea. Maybe I was motivated by those old movies about the U.S. Navy when the captain would go on the PA system to announce that, “The smoking lamp is lit,” which meant the sailors had permission to smoke. Since most teenagers like to whine, I adapted it to give my high school advisees permission to whine, but just for a few minutes. Then I turn off the light, and they have to stop.

I have 15 high school advisees. They crowd into my office every week or so to meet with me. They settle down and have a snack, which I provide. Then I turn on the whining light and the floor is open for anyone would like to whine.

And whine they do, citing hardships such as too much homework, or “this teacher is unfair and obviously doesn't like me”; or “my parents are the only ones in the whole school who won't let me, me....a totally trustworthy child, do....” (and they fill in the missing blank—go with friends on spring break, go to an all-night concert, use the family car); or one of my favorites: “I have to walk too far

from the junior parking lot with my heavy backpack and what's more, sometimes it rains.”

They usually exhaust themselves in a few minutes, get it out of their system plus pick up a little sympathy from classmates, and then we go on to talk about more important things. The purging process works. In fact, it works so well that if I had more time in my life, I would commercially market a Whining Light: no home in America, no workplace, should be without one.

Over the last several years, I have begun to use the whining light myself, when I am alone in my office, usually late in the afternoon when the campus is quiet. I am typically an upbeat person, generally positive, but more and more, I need these few moments alone with my light.

Here's why I need it. In fact, to get in the mood, I am going to turn on the light right now. My guess is that many of you will be able to relate to my issues, and maybe you'll even want to go get your own whining light.

I whine about getting old. Yes, I know, we all get old—that's nothing special, but growing old is particularly unnerving in a school. The reason is that I get old, but they don't. “They” are the children.

In any given year, “they” age only a few months, but by the beginning of the next school year, poof! There is a new crowd, and they are the same age all over again: the sixth graders are 11 years old again and just beginning to feel their oats; the seniors are still 17, peering into their impending new world of college and adulthood, and feeling a different kind of oats.

Who gets older? I do. Who stayed the same? Them. They're stuck in time, I'm slowly withering on the vine. We're not exactly on our journey together. Not to mention their parents, who look younger to me every year: children having children, and newer teachers, many of whom are in their late twenties.

9

This is all hard. There are lots of challenges. One difficulty I have is that we, my students and I, lose our common reference points.

Every year I teach a junior-senior history class called Modern America—topics in post-World War II America. Years ago I gave up comparing some national trauma to the assassination of John Kennedy. They don't relate to that. And Watergate? Same thing. I might as well be talking about Valley Forge: it's all the prehistoric long ago to them.

More recently, I slipped up and asked them to compare an event to 9/11. Doesn't work; they were two or three years old in September 2001. It's a little better for the recession that

**Growing old is particularly unnerving in a school. The reason is that I get old, but they don't. “They” are the children.**

began in 2008: they were 10 years old then and can at least remember overhearing something their parents might have been talking about.

And if we have no common ground on historical references, you can totally forget about popular music. With music I feel like Rip Van Winkle, but a Rip Van Winkle who went to sleep but never woke up, never mind 20 years later, never. By the time I have even heard of the recording artist, they are totally-yesterday. And this is more than the age-old complaint about youth music. Every generation does that. I don't even know whether these groups exist, or they are just made-up names and the kids are putting me on.

Technology? Young people are so good at technology and they are also so patronizing to those of us who are struggling to figure out just 25 percent of what our iPhones can do. By and large, teenagers have abandoned Facebook for newer platforms that use minimal amounts of the English language. Young adults and older people use Facebook. I happen not to because I could never figure out how to tell an alum or a school parent that I didn't want to be their friend, but even if I did, my students would not be found there.

Furthermore, their technological skills enable them to communicate in nanoseconds. For example, when the Mother Goose building burned down six years ago, actually on the night of Grandparents Day (but we don't think any of you did it), we learned later that some graduates of the school living in China saw pictures of the fire even before I got called to campus.

There are lots of other examples of oldness being rubbed in my face every day, but you get the picture. I have thought a lot about why this makes me whine. I think the best way to explain it is that it hurts my feelings because I don't feel old inside. I don't self-identify as old. I still think of myself as young inside, maybe in my late 20s or 30s. I think of myself as cool, not hip. I never was hip, but I bordered on cool. With it. Paideia was never part of the Establishment and I don't want to be the Establishment.

Nor do I want to be an icon. I've been here since the middle of the Nixon presidency—you remember Richard Nixon, don't you?—and such longevity can breed iconic status, even when not deserved. For example, people quote me as saying things I know I never said, good things, but not my words.

They act like I pulled a sword from a stone and became headmaster at age 25, flew a bi-plane across the Atlantic Ocean to Atlanta and landed in a cotton field to start Paideia School. Students hold doors open for me so far in advance of my arrival at the door that I spend a lot of my day scurrying to reward the kindness of children.

I am an advice giver. I like that part of the job. It's still working out pretty well, but now and then I get the sense that students or young faculty are hearing my words more as a museum recording, a quaint voice from an earlier century: our headmaster who speaks like a kitchen sampler.

I hope as fellow grandparents you can relate to some of what I am saying, even though hardly any of you spend all your days surrounded by the young, like me, aging helplessly on a street named for an explorer, Ponce de Leon, who spent his career searching for the Fountain of Youth. I will put my whining light in my office window later today and if you would like a walk-by whine, come on by.

**Paul Bianchi,** headmaster, spoke at Grandparents and Special Friends' Day about traditions, therapeutic whining and the joys of watching learning unfold.

10

But now I'll turn off the whining light, and think positively. I'll focus instead on all the wonders of working in a school, of watching children unfold before our eyes like time-lapse flower sequences on The National Geographic Channel. While the structure of school is fairly constant, what happens every day is often new, or slightly different. When children get out of the car in the morning, they have in their backpacks, metaphorically speaking, energy for a whole day, their dreams and fears, their parents' dreams and fears, their openness, and their blind spots.

