

SCHOOLBOOK

a JOURNAL of EDUCATION

**Paideia School
Atlanta, Georgia**

I N T H I S I S S U E

**Summer 2012
Vol. ?? No. ??**

Building a Good School, 40th Anniversary Reflections

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Headmaster

Jennifer Hill
Editor

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Paideia School, located in northeast Atlanta, has some 960 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.

A Community of Learners— Teachers and Students

*By learning you will teach;
by teaching you will understand.*

—LATIN PROVERB

When Paideia teachers think about “Why they teach,” the joy and richness of interacting with their students ranks high among their reasons. The lessons are imparted on both sides of the equation.

With the graduation of their youngest child, one family's twenty-two years at Paideia came to a satisfying end. The only remaining question was what to do with the closet full of wrapping paper.

Jennifer Hill
Editor

Building a Good School, 40th Anniversary Reflections

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Paul Bianchi is the headmaster of Paideia School, a job he has held since the school opened. He and his wife Barbara Dunbar, the school's consulting psychologist and the coordinator of the half day, are last the of the original faculty. Their three daughters, Melissa, Sarah, and Emily are graduates of Paideia, and their granddaughter is a member of the Class of 2027. Paul spoke at the school's 40th anniversary celebration at a gathering of faculty, staff and trustees who worked at the school throughout the years.

WHEN I CAME TO PAIDEIA, I couldn't find it. After driving around for several hours, refusing, of course, to stop and ask for directions, I finally asked Barbara why I couldn't find the school. She said that it did not yet exist. Then it all began to make sense. There was no school, and since we wanted one, we would all have to make one. And that's what we have done—all of us, those of us in this room and others who are not here tonight.

I have often thought, and no doubt have often said, that a person could do my job with seven or eight good aphorisms or maxims if that person really understood what these expressions meant and knew when to apply them.

Before Paideia, Barbara and I, along with Robert Falk, taught at Galloway in its first two years. Elliott Galloway was a wonderful man. He was not that old when the school opened in 1969, a year or so under 50, I believe, but already he had a habit of relying on a few expressions that were important to him. His most frequently used reference back then was the myth of Sisyphus. You remember Sisyphus—he was the guy in Greek mythology doomed to push the rock up the hill and as soon as he reached the top, it would roll down and he would have to do it again, and again, and again.

Sisyphus was a leading character in those early years at Galloway. And of course, some of the younger faculty—smart alecks, generationally immersed in irreverence, maybe even from other parts of the country that bred irreverence—some of these young smart alecks when Elliott wasn't within earshot would have great fun with old Sisyphus.

"Has anyone seen Sisyphus today?" we would ask.

"No, he's absent," would be the reply, "I think he went mountain climbing in North Georgia." Or...

"Here, kid," we'd say to a misbehaving student, "take this note to the main office on

the second floor, but when you get to the top of the stairs, don't give anyone the note—just go back to the bottom of the stairs, and keep doing that for the rest of the day..."

Much later in Elliott's life, in the years after he had retired as headmaster in 1990, I would see him occasionally at Galloway School or headmaster events. After a few such times, I realized that Sisyphus had retired also, but instead the rock and the hill story, Elliott had taken to saying something else: "We do what we can do, that's all we can do." Elliott and I weren't together much in those years, but I heard him say that often when we were.

Elliott Galloway was not really my mentor. I wasn't there that long and I was at an age that I wasn't paying that close attention, but as I have thought about his habit of saying the same things again and again, I realize that, consistent with my belief in having a few good aphorisms to get through the day, that I am doing much the same thing. It is a humbling realization. Also humbling is the awareness that like Robert and I and other young smart alecks at Galloway 40 years ago, the wisdom I have compressed into a few sayings is probably eliciting the same reaction today among the younger generation at Paideia.

Let me give some examples. There's a large water color painting over the desk in my office with the Zen expression, "After ecstasy, the laundry." I have taken to saying that a lot. Sometimes when carrying on in my office, I don't even have to say it—I just point to the painting. Occasionally, for effect, I will point to the painting and read it to my audience at the same time. It's very powerful when I do that.

Then there's that expression that poor Caroline Quillian Stubbs (and Dorothy, Laura Magnanini, Brett Hardin, and others whose jobs often put them in the room with me)—an expression they have heard ad nauseum. When speaking of Paideia's con-

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stancy over the years, I say “we have stayed with the date we brought to the dance.”

