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Professional Development Enriches

TEACHING & LEARNING

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Shirzad Chamine (second from right) with Dennis Estrada, Stuart Hall Upper Form Dean, President Ann Marie Krejcarek and Rachel Simpson, Chief Academic Officer and Head of Convent High School, all of whom are Positive Intelligence coaches trained by Mr. Chamine.

Each year, Convent & Stuart Hall faculty and staff are invited to participate in a number of professional development opportunities. A few of the latest offerings have included Shirzad Chamine’s Positive Intelligence Program, literacy training at Columbia University in New York City and Scott Ervin’s Behavioral Leadership Classroom Training. Each supports Area of Impact III of the school’s Strategic Plan: optimizing organizational structures and systems that demonstrate strategic agility, scaffolding student growth and inspiring effective community engagement.

“Area of Impact III’s objective to develop a ‘culture of relevance, professionalism and innovation’ is aptly met by these recent professional development opportunities, whereby faculty and staff are engaged in a culture of learning with adults embracing their own growth and development,” explains Rachel Simpson, Chief Academic Officer and Head of Convent High School. “Whether in the field of Positive Intelligence, literacy or positive psychology for enhanced student engagement, the culture at Convent & Stuart Hall is centered on personal and professional growth. By instilling in faculty and staff a capacity for change and innovation, we can confidently assess and refresh our ongoing educational practice.”

POSITIVE INTELLIGENCE: BOOSTING MENTAL FITNESS AND GUIDING STUDENTS TOWARD INTENTIONAL DECISION-MAKING

In early 2022, 77 teachers, staff members and administrators participated in a six-week Positive Intelligence program by Shirzad Chamine (*New York Times* bestselling author of *Positive Intelligence: Why Only 20% of Teams and Individuals Achieve Their True Potential and How You Can Achieve Yours* and Stanford University lecturer).

The ultimate goal of the program is to build a foundation of mental fitness by strengthening three core muscles — Saboteur Interceptor, Self-Command and Sage — in order to shift the balance of power from participants’ inner Saboteurs (negative self) to their inner Sage (positive self), where the capacity to empathize, explore, innovate, navigate and activate is the source of their response to stimuli.

Through Positive Intelligence, members of the Convent & Stuart Hall community — such as Paul Pryor Lorentz, High School Chair of Community Life and Religion, Theology and Spirituality Department Chair, and Rachel McIntire, Visual Arts Department Chair — are busy building powerful, positive habits of mind.

“Positive Intelligence is helping me recognize and confront my Saboteurs in my own life as well as the way they impact my work,” notes Paul, who oversees everything from clubs and

activities to character development and disciplinary action. “In my work with students, it’s a helpful framework for guiding them toward intentional decision-making.”

The program has similarly supported Rachel’s personal and professional growth and development. “I’ve learned about my Saboteurs and what’s below their surface — which has helped deconstruct patterns and identify their origin,” she says. “Working within the Positive Intelligence framework supports me in shifting to my Sage self, a place from where I’m a clearer, more patient communicator, able to support students in developing and conveying their ideas in a variety of art forms.”

Paul regularly leads his students through Positive Intelligence reps — shifting attention to the body and any of the five senses for at least 10 seconds — particularly ahead of jumping into complicated material.

“I feel so much more ‘in myself’ when I’ve taken the time to perform Positive Intelligence reps before interactions with students and colleagues,” he says. “Since so many of us at Convent & Stuart Hall are involved in Positive Intelligence work, we can name our unique gifts and strengths with a sense of pragmatism, removed from concerns of false humility and with an emboldened sense of playing a role within a gifted community.”

The program, Rachel says, has enabled members of this community to become closer to one another on a more personal level: “Positive Intelligence has provided an opportunity for a ‘still’ within the commotion of a unique and bustling school year. Working within a pod of [between five and seven] colleagues was a true pleasure, providing a time and space to get to know faculty, staff and administrators outside their professional roles and responsibilities.”

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— PAUL PRYOR LORENTZ | HIGH SCHOOL CHAIR OF COMMUNITY LIFE AND RELIGION, THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY DEPARTMENT CHAIR



LITERACY TRAINING: TEACHING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS HOW TO READ — AND HOW TO LOVE READING

Last summer, under the auspices of the school's K–12 Academic Council, roughly 15 elementary school homeroom and English teachers — including a handful of administrators — attended a three-week literacy workshop, “Teaching Reading to Struggling Students,” hosted by Teachers College, Columbia University’s Continuing Professional Studies, reinforcing Stuart Hall for Boys and Convent Elementary’s commitment to providing a research-based literacy program.

Among the attendees was Literacy Curriculum and Instructional Lead Natalie Ohanessian, a former Stuart Hall for Boys kindergarten teacher and Learning Strategist who has stepped into a new role this year. She works with K–4 students who may benefit from a little extra help in reading and writing by pulling them to work one-on-one or in small groups, or pushing into classrooms to support learning activities.