Together during the day we will grapple one way or another with some of the timeless matters of human existence: how do we grow, become or stay motivated; how do we learn to live with each other successfully, understand what we have in common as well as our differences.

We will explore what constitutes effort, how we respond to setbacks, and how to build character? And, of course, an important question for all of us: what, if anything, is worth whining about, and how should we appreciate and respond to how damn lucky we are to be alive in our corner of the world?

I hope you will see the positives of the Paideia corner of the world today, get a glimpse of why, despite some existential pitfalls, that a life around children offers an unending fare of emotional and intellectual meaning on a daily and lifelong basis, and also a shocking amount of joy, liveliness, and laughter to fuel our journey.



Paul Hayward

## Discipline—An Educational Opportunity

11

I'M PAUL HAYWARD, head of the high school at Paideia, and I have a confession to make.

When I was in 8th grade, I ran a black market selling gumballs in my junior high school. I bought them for a penny a piece and sold them two for a nickel. Chewing gum at school was, of course, against the rules. The rule enforcer was the assistant principal, a man who prowled the halls with a scowl on his face, looking for kids making trouble.

**Paul Hayward** is retiring as the head of high school in June 2016. During his 44-year tenure he amassed a large body of wisdom on student behavior. He shared his insights in a speech at a Georgia Independent School Association Conference.

I was not a troublemaker. Those were other kids. I was just a young entrepreneur. One day on the PA system, the principal announced there had been an increase of chewing gum in the water fountains, and reminded us of the no gum rule. That wasn't my fault, I thought. I didn't put the gum there, that was the other students, the consumers, the troublemakers. Do you recognize the 13-year-old mentality? I did stop selling gum for a while, and eventually other interests took over. I never got caught.

Was I breaking the rules? Yes.

Did I need to be caught in order to learn? No.

Should I have been punished? Yes, if I had been caught.

Did I go on to a life of bad behavior because I was not caught? No, and now I am the disciplinarian, though I am resolved to be happier than the one at my junior high school.

I'm going to present an approach to thinking about discipline as earning. It includes these elements:

*What's going on*—look at what's behind the behavior.

*Engage the student to look at the behavior.*

*Choose a consequence that enhances learning.*

*Review*—have the student look back after some time.

I'm going to talk about how I look at students who break the rules. I will share a way of thinking about kids in trouble. My specific methods may not fit your school, though I think all independent schools want students to learn through discipline. I hope you will find something in what I say that will resonate with your thoughts and questions about handling discipline.

One of the meanings of "discipline" is "to instruct and educate." The Greek root is *disciplina*, meaning instruction, teaching, training, education. It is that aspect of discipline in the context of schools I will address.

### **Why do we discipline students?**

Order—Some behaviors are not conducive to a learning environment.

Control—adolescents cannot always be trusted to make wise decisions.

Safety—we can anticipate bad consequences of behavior better than adolescents..

Learning—we want students to grow up with self-insight and self-control.

Those are all valid and important reasons for rules and consequences from our point of view. But let's look at behavior from the teenager's perspective.

### **Why do students break the rules?**

A major reason is that the teenagers want attention. They may not even be thinking about rules. They are concerned about how their friends see them. They are not thinking about what we see, only about what others see. "Notice me" is the desire.

Another major reason is that teenagers want something they think they need but cannot have. Cheating falls in this category. Students think they need good grades but can't understand the material well enough, or write well enough, or compute well enough. Some students have such a strong sense of right and wrong that they don't

## 12

cheat, but others do not have the same mental barriers. They want the good grade and are willing to take a short cut.

A final reason is that teenagers are not very good at anticipating consequences. They don't always pause and think, "What could happen if..." Adults often say to kids in trouble, "What were you thinking?" As educators, we know the answer is that they just weren't thinking, their pre-frontal cortex has not developed fully enough to anticipate outcomes.

There are times when misbehavior requires a patient approach. I have a standing rule with the teachers at our school that they can send a disruptive student to me at any time without any explanation—just, "Go see Paul Hayward." It is a high school version of time out, a way of removing the student who is interfering with the learning of others. I am the time out corner. When the student comes to me, I ask, "What happened?" The student usually begins with how unfair the teacher was, how others were doing the same thing, how they weren't doing anything in class, etc. I let the student vent, because I know that he or she won't hear much when they are so emotional. As they begin to calm down, I ask the question, "And what was the teacher doing when you were doing this?" Eventually they are able to see that their behavior was interfering with what the teacher was trying to do. This can take five minutes, or if the student is really upset (often the underlying cause is not the teacher), up to 15 minutes or more. When I think they understand the impact of their behavior on the class, I ask the unexpected question, "So what are you going to do about this?" This is the teaching moment. This shifts it to what they can do. If I tell them what to do, I am using my authority to dictate their behavior. If I ask

what they are going to do, they have to make a choice, to come up with something that will improve things between them and the teacher. Usually they come up with some form of, "I guess I need to apologize." I respond, "Sounds like a plan. Go do it." I give the student a note to get back into class that reads simply, "We talked." Of course I follow up with the teacher later in the day to see if there is anything that happened the student didn't tell me. Rarely does that student have a problem with the teacher again.

This approach is echoed in an excellent book titled *No-Drama Discipline*, by Daniel Siegel & Tina Payne Bryson. They write about discipline as it relates to raising children, but the principles are similar to discipline as teaching in schools. They write, "Effective discipline means that we're not only stopping a bad behavior or promoting a good one, but also teaching skills and nurturing the connections in our children's brains that will help them make better decisions and handle themselves well in the future." Their catch phrase is "Connect and Redirect." Connect means waiting until the child is ready to look at their behavior, much as I do when a student is sent to my office. Redirect means helping children understand what they can do differently, so that the desired behavior is reinforced with understanding and repetition. They summarize their approach in these words, "Our children need repeated experiences that allow them to develop wiring in their brain that helps them delay gratification, contain urges to react aggressively toward others, and flexibly deal with not getting their way." I think this is also a good description of our goals for disciplining teenagers in schools.