If I were paying closer attention, I would probably see eyes roll when I say this, or hear the click of those little hand clickers that ushers carry to count attendance as my colleagues keep score how many times they have heard me say the same thing that week.

Occasionally I will get on a roll and say something like “We have stayed with the date we brought to the dance, ...then we go home for a night of ecstasy, followed by the laundry,” but generally I try to keep the message simple.

Of course, the ecstasy-laundry message is not much different than Elliott’s old friend, Sisyphus, rolling that damn rock up a hill for all eternity. In both instances, for both of us, it means that in school all of us constantly keep doing what we do, all we can do—the things we hope will bring ecstasy, as well as the same old date brought to the same old dance, and we also keep having to clean up after ourselves, to deal with the messes, our own and those of others.

They’re not going to be perfect, these lives we lead, this work we do in school. It’s a batting average—that’s another thing I say a lot: teaching is a batting average, and nobody bats a thousand. (Sometimes I throw in the added historical reference saying that my childhood hero, Ted Williams of the Red Sox, was the last guy to bat over .400, which when you think about it is really not that comforting to parents: I mean, what parent would be satisfied knowing that we get it right with their kid only four times out of ten?)

I find the realization of limitation, of fallibility, enormously reassuring because it frees us from the self-imposed burden of being perfect, to create one ecstatic achievement after another. We can try to do our best work and try to do it better. We don’t have to fret endlessly and defensively about falling short of unachievable perfection. So many schools fake it by communicating that everything that happens in school is intended as well as the best and only possible thing that could have been done.

We have built a very good school, and one that I believe continues to get better, because we have never kidded ourselves that we have once and for all unlocked the secrets to human growth and potential, to mysteries

of flawless organizational structures, or the magic of a cure-all curricula. We can always improve.

Another thing I say too often is that Paideia is Puritanism in blue jeans, which to me means that people should not let the informality of the school fool them. In college I studied and grew to like those New England Puritans. They weren’t my people, and in fact, their ancestors were not that happy when my people finally came almost 300 years later to join them in America, but I like the Puritans nonetheless. They worked hard, they believed in things, and they had a deep appreciation of human imperfection. They were, of course, judgmental and intolerant, but so was most everyone else back then. They were just quicker to hang you or crush you under stones when they thought you were wrong.

Paideia has not only survived for 40 years, it has prospered because we have been modern day Puritans. So many people have worked hard to build the school. The dedication of trustees that began with Ed Holmes, the Brachmans, Ed Bohling, and Clay Moore has continued with Nancy Kirwan, Sally Dean, George Howell, Jon Lowe, Bill Clark, the Meddins, and scores of others.

Being a board member at Paideia is to take a part time job, sometimes a part time job that crowds out your full time job. Some parents who are not trustees do the same—run an auction to pay the tuition of 25 Paideia students every year, start Pi Bites, raise oodles of money for important things.

Those of us who work at the school might wear blue jeans more tattered than the trustees wear, but we have the same Puritan streak. Collectively we have defined this school through years of professional and personal effort. I often say—again, another reliable expression to fall back on—that in a school there is no substitute for a cast of contagious characters.

Paideia is a teachers’ school—as if there really could be any worthwhile school that wasn’t based on who teaches there and what teachers do—and we have infected and animated it with our daily breath.

Hard work is an important part of our school culture, and our identity. So as we

close out our 40th year, a fitting question to ask ourselves is why do we work so hard?

There are a number of reasons and in the foolish hope that words said at a milestone like tonight's celebration might reverberate more than others, let me offer a few of them here at the end.

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We work hard because this school has given us a chance to create—to make something anew, or to improve on what exists. Our classrooms are our own, more than at any other school we know of. Individually and collectively, we decide much of what we teach, and we get to work out how best to teach it. Those opportunities in teaching did not exist in American schools when Paideia

We get to use our intellects as well as our artistry to craft the intellectual and emotional world we offer children. It has always surprised me that such a sensible way to have a school is so rare.

began back in the 1970s and they exist even less so today. We get to use our intellects as well as our artistry to craft the intellectual and emotional world we offer children. It has always surprised me that such a sensible way to have a school is so rare.