The training, she recalls, served as an important reminder of the structured, explicit, multi-sensory learning activities that build upon one another and must be carried out each day in the classroom. For instance, attendees learned that students must develop oral language skills and phonological awareness before being taught the alphabetic principle and decoding strategies.

“I learned so much more about the reading brain from recent neuroscience research and the best ways to support struggling readers — whether they’re dyslexic, an English-language learner or simply continuing to develop early literacy skills,” Natalie says.

“Since reading isn’t something our brains are naturally wired to do, like speaking, we need to be explicitly taught ‘the code’ to become proficient readers and writers.”

Natalie says the workshop, which “outlined how our brains learn to read and how we as teachers can support that process,” reinforced the work she does both in and out of the classroom as well as the need to be explicit in her delivery of content, whether reciting rhymes with kindergartners or introducing the Frayer Model — a graphic organizer for building students’ vocabulary — to fourth graders.

“We know so much more about how the brain works and how children learn to read,” Natalie says, noting that she takes great pride and joy in Convent & Stuart Hall’s concerted efforts in not only teaching students how to read but also how to love reading. “With this knowledge, we’re focusing our curriculum choices and instructional strategies around the five pillars of early literacy and reading instruction — phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension — and continuing pedagogical alignment across divisions. It’s a pretty exciting time to be an early literacy teacher!”



Scan this code to learn more about our K–12 Research-Based Structured Literacy Program.

ABOVE: Natalie Ohanessian adopts new strategies while teaching early reading skills to Stuart Hall kindergartners. RIGHT: Scott Ervin, center, with school leaders in Syfy Theatre following one of his hands-on workshops for faculty.

BEHAVIORAL LEADERSHIP: TRANSFORMING CLASSROOMS INTO CALM, POSITIVE SPACES FOR CHILDREN TO LEARN AND THRIVE

On March 31, 2022, K–4 teachers from both elementary divisions were introduced to Scott Ervin, M.Ed., a student behavior and classroom management expert and a former teacher, principal and superintendent. Mr. Ervin is the author of *The Classroom Behavior Manual: How to Build Relationships with Students, Share Control, and Teach Positive Behaviors* and the syndicated advice column “Ask the Kid Whisperer.” During his session with the teachers, Mr. Ervin demonstrated the relational power of knowing how to greet and say goodbye to students, including eye contact, a smile, physical contact such as a handshake and referring to students by their names, as well as various procedures for promoting positive behaviors in common areas throughout the school’s campus.

The following day, the K–8 community gathered to learn specific strategies for integrating Behavioral Leadership into the classroom. Finally, in early May, three faculty members engaged in Behavioral Leadership Classroom Training and Classroom Coaching.

“Throughout the week, Scott observed me three times for 30 minutes,” recalls Anne Warda, a Stuart Hall second grade lead teacher. “Following each observation, Scott and I debriefed for 15–30 minutes. During the debriefing process, Scott shared strengths he observed and ideas for ways to incorporate additional Behavioral Leadership procedures and strategies into the classroom.”

“During the final observation, Scott and the other coach-in-training used the Behavioral Leadership Classroom Scorecard to keep track of how many times I used specific Behavioral Leadership strategies, such as strategic noticing, preventive movement and gentle guidance interventions,” says Stefanie

Marquette, a Stuart Hall fourth grade lead teacher and recipient of last year’s Sister Mary Mardel Award for Faculty Excellence. “During the debriefing, I was given my total score and a breakdown of my points, using what Scott calls the ABC, 123 Coaching Process.”

ABC requires each coach-in-training to offer three pieces of positive feedback about their colleague’s implementation of Behavioral Leadership procedures and strategies, while 123 comprises opportunities for further improvement.

In search of ways to build community within her classroom and impart a greater sense of autonomy among her students, Stefanie observed a colleague using a control-sharing strategy that she liked so much that she immediately began using it in her classroom. “There are many aspects of Behavioral Leadership that we were already using — but with slight differences. For example, we would say, ‘I like how so-and-so is listening quietly’ or ‘Thank you for walking in the hallway.’ After meeting with Scott, however, these ‘likes’ and ‘thank-yous’ have turned into ‘notices.’ So, now, I’ll say something like, ‘I notice so-and-so has his science notebook on his desk.’ We take away the value aspect of the statement and achieve similar results. Using strategic noticing allows me to redirect unwanted behaviors in a calm, positive way.”

Anne agrees, adding, “Behavioral Leadership creates a calm environment and allows each student to be heard and gain self-confidence.”

This past fall, Anne and Stefanie had the opportunity to train other teachers to become Behavioral Leadership Classroom Coaches. Likewise, several high school faculty are also becoming Behavioral Leadership coaches, amplifying the school’s peer learning community where faculty can collaborate and learn from each other.