Sometimes students do something wrong because something else going on in their lives that interferes with good judgment. Let

## 13

me tell you a story about Billy. [I've changed the names of the students for these stories.]

Billy had older siblings who had done well in school. Billy was smart, but misbehaved in many ways. He had one problem after another all the way through high school. He stole a book. He was mean to classmates. He lied to his teachers. He skipped classes. He didn't reach his full potential. He came close to being expelled from school, but always changed just enough to escape that ultimate punishment.

He is the only student I ever threw out of my office during a parent conference I called to deal with his behavior. He was so obnoxious to his parents that he was undermining what I wanted to discuss. What I think now is that something was troubling him, probably having to do with his family, that he did not want me to know about. I think his behavior was unconsciously designed to draw attention to himself and away from his family. On the last day of school, as he walked down the sidewalk away from his troubled high school history, he walked out of his way to come see me and say, "I know that you did what you thought was good for me." I took that as his way of saying thanks. I hear from his classmates he is doing well as an adult. I hope some day he comes back to tell me himself.

### Pause and reflect

Think about a student who is giving you the most trouble now.

What is going on in his/her life? What does the student want?

What does the student need?

I believe this about students:

Most students want to do well, or at least avoid trouble.

Most students share the school's values, though perhaps not as strongly as we do.

Most students have a hard time thinking about consequences, which is why they still

have parents and teachers and coaches at age 18.

There may be some adolescents who don't fit these beliefs—we have labels for them—"budding psychopaths," "teenage delinquents," "spoiled brats." There may be a few who need more than we can provide in a school. But I believe that if we assume the best, most students will respond positively.

Let me tell you a story about Jack and Jill, two 10th graders, a couple. Jack and Jill skipped school one day. To avoid getting caught, each sent an email to the school explaining that he/she was sick. The emails came to us one minute apart. It was suspicious, so we investigated. Our technology department was able to determine that the emails came from the same computer. The students did not know we could do that. I called each student's parents, who believed that their child was home "sick." They called their child. Both Jack and Jill told their parents they were not together. Jack's mother, a woman I had known for many years, called me back and said I was wrong and that she believed her child. I calmly said that the facts I saw indicated that Jack and Jill were together. Less than an hour later, Jill confessed to her mother. Jill said that her mother's trust in her was so important to her and she realized she had broken it. Jill was so disappointed in herself. Jack had to tell his mother he had lied after she had believed and supported him. The parents apologized for not believing me. We chose an appropriate punishment for Jack and Jill, but the most significant learning that happened came in the conversations they had with their parents.

## 14

There is another part to the story. We have a required sophomore course on ethics, a short course, four-weeks long. Jill was in my section. The “sick” incident happened in the first week of the course, but I told her she would learn more about ethics talking with her parents than anything we would cover in the course. I told Jill that she now had the challenge of finding ways to regain the trust she had broken. She nodded knowingly. I also told her I would not mention what happened in the class and would not make an example of her with other students. She appreciated that. On the final day of the course, as students were sharing in a circle about what they had learned about ethics, Jill told the story of her skipping and lying and what she had learned. I had given her room to learn, and she had faced herself and made a choice to be better.

I have a theory that every school has some area of rules about student behavior that students will routinely test. These may not be the most important rules of the school, but they are clear and measurable. This area usually has the longest section in the rule-book. In some schools it is the dress code, tested by students with shirts pulled out or skirts too short or something else that is just over the line. In other schools it may be tardiness, where there are significant and clearly stated punishments for being late, regardless of the circumstances. At our school, it is parking. Our campus is squeezed into a long, narrow block with only enough on campus parking spaces for faculty and staff. Our students park in church parking lots a block or two away. Students test the limits by parking in areas reserved for church members or on the street closer to the school. Our parking rules are more detailed than any other rules we have about student behavior. I wrote the rules with an emphasis on respect for the churches, caring about the neighbors, and helping the traffic flow at car pool time. It is a beautiful and eloquent set of rules. Students

still break the rules. What kind of discipline both controls the behavior and teaches a lesson?

### **Pause and reflect**

What behaviors have the most rules at your school?

What does the disciplinarian (you or someone else) care about the most? What would students say is the most important rule?

Your very detailed set of rules may not be about the most important behaviors your school values, but testing them is normal adolescent behavior, and not necessarily bad. I would rather they test the parking rules than the rules about drugs and alcohol. At our school, being caught violating the parking rules once and losing driving privileges for a week is usually enough. But not always. Let me tell you a story about John.

As a junior, John parked on the street frequently. I gave him the standard punishments—first a week suspension of driving, then two weeks, then more. But he continued to violate the rules whenever he thought I wasn’t looking. Clearly the standard “stimulus-response” Skinnerian method of punishment wasn’t working. I decided to think outside the box and try something different. I called John into my office and said, “John, this punishment is clearly not working. I am simply going to ask you kindly not to park on the street anymore.” That was enough, and he never parked out of place again. Communicating with this teenage boy with respect and trust made the difference to him. John wrote me recently and reminded me of this incident saying, “That type of communication, honesty, and trust is why I and so many others have such a high degree of respect for you.” John now has a college

## 15

degree in international affairs, has travelled overseas extensively, and has worked for the Carter Center on a conflict resolution program. I like to think I helped prepare him for that job.

A conflict resolution program. I like to think I helped prepare him for that job.