The same is true for trustees and volunteers. While the school benefits overwhelmingly from volunteer leadership—in many ways it has been built on it—, that same creative satisfaction that the faculty enjoys also accrues to parents who have done so much here. Think of how rewarding it must have been to Janet Blumenthal 25 years ago to use her clear thinking to put financial aid on a new footing; or Sally Dorn, Terrell Weitman, and Arnie Silverman to look at two major buildings on campus and allow themselves to realize that those particular building would not be there and Paideia in general Paideia would not be the same school without them; also Christine Cozzens, Margaret Napier, Matthew Bernstein, Paula Amis, Laura Iarocci—the list is a long one.

What we have all done here is not only creative, our work enlivens us in the moment. We have sustained an environment, a community that appreciates and embraces the present. We have been mindful long before mindfulness became something one studied at workshops and practiced in classes.

The last item in *The Framework of Values* written in 1979 speaks of the importance of the present, the notion that as important as preparing for the future is in school, that at Paideia we are going to enjoy the day, and, furthermore, that savoring the day—the children, our colleagues, our community, our lives—is itself one very good way to prepare for the better days we all want for our students.

Part of this appreciation of the present is that we have what sometimes seems to be a scandalous amount of fun, which is not usually seen among Puritans, blue jeans or otherwise. As Newt Hodgson wrote back in 1980 in words we paste onto almost every Paideia brochure, “school ought to be a place you are anxious to go to in the morning and somewhat reluctant to leave at the end of the day.” We tap dance to work—another expression I use—because there is so much singing and dancing in our days.

Finally, what we do in school is important. It makes a difference in the lives of others, even though we cannot always measure precisely what that difference is—where our efforts as teachers or volunteers leave off and other influences begin. There can never be enough good schools in the world, and that in itself makes Paideia worthwhile, but even more important is its impact in the lives of children—what they do in their lives and in how they understand their lives.

Aren't we fortunate, amazingly lucky, to get to do something that is important and creative and enlivening, all at the same time? We are fortunate to live in a community that values each of us, sustains us and is also worthy of everything we can do for it.

The laundry is steady work, for sure, but who wouldn't want to work hard in a place that offers such ecstasy?

Who wouldn't want to stay with that date for the entire dance?

And the best news of all is that we get to keep doing it.

Happy Birthday, to all of us, to Paideia.

Stepping Into a Classroom Feels Like Coming Home

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Margaret Petrey has devoted her professional career to the education of preschoolers and kindergartners, teaching at Cliff Valley School for 20 years and at Paideia, where she has taught in the half-day program for over 10 years. In addition to young children, her passions include her husband, four children, two grandchildren, playing piano, reading, yoga, and taking her two-year-old Briard on lengthy walks.

At the beginning of the school year,

Paul Bianchi, the headmaster, asks several teachers to give what know as “Why I Teach” speeches at the faculty retreat that presages of the beginning of the new school year.

Here is an excerpt from Margaret’s speech.

WHEN I MENTIONED at home that I had been asked to write about why I teach, my daughter, who must have noticed the slight panic in my voice, assured me, “That’s easy, Mom. All you have to do is find your inner writer.” She had been reading *One Writer’s Beginning*, by Eudora Welty. I’m not at all sure I have an inner writer, although who’s to say one won’t emerge once I take John Fox’s workshop? But do I have an inner teacher? If so, where does she come from? I wasn’t sure how to begin looking.

Unlike many of you, I didn’t know from my earliest years that I wanted to be a teacher. There weren’t teachers in my family, as far as I knew.

I decided that by going back to my earliest years, I might discover how I came to this job that I love. As I began thinking about my childhood, memories began to bubble to the surface. I was born in Manila, Philippines, where my dad had gone alone to start a business. He was imprisoned there during WWII and returned to the states after liberation. He married my mother, a widow with two daughters, and the new family returned to the Philippines. I was born soon after their arrival, in 1949. My parents lived a charmed existence there in Manila. They loved to entertain, and it seemed there were always evening parties, usually outdoors, prepared and served by a live-in staff. Guests milled, talking and eating from food-laden tables set out on the thick lawn. Lights, strung from the trees like suspended stars, surrounded us. I would play barefooted on the grass and stick my finger into my dad’s beer glass for a taste as he carried me around. I was always allowed to hose the flowerbeds in preparation for the parties.

I spent a lot of my time in the tropical outdoors. I remember the fragrant scent of the jasmine-covered trellis that enclosed the garage, and the tall gladiolas from whose wide leaves I picked snails for a nickel a bucket. During the day, I played “jump the stick” on the lawn with Jesus, the gardener. I climbed the full, squat guava trees, picking the yellow-green prize fruit and biting in as the juice ran down my chin. We could walk to Manila Bay, where I swam, collected shells, and caught porcupine fish with a fishing rod.