### **Sometimes the investigation is part of the discipline, the teaching process**

Many years ago, when our school was much smaller, we found a pile of beer cans on the high school curb one Sunday morning. The headmaster and I met at school and made a few judiciously chosen phone calls. We identified a group of six students who had been out Saturday evening at a nearby movie

### **Have rules but think outside the box. At times the investigation is part of the teaching.**

theater. When we spoke to the students on the phone, each of them denied having come by the school. Realizing we had temporarily reached a dead end with phone calls, the headmaster and I headed home. His route home took him by Jane’s house, one of the six students, a girl he taught, whose parents he knew well. He stopped and rang the doorbell. When the mother opened the door, he simply asked if he could talk with her daughter. When Jane came down the stairs, she took one look at the headmaster, started sobbing, and confessed. He had sensed that she would be uncomfortable lying to him face-to-face, and that seeing him in person might get to the truth. We found out about all six students, and the others confessed when they realized we knew who was involved. One year later, Jane was elected to one of the student positions on the Disciplinary Committee, running on a platform of experience. She was elected because other students respected the way she had told the truth and accepted her punishment. We often emphasize truth when we are investigating an incident. We may pretend we know more than we know for certain, but we

start by telling the student that the truth is important, that telling us what they did will help them learn from what happened, and that things will be worse if they leave the office and haven’t told us the whole truth. Because truth and respect are values we emphasize and model every day, this approach often works.

### **Methods of discipline**

Have rules but think outside the box. At times the investigation is part of the teaching.

### **When to expel**

There are rule violations and behaviors that are so egregious and contrary to the values of a school that expelling the student is the appropriate action. Fortunately these times do not occur very often. Each school has to decide which behaviors deserve expulsion. It is one of the ways we state the values of the school. I think it is best to leave some latitude in the rules for judgments based on the situation. A long time ago we decided to have a “zero tolerance” rule about drug possession and use at school—expulsion on the first violation—one strike and you’re out. Our thinking at that time was that if we made the punishment so harsh students would fear the consequences and avoid risking expulsion. We were wrong. Teenagers don’t think that clearly. Their behavior is more likely to be influenced by the chance of being caught than by the fear of what might happen. We changed that rule after a couple of years. We realized it made a difference to us whether it was a freshman caught with one joint or an older student selling drugs on campus. Our rules now often contain a phrase like “serious consequences, up to and including expulsion.” I do not think

## 16

there is any set of rules that guarantee that students will not misbehave. Zero tolerance really means zero flexibility.

### **Pause and reflect**

What can a student do at your school that would lead to expulsion?

What student behaviors in your school worry you, where you feel you do not have control? What are the most important values of your school?

The rules should reflect your school's values, showing what is most important to your school, your faculty, your students, and your parents. Schools should look at how the rules reflect those values, not just how they define the behavior you want. The rules define the climate of the school, along with how students are treated by the adults in the school. It is best if most students want the rules to be followed, worst if it feels like an "us" against "them" environment. At our school, joint student-faculty committees consider disciplinary situations. Having both students and teachers involved in making difficult decisions helps build this sense of community values and norms.

I want to talk for a minute about the role of parents in this whole process of disciplining. We know that parents have different ways of raising and disciplining their children. We hope they share the same values the school holds most dearly. We hope they will trust us to do the right thing when their child misbehaves. They did choose our schools, and we did accept them and their child. Parents can be very helpful in the discipline process, or they can interfere with what the school does. I called the parent of one senior we expelled for theft, and the father demanded, "I need a different answer." I told him there wasn't one. On the other hand, I suspended one freshman for bullying behavior and his mother thanked me. Michael Thompson wrote an insightful article, "The Fear Equation," that has helped

me understand and work with parents. One of his major points is that parents often bring to a meeting the skills and strengths that work in their profession—the lawyer may be argumentative, the doctor may be confident that his/her view is the only way to see things, the therapist may believe they understand the underlying causes of their child's misbehavior. We know that even smart, successful parents sometimes have a hard time seeing things clearly with their child. It helps to build a positive relationship and a sense of involvement before any misbehavior happens. It helps to have clear rules consistently applied.

Sometimes it helps to look at the parents in the same way I'm suggesting we look at students: What's going on (in their lives and in their family)?

Engage parents to look at their child's behavior. What do you see at home?

What are your concerns and worries? What were your teenage years like?

Ask how the parents can help the student learn from what happened. What consequences are you going to have at home?

How will your child regain your trust?

A few weeks from now, have another discussion with your child. What have they learned?

### **What do we want to see happen when students misbehave?**

I believe we want students to grow and learn, to develop self-insight and maturity. Our goal is to teach, not to punish. Punishment can be a tool, but it is not the goal. I will often tell a rule breaker to remember the feeling they have right now—regret, embarrassment, fear—and put it away where they can pull out the memory of the feeling when they are tempted again.

Let me tell you a story about Frank.

## 17

Early one fall the freshmen were electing a classmate for the Honor Council. Four students were running for the one 9th grade position. We used paper ballots and passed them out, students marked them and put them in the ballot box. Frank ended up with a handful of extra blank ballots because some students were absent. He voted on all of them. We did not see this at the time. After school that day Frank called me and confessed. He said he thought that his friend who was running was so unpopular that she would not get many votes so he marked her name on all the extra ballots. He didn't expect her to win, but he didn't want her to feel bad. He felt so guilty the rest of day that he had to call and tell me what he had done. Let's look at Frank with the perspective I have been describing.

What's going on? He had compassion for a friend.

Look at the behavior. He did that himself, and felt guilty.

Choose a consequence that enhances learning. Our normal procedure would have been to have a public hearing with one of our student/faculty courts. Looking at Frank, and the girl he wanted to help, I thought the public embarrassment would hurt both of them rather than help them learn. I talked with Frank in my office the next day and gave him a punishment similar to what I thought the court would have imposed, and explained why I was bypassing the public process. Frank was relieved and accepted his punishment almost enthusiastically.

Review—look back at it later. When Frank finished his punishment, he said he would never do something like that again.

He went on to become one of the most respected students in the high school. Frank had actually disciplined himself, learned from his mistake, and needed the punishment only to give him closure on his misdeed.

I have one final story about how trusting students even in disciplinary situations can have positive results.

We had a new sidewalk put in around a parking lot one year. Fresh, wet concrete was just sitting there. We guarded it during the day, but hoped it was dry enough when the last adult left in the evening. Sometime that night, a group of seniors came back and decorated the concrete, which had not fully dried. We were quite upset the next morning. The students had not anticipated our reaction. Mid-morning one senior approached me and said, "We're sorry for what we did. If you will hold off your investigation a little while, I think we will all come forward and confess." I told him he had until the next morning. Just before school, he came back with a letter of apology, offering to pay for fixing the damage, signed by 40 students, including four who weren't there but said they would have been if they had known about it. All of them accepted their punishment and paid for the repairs. There is no indication that the sidewalk was ever vandalized, except for one small corner we overlooked. In addition, one of the students who participated is now a teacher at our school. Good things can come from adolescent mistakes.

## 18

## RESOURCES

*No Drama Discipline. The Whole-Brain Way to Calm the Chaos and Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind*, Daniel J. Siegel & Tina Payne Bryson, Bantam Books, 2014.

A wonderful book about how to raise children that has relevance to discipline in schools.

*Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain*, Daniel J. Siegel, Tarcher, 2014.

Another great book that gives insights into how teenagers think.

“The Fear Equation,” Michael G. Thompson, in *Independent School Magazine*, 1996.

<http://www.nais.org/Magazines-Newsletters/ISMagazine/Pages/The-Fear-Equation.aspx>

An article that explores the relationships and underlying fears between teachers and parents.

*Conscious Classroom Management. Unlocking the Secrets of Great Teaching*, Rick Smith, Conscious Teaching Publications, 2004.

<http://www.consciousteaching.com/book-ccm/>

While not specifically about discipline, this practical book has many excellent suggestions about teaching.

*Research-Based Strategies to Ignite Student Learning: Insights from a Neurologist and Classroom Teacher*, Judy Willis, Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development, 2007.

<http://www.radteach.com>

Dr. Judy Willis is a neurologist turned teacher who combines the latest knowledge about the brain with an understanding of what happens in the classroom.

## 19

**Sarah Schiff** teaches English in the high school. She recently shared with her colleagues how understanding the transformative power of words and stories that led her to become a teacher.

I hated high school. Now I realize this is a pretty strange thing for me to admit, considering my job and considering the fact that afterward I stayed in school for as long as I possibly could. It wasn't because of the school part that I hated high school. I loved the classes. Well “love” is probably a bit of a strong word for the math and science classes, but I didn't mind them. What I did mind, at the risk of sounding like a misanthrope, were the other students.

The high school I went to was a very different place than Paideia. But before I tell you about it and why I hated it so much, I should probably talk a bit about me and my family, but don't worry. I am a first-generation American, and I am first generation privileged. My dad's parents were Holocaust survivors, and my mom's grandparents were immigrant farmers who escaped the pogroms in Russia and arrived in Canada, where they struggled financially and got into all kinds of dramatic shenanigans. But my parents had the great fortune to grow up in Canada in a time of national prosperity and so got good educations and lots of support. My dad became a doctor, and they decided to move to the U.S.

I was raised in a small town in North Florida, Saint Augustine, and I had a great upbringing. It's hard not to when you live that close to the beach. But then there became the issue of schools. The public education system was less than stellar in St. Augustine. So we made the hour-long drive every day up to Jacksonville for me to go to a school, which, as I've already mentioned, I hated. But at the time I didn't know why. I didn't make friends easily, and my adolescent self assumed it was because there was something wrong with me. The students all seemed to have known each other since birth, they went to cotillion dances, drove BMWs and big trucks, and belonged to country clubs. To me, they seemed shallow and snobby and didn't seem to care about doing well in school—even though their parents paid ridiculous—though not unheard

of—sums of money to send them there. Whereas of course I loved doing well in school. You probably know kids like me: I read constantly, would stay after class to talk to my teachers and ask for book recommendations. Which of course made me all the more of an outcast.

Now, I'm making it sound more dire than it was. I did have a small group of friends who had similar interests as me, who liked learning, who were into music and art and drama. Looking back, I now realize that many of them were Jews and students of color. We were the freaks and geeks who spent time after school working on the lit mag and rehearsing for the musical and never going to the football games or after-parties.

Even though I was miserable at school, I dreaded having to go out into the community beyond it, because I knew I'd have to identify myself as a student there, and I was always ashamed to have to do so. So I felt doubly ashamed: ashamed that I went to my school *and* ashamed that I didn't fit in there.

It's only in more recent years that I've been able to figure out why I was so unhappy. The thing that helped me figure it out was a word. Which brings me—finally—to the point of my speech: the power of words. Sometimes you don't know that there's a problem, why there's a problem, or what the problem is until you can name it. The problem I had but couldn't name is a word that I've actually already used in this speech—I probably use it on a daily basis now—but it's one that has only in relatively recent years attained the usage and prevalence it deserves. In fact, I realized after drafting this talk that it was also the subject of Paul B.'s graduation speech last year. The word, of course, is “privilege.” Most of the students at my high school were highly privileged, and the troubling thing about them was that they didn't know it. Or if they knew it deep down, they would never have admitted it. Most of them still probably wouldn't. I think if

somebody had used the word “privilege” when I was in high school and explained the concept to me, I would have had a better sense of who I was, and why I wasn’t happy where I was, and what I maybe could have done to feel better about myself and the world around me.

But better late than never.