My home was built high off the ground; my family lived in the upper, main body of the house, and the employees—the cook, a lavandera, and two amahs who took care of my younger sister and me, lived on the ground floor. Our quarters were spacious, furnished in mahogany and rattan, the long front porch tiled and sunlit. The servants’ living area was, well, the basement. A long, wooden stairway led from our kitchen to the servants’ quarters; when I wasn’t outside, this is where I chose to play.

The basement had a cement floor with a large main room and a few bedrooms, for the women who lived-in. I was always busy there. I remember the large tin washtub with its metal washboard; I can still feel the scrape against my fingers when I “helped” with the laundry. I would dress one of our many cats in doll clothes and take him for strolls in my doll buggy. I watched carefully as our cook made dolls from the strands of black hair she pulled from her brush. I worried about the mother cat raising her kittens on rafters close to the ceiling, and I fed grain to the chicken I’d saved from a roasting. I often ate with the servants, family style; I loved the taste of bagoong, the ubiquitous salty, small fish, and ate as the Filipinos did, dipping my fingers into the rice and scooping it into my mouth with my fingers. I loved especially to bathe in the basement. There was a large

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communal shower, similar to what you'd find at the Y; one of my strongest memories is of standing under the flowing water with our household women, awed by the beauty of the water streaming from their smooth, cocoa-colored skin. I felt the cooling water on my own naked body, and the experience seemed completely ordinary and also quite magical.

For me, freedom and unity were in that basement. I felt I could be myself completely, fully alive and connected to the people and world around me. "Upstairs," our lives were very different. We did not eat with our fingers. Sometimes I sat for an hour or two at the table after a meal had ended because I hadn't eaten my meat. We all had naps in the afternoons. I did my homework. We were polite and "happy," always; I didn't bring consuming feelings to the table—sadness about the baby bird I failed to nurse back to health, or fear that I might be kidnapped from the yard while I played because I had unusually blonde hair.

Upstairs, there were expectations. I knew my parents cared for me, but I was also careful not to disappoint. I became an expert at hiding transgressions, such as sucking my thumb, or dumping my sister's perfume into the toilet. It seems, as I look back on it now, that upstairs I listened to my mind. In the basement, I listened to my heart.

The Philippines suited my family for nine years after I was born, but the government was becoming unstable, and my parents decided it was time to leave. I left all I had known on an island that bears no resemblance now to the place in my memory. On the airplane, I clutched a paper bag full of my favorite seashells. I felt as though a part of me had died.

We moved to north Florida, which had a similar climate and was not too far from grandparents. The woods and lake near my new home, with trees to climb and vistas to

explore became my new playground. I went to school, made friends, took piano lessons, and sang in the choir. I did my best to excel at what I did, but lived with the suspicion that I always came up a little bit short.

I enjoyed school, for the most part, and was fortunate to have teachers I liked along the way: Mrs. Gross, who let us plant a garden; Senora Roach, whose Spanish quiz game version of musical chairs was scary and fun. (I'm not making up the names.) There was the English teacher who understood what I had written better than I did, and the French teacher, round as a button, who noticed my ability. I am grateful to these teachers and many more, but never imagined following in their footsteps.

In college, I majored in French, and had no idea what I wanted to do after graduation. "Either teach, or go back to school," my advisor said. I happened on a bulletin in the college post office. Apply for a teaching internship program, the notice read, take graduate courses, and earn a Master's degree in elementary education, all in one year! It sounded like a great opportunity, and would also help me find out how I felt about teaching. So, I applied. The internship, as it happens, was in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where my husband-to-be was in school. Ah, kismet, I thought.

I was accepted to the program, and for my teaching internship, I was placed in a 7th grade French class. Try though I did, I could not bring to life—apologies to you foreign language teachers—a mock conversation about ordering food in a restaurant, or going on a trip. During the course of the year, though, we were required to observe in the other classrooms, scattered in cottages around the campus. As I stepped into the preschool classroom, the joy of being a child in that long-ago basement radiated through me. The children were vibrant and engaged as they went about their play, their teachers attentive, but unobtrusive. In this space, alive with the enthusiasm of children being themselves, I reconnected with my early, happiest years. I felt as though I'd become whole, heart and mind fused through an explosion of feeling.

The moment I stepped into the preschool class, I knew that this was the experience I wanted to be a part of.