Let me give a more contemporary example about the power of words. The English teacher that I am, I tend to be slow to adopt the neologisms that occur in text messages and on social media: LOL; adorbs; friend, as a verb. But I recently learned a relatively new one, and it has helped me understand something I’d only subconsciously been affected and upset by before. The word is “mansplain.” First I just laughed when I heard it, because, like most new words these days, it sounds ridiculous. But according to that bastion of contemporary cultural knowledge, (the Internet’s) Urban Dictionary, Mansplain refers to a man’s “delight in condescending explanations delivered to a woman with rock solid confidence of rightness and that slimy certainty that of course he is right, because he is the man in this conversation and of course she couldn’t figure it out on her own.” So that’s Urban Dictionary’s definition, but the concept actually stems from a 2008 essay by Rebecca Solnit called “Men Explain Things to Me.” She doesn’t take credit for the word but says that it developed on the Internet in response to her essay and that it’s not wholly accurate because, “mansplaining is not a universal flaw of the gender, just the intersection between overconfidence and cluelessness where some portion of that gender gets stuck.”

Nevertheless, she explains the experience of mansplaining as one that “every woman knows,” that “keeps women from speaking up and from being heard when they dare; that crushes young women into silence by indicating, the way harassment on the street does, that this is not their world. It trains us

in self-doubt and self-limitation just as it exercises men’s unsupported overconfidence.”

Despite its limitations, until I learned and thought about the word, I hadn’t realized that I had been on the receiving end of mansplaining many times. But in all those times, when I was sitting there, stuck in a conversation trying to explain, yes, I’m very familiar with this basic concept, the man never relenting despite my attempts to intervene and cut the unnecessary diatribe short—in all those times, I thought it was my fault. I thought there was something wrong with my body language or that I must be fundamentally socially awkward or inarticulate or uncultured—maybe I should have gone to cotillion. I couldn’t help but wonder if I had missed out on some kind of social niceties or conventions and was unintentionally sending out signals that I am indeed helpless. But when I learned the word “mansplain,” I realized that it wasn’t because of me. I realized that I wasn’t alone. That’s the thing about unnamed forms of oppression; you can grow paranoid and assured that the fault lies with you and not systems and patterns that are much bigger and older.

So I’ll understand if no man in this room ever wants to talk to me again. I’m sorry if I’ve made anyone uncomfortable. Would it make you feel better if I said that I have never experienced mansplaining at Paideia?

But of course I have, and of course I have also been the perpetrator of insensitivities to people different from me. Misunderstandings and belittlings are the legacy of our nation and written into the history of human society, but it is through the power of words that we can make progress, and even if it is incremental, it can be lasting. I’m thinking of the ways other relatively new words, like microaggression and cisgender and differentiated learning, have not only expanded our vocabularies but also our minds and hearts.

So if just a single word can have this kind of transformative effect, imagine the change that a whole story can bring. We are all familiar with the power of a good story, the way it can remove us from the familiar world we take for granted, can bring us into the deep recesses of another person’s psyche, into their soul. One writer has said that we can know no other human being besides ourselves better than a character in a book. Think about it. How well do you know the person you think you know best? Do you really know what’s going on in their heads? Now think about how well you know the characters in the last novel you read—hopefully not in the

**What we’re fighting against is the worldview that always wants to see sameness, and what we are cultivating instead is a worldview that should be able to recognize and respect and include—not just tolerate—difference.**

too-distant past. How well do you know their desires, their challenges, their disappointments? How well can you empathize with them?

So this, ultimately, is why I teach. By entering the imaginative realm of an author’s created world, students gain access to the mind of a suffering character who is different from them. When students first come into my classroom, they often tell me that their favorite books are those with “relatable” characters. I try to disabuse them of that form of literary criticism as early as possible. But it takes a major and persistent intervention, in part because it’s a completely normal developmental phase that they’re going through—it makes sense that they, feeling so alone and misunderstood, so unlike everybody else, would want to read about people like themselves. I know and remember well how they feel. But my job—our job as teachers—is to shuttle them, in supportive and understanding ways, beyond this adolescent phase.

But we’re struggling against the tides, because it’s the same adolescent phase that our society is still in. What we’re fighting against is the worldview that always wants to see sameness, and what we are cultivating instead is a worldview that should be able to recognize and respect and include—not just tolerate—difference. My job as a teacher is to assign students stories of people who have suffered for reasons very different from the reasons they suffer. To have them read about and empathize with Zitkala-Sa, the turn of the century Sioux Indian woman who wrote about being taken away from her mother and sent to a boarding school, the motto of which was “Kill the Indian, Save the Man.” She talks about how the missionaries cut off her hair, beat her for speaking her native language, for practicing her religion. She grew up not knowing who she was, not feeling at home when she returned to the reservation, but not feeling like the American citizen and Christian the boarding school had tried to force her to be. My job is to have the students read W.E.B. Du Bois’ *Souls of Black Folk*, in which he coins one of the most useful terms for helping us make sense of the problems that continue to vex us: “double consciousness,” the way that black people in the United States, and many others who don’t conform to the mainstream, are forced to see themselves from the disparaging viewpoint of those in power, a view that is in fundamental contradiction to how they see themselves. To an extent, we all suffer from double consciousness, alienation. For this reason, it is additionally my job to have my students read Shakespeare, Nathaniel Hawthorne, F. Scott Fitzgerald, all of whom voiced in startling and beautiful ways the despair and creative potential of not fitting in. If students can cultivate empathy by reading about Hamlet’s moral dilemma, Hester Prynne’s ostracism, Jay Gatsby’s obsession, Zitkala-Sa’s identity crisis, Du Bois’ double consciousness, then maybe they can recognize similar struggles going on in the people and in the world around them—as well as in themselves.

22

Great literature purposely disorients us, gets us out of our own heads, and, in so doing, it also re-orient us with an expanded and more inclusive worldview. I consider it an honor that I get to play just a small part in leading young minds to Frost's "roads not taken," and Keats' "realms of gold," and Shakespeare's "brave new worlds." These were the words and stories that gave my life so much meaning when I grew up feeling so alone and out of place. Unlike myself when I was in high school, I want my students to be able to name and recognize their privilege, to not be ashamed of it but to become empowered by it, to see it as the less traveled road toward empathy. If they can put into words and recognize the suffering and oppression and injustices of our world, then they can fight them.

And I should probably also clarify here at the end that even though I hated my high school, I love Paideia. Only at Paideia can I get up here and give voice to who I am and what I believe. It is only at Paideia where I am asked to share with you what I haven't been able to put into words for many years. It is my privilege.



Martha Caldwell  
Oman Frame

23

Martha Caldwell and Oman Frame are home-base teachers in Paideia's junior high school. They developed a curriculum on race, class and gender for eighth graders that developed into a summer program for educators. This year, their book *Let's Get Real: Exploring Race, Class and Gender Identities* was published and offers teaching strategies for junior high and high school teachers for engaging and guiding students through conversations about these issues.

## Students Lessons Evolve Into Lessons for Teachers

AS TEACHING colleagues and creative collaborators, we discovered our integrated eighth grade social studies and language arts curriculum quite by accident. In the summer of 2007, Paideia awarded us a Blumenthal study grant to design a social studies course on climate change. In developing the curriculum, we both agreed that we wanted our students to connect the issues of climate change to social justice. We wanted our students to recognize that climate change will impact the economically disadvantaged more severely than the economically secure. We wanted them to realize that climate change is about more than just recycling and being green. We wanted them to see that masses of people on the planet will be displaced, that the poorest regions of the world will face food shortages and that the people least equipped to survive will be the victims of famine and disease. We wanted them to see the larger systems that have created the situation. So to give them a background for understanding systemic injustice, we designated an introductory unit to address topics related to their own identities: race, class, and gender.

What happened was that the two-week introductory unit expanded to fill the entire semester and ultimately became the social studies class we teach every year. Why? Because our students couldn't stop talking about it, and because it worked in ways we hadn't imagined. We only understood as the course unfolded that our students live and breathe social justice issues everyday in their lives at school and at home. Our students understand the effects of social power in the hallways; they know the subtle workings of the social hierarchies during lunch and in their social media networks. We realized we could use that knowledge to build understanding of how systems of power function in the wider world. Through inquiries into literature, histories, politics, and cultures, we could give our students tools to connect what they already knew to learn how power and privilege

operate in institutions like schooling, religion, government, and business. We inadvertently found a connection between the personal and the academic, which allowed them to bring their personal lives into the classroom and take their work in school home to be discussed over dinner with their families. When we saw how inspired they were by what they were learning and how grateful their parents were that they were talking about it, we decided to continue it. Our students were interested and learning, and so were we.

We were also seeing our students become more empathetic and as a result, they were able to see things from multiple perspectives. They begin to form authentic relationships based on mutual support that created alliances across differences. When they heard each other's stories, they became invested in doing something challenge injustices in society.

Because the excitement generated by authentic learning is not limited only to students, but includes teachers as well, Oman and I wanted to share what we were learning. We began making presentations for other teachers at educational conferences, where schools invited us to share our work with their faculties and students. With strong support from Paideia, we began consulting and offering workshops for educators.

Since the summer of 2013, when we hosted our first Diversity Institute for Educators, more than 100 teachers, counselors, admissions officers, administrators, board members, and parent liaisons from over 20 schools have completed our 4-day training program. Oman and I team up with other Paideia teachers to share the knowledge and expertise we have gained from our freedom to create curricula. Natalie Bernstein has shared her extensive elementary library collection of picture books about racial and gender identities. Eddy Hernandez leads a unit on how LGBTQ issues can be addressed by schools in a variety of ways from history classes to a school wide

24

push for safe communities. José Cordero shares aspects of his curriculum, which includes music of the Civil Rights Movement and a futuristic role-playing game in which first and second graders respond to injustice in imaginary scenarios. Teachers attending the Institute readily find ways to apply the methods, techniques, and lesson plans we present to their own curricula in their individual classrooms. Teachers are currently using aspects of our methods in elementary classrooms, middle school humanities courses, and in high school English, history, ethics, biology, math, civics classes, as well as in their advisory curricula and library collections. Athletic coaches even use our model for team building.

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While teachers sometimes ask for detailed instructions about how we structure our lessons and instruct our students, we strongly encourage them to use what we offer in a way that fits with their own personal teaching style. In *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, Parker Palmer emphasizes that as teachers, we “teach ourselves.” Discovery our own values and voice as teachers moves us toward better and more effective teaching. “Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique,” Palmer writes, “Good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher.”

Oman and I share our experiences, techniques, templates, and methods, but also know that teachers who aspire to this kind of teaching and learning constitute a large subgroup of highly committed professionals within the field of education. These individuals typically come to us already equipped with a heightened sense of self-awareness, strong communication skills, and a set of techniques, methods and experience all their own. As bell hooks would say, these teachers are “called to teach” and, as such, they see their teaching practice as a purpose and mission, and not just

a job. Teachers who infuse their lessons with what they value most in life gain the trust and respect of their students. Recognizing that teaching the most important work we could be doing and letting our students know how committed we are inspires them to match our commitment with their own.

Teachers tell us over and over that the one of the most important take-aways from our trainings is the connections they make with each other. To do the real work we’ve signed up to do, teachers have to build supportive communities. We need deep and sustained relationships with likeminded professionals who share our commitment and understand our values. The Summers Institute provides a forum for conversations that are rarely broached, yet utterly compelling in their potential to stimulate growth and change. Meeting and connecting with colleagues, hearing each other’s stories and engaging in interactive exercises are powerful experiences for teachers who sometimes feel isolated in their individual classrooms. These connections are sustained through an online forum in which they continue to share pertinent experiences they have in their classrooms as well as professional articles and current events materials.