I quickly found a local childcare center where I could volunteer, and have one way or another, been working with young children ever since. I was fired from my first job as lead teacher in a day care here in Atlanta, for supporting underpaid assistant teachers. I worked with Head Start, filling in for a teacher who left mid-year. I taught 3-and-4-year-olds in a federally-funded program that served at-risk children within the public City Schools of Decatur; all of us were devastated when the funds ran out, because we'd seen what gains these children could make through their play.

I was young and inexperienced, and was fortunate to meet gifted mentors along the way. In time, I came closer to the self I wanted to be in the classroom. This is my 11th year at Paideia, and I'm still growing in that direction! Every year, I look forward to a new beginning; a classroom of young children is still my favorite place to live and to grow.

I teach because it's so important to create a place where children can be themselves, and to trust that they can give voice to their innermost feelings

Not long ago, a young boy, Ben, perhaps 8 or so now, came to the half-day playground for a visit after school. "You know," he told me. "I still have my mat. The one I made for Thanksgiving. Every time I see it, I feel like I've come home." I can't imagine a greater tribute. When I step into the classroom, I, too, feel as though I've come home.

I teach because it's so important to create a place where children can be themselves, and to trust that they can give voice to their innermost feelings. Each child has a story to tell, and I feel that we all come to know ourselves as we tell our stories. I want my classroom to be a place where stories are told, feelings are accepted and acknowledged, and children come to know and feel that they are fine exactly as they are. I want children to know and understand that they carry within themselves—as we all do—an enormous capacity for growth and change.

I teach because I am my best self in the classroom. I have to be on my toes. I have to be totally present and focused, with nothing

on my plate except this child in front of me. I have to let go of my agenda and not judge or assume if I am going to truly listen to what the child has to say; yet, I also have to be clear, fair, and impartial if the child is going to trust my response. I have to become expert at reading body language, which sometimes offers more insight than words. I have to silently communicate that the children can take all the time they need to become who they are. Teaching keeps me anchored in the moment.

I'm always awed when a child reveals something close to the heart. Moments such as the following take hold and keep me coming back for more. This child had just come back to school after being out with a virus:

Me: We missed you yesterday.

Child: Yeah. I had the throw-ups last night.

Me: Throw-ups are no fun.

Child: Yeah. But I got to watch tv.

Know what? I wish I was dead and I could go to heaven and see my dog.

Me: You still feel really sad your dog died.

Or, this:

Child: I wish I were a hamster.

Me: Oh?

Child: If I were a hamster, I would be very small. I would have someone to love me and take care of me.

Me: Yes, you would.



I don't have to say or do very much; I am mostly just there. But I can create a space between us for painful or strong feelings to be expressed and that lose some of their grip as they are spoken. I can reflect these feelings, naming them for the child to consider. I think that it's through this kind of interaction, an exchange with a loving but neutral adult, that children develop insight and the capacity to cope with the powerful emotions we all have. As children become more accepting of their own feelings, they become more compassionate towards others—and what a privilege to be a witness to this process!

Usually, I can keep my own emotions in check, but sometimes I have to work harder at it than others. I have to trust that things may not always be what they seem.

A child is out by a tree in the yard. Wielding a yellow plastic shovel like a baseball bat, he's giving the tree some pretty solid whacks. The mom in me (and, yes, the teacher, too) wants to shout, "Stop! What are you doing? Put that shovel down right now!" Instead, with a leap of faith, I step outside myself. I ask him whether he's "working" on the tree. Yes, he says, proudly. Just that morning, he explains, he has helped his dad prune a tree, cutting back some of the branches. We talk a little about the pleasure of working with his dad, of what tools might be more appropriate than a shovel for the job, and he agreeably puts the shovel back in the sandbox.

Teaching young children isn't just about listening; it's also about using reflection to help look at his or her behavior, and in seeing the behavior—without feeling bad about it—develop self-acceptance and insight. The children have freedom to be, but I can use their experiences to help them see better who they are.

One child, for example, rushes into the classroom in such a hurry that she pushes through the crowd of children in the doorway. On the one hand, her burst of energy, as well as the physical contact with others probably feels good to her. On the other hand, she's alienating the children whose approval and friendship she seeks. Criticism and faultfinding won't help her develop a sense of her own needs and how she can meet them. But without judging, I can give her a picture of what's happened, we can get feedback from

children who were pushed, and we can find other ways for her to satisfy the demands of her boundless energy.