Another compelling experience for participants in the Institute is what they learn from our alumni student panels. We select our panels from recent graduates of the Atlanta area independent schools. The first panel consists of students of color and the second panel is made up of gay, lesbian, and transgender students. When these students share their stories, patterns emerge that are not limited to individual schools, but characterize the experience of students in schools nationwide. The students are invariably eager to participate and grateful for the opportunity to share their experience. “Thank you for listening to us,” said a student as the panel ended. “I can’t tell you how much it means that you want to learn about my experience.” The students feel validated and excited that their schools want to do something to make school better for those coming behind them.

One persistent theme that emerges from our minority panels is that of being perceived as a “charity case.” Students of color who came from middle and upper middle class

25

families felt that teachers and students alike sometimes believed they are financial aid students when their families were paying full tuition. Rhonda’s father was a judge and Page’s parents were both doctors, yet they both said they were sometimes stereotyped as financial aid recipients simply because they were African American. They encountered the belief that they were admitted to their schools because of affirmative action policies or because the school was trying to help them advance socioeconomically. They did not feel that they were always seen as valuable and equal members of the community with just as much to offer to their schools as anyone else. Monica’s peers from her predominantly black neighborhood went to independent schools around the city and were connected by social

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organizations and parent groups. She quickly figured it out that her social groups were split according to race and that “the black kids talked about race all the time, but the white kids never talked about it.”

Minority students are often separated by the demographic make up of Atlanta and may have an hour-long commute to school. Consequently they are not always able to participate fully in extracurricular and/or social activities due to transportation issues. “My mother said, ‘I drive you up there five days a week and I’m not going to drive you back and forth on the weekends,’” Shakira told us. “And my friends parents didn’t want to drive them to my neighborhood either.” Gabriella, a Mexican American student, sometimes visited her white friends in their homes, but if she attended a party or went to a friend’s house for dinner, she had to take the bus home. From the bus stop she walked through a dangerous neighborhood, which was especially concerning after dark. Gabriella only had one friend visit her at home during

the time she attended her independent school. “I was embarrassed for her to see that I lived in a trailer park,” she said.

When we asked about their support groups, the minority students consistently commented on their relationships with teachers of color. Most schools are keenly aware of the need to increase diversity in their faculty, but these student voices expressed that need in bold relief. Samara described her support group using the name of only one teacher. “My support group was Ms. Uchenna. It wasn’t just me, though,” she said, “All the black kids were in her room before school and at lunch.” Several teachers of color at the Institute nodded in agreement when they heard Samara’s story because it reflected their experience. These teachers provide a space where students of color feel safe talking about their racial experience or identity. One teacher at the Institute described her role as one of the few black teachers at her independent school as an “extra part time job I don’t get paid for.” Research shows the importance of students having teachers who reflect their racial identity. It is important for students of all races to have teachers of color, but particularly crucial for students of color.

The GLBTQ panels typically describe their experiences of feeling marginalized by peers and sometimes even teachers. One lesbian student who attended a religious institution said she feared that if she came out to anyone at her school, she could be expelled. Another student said that even though she attended a school with a strong gay/straight alliance group, she only came out to close friends but never talked to any of her teachers about her orientation.

These students talk about hearing gay slurs routinely bantered about routinely by other students. Students sometimes use the word gay as a synonym for stupid and such insensitivity can be hurtful, especially if it’s done in the presence of a teacher who does nothing to intervene. These kinds of comments keep gay and lesbian students silent and make it difficult for them to be themselves at school. They describe the process of coming out as an ongoing dilemma that requires constantly weighing the risk and rewards of each situation. These students face potential marginalization from family members, friends,

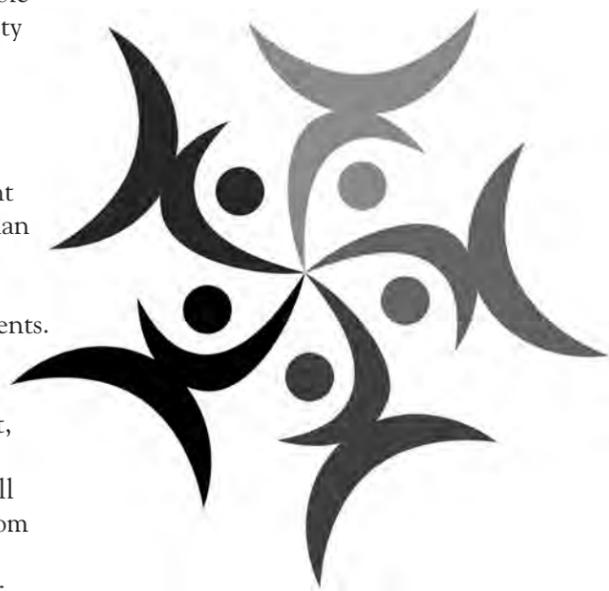
schools, and churches.

Transgender students describe a painful process of masking their feelings about their gender assignment to try to fit in. They often feel they have no one to reach out to and must necessarily internalize their feelings.

Educators at the Institute find these students' personal accounts compelling and consequently, they rethink how safe their schools may be for these students. They go back to their schools committed to take action on behalf of minority and GLBTQ students.

Through our work with students and educators alike we find that individuation and diversity are intricately linked. The process of individuation requires that we acknowledge our differences, yet by accepting and affirming them, we transcend them. When we listen to each other's stories and respond with supportive feedback, we begin to see each other through new eyes. As our identity grows stronger, we become more independent individuals capable of defining ourselves in relation to the society we live in rather than being defined by it. We find the power to resist the negative stereotypes associated with our particular social identities and overcome stereotypes we have internalized. In sharing our different experiences, we recognize fundamental human qualities that bind us together.

We both continue to teach full time and continue to develop our work with our students. We are primarily teachers and secondarily consultants and teacher trainers in the area of diversity education, identity development, and the role of social emotional learning in the process of higher order thinking. We still consider our main work to be in the classroom with our students, as their input is essential for us as we continue to learn and refine our approach.



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