Another child sits quietly playing, but meekly gives up a toy when someone else comes along and demands it. Rather than control impulsive behavior, this child needs to strengthen his responses. He can learn that saying "No" when he needs to feels great, and may also help the grabber begin to develop self-discipline. Compassion and social responsibility, I believe, develop after needs of the self are met.

In each of these situations, and a thousand more like them throughout the day, we have opportunities to help children become aware of behaviors that are helpful to them and feel good, and those that are not serving them very well. I love the complexity and depth of behaviors we see every day and the ability to help children to help themselves become...more confident, more comfortable, kinder, more compassionate, a better friend.

I teach because I love the challenge of putting new information into the picture I already have of a child's emotional, social, cognitive, and physical growth. How will what I have just learned help me to help this child on his or her developmental path? How do I best convey what I know to parents? I began teaching young children during an amazing period in education, when the value of play has come to the forefront as well as new insights into how the brain works. I teach because I love to explore child development research that reaffirms, adds to, or challenges what I do, and to experiment with changes I may need to make in my own behavior. There is always more to learn, read, and do.

It's August and Another School Season Is About to Begin

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AND SO IT BEGINS AGAIN. The theater is full to overflowing, and the combination of eagerness, anticipation, excitement, and dread is almost palpable. Summer seems to go by much more quickly than it did even 10 years ago, let alone back in my college days where the school I attended was on the quarter system and we returned in mid-September when there already was the proverbial nip to air. It is hardly the happiest time of the year for me, coming as it does after 10 days or so of wrestling with student requests for changes to a schedule that I had spent the better part of the summer trying to craft. It is often hard for me not to view the schedule change requests as something of a

Juan Jewell is a avid Sixer's fan and the director of studies in the high school.

The beginning of school is very much like that wonderful day in February when pitchers and catchers report to spring training and the cycle of another baseball season begins. Every baseball team in February is confident that this year will be different...

reproach. Over time, however, I have come to realize that the requests have little to do with me.

The beginning of school is very much like that wonderful day in February when pitchers and catchers report to spring training and the cycle of another baseball season begins. Every baseball team in February is confident that this year will be different, that this will be the year in which everyone is an all-star, all the pitchers will win 20 games, all the hitters will bat .300. In August, every student will do all of his homework on time, will earn straight A's, will have a starring role in the musical or on a team. Of course, the key to that outcome is having the absolutely perfect schedule.

I have always been fascinated by the mathematical concept of a limit, that is, something that you continually approach but can never reach. The history teacher in me sees that as a wonderful metaphor for the quest in human

history to create the perfect society, and the high school scheduler in me sees that as a metaphor for designing the perfect schedule. Every year, there are four or five students, usually seniors, who I find simply impossible to schedule into all the classes they would like to take. There are four or five others who really, really want to take a class that they really, really shouldn't. And there are many more who simply love five of their six classes and wonder if I can change the sixth without changing anything else.

I generally receive the first e-mail requests for schedule changes within 24 hours of the schedules being mailed. It is a bit depressing, to say the least, to find out so quickly that I have failed once again to create the perfect schedule, but I am getting better at suppressing that sense of failure. In requesting changes, students are seeking to exercise control over their academic lives, and that is something we certainly wish to encourage. But could it be that our being able to communicate instantaneously makes us more inclined to see not getting all six classes one wants as a problem to be solved, and solved immediately, rather than a situation to understand? Often my judgment is vindicated; it is not unusual for me to receive another e-mail from the same student a few hours later, telling me to ignore the first e-mail.

What gets me through the drama and the angst is the confidence that within a week or so everything will settle down. Students will discover that that teacher they dreaded really is not so bad after all, that the placement in a different, perhaps less demanding course, really does make sense. And in another few months it will be January short term, and the cycle will begin anew.

Reading Aloud, a Nourishing Tradition With No Age Limit

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Natalie Bernstein is the elementary librarian and passes on her life long passion for reading and books to students and their parents everyday. She and her husband Matthew are the parents of two Paideia graduates, Justin and Adam.

WHEN MY CHILDREN were ages 11 and 7, we rented a house for a month in France. Of all the things we did in France that summer, the most memorable was the time we spent reading aloud to our children. Because dinners tended to go very late, we settled in to read every afternoon for an hour. My husband would read to one son and I would read to the other, and when we finished books, we switched reading partners. I was a new elementary librarian at the time and had packed at least 20 paperbacks. It was my first discovery of *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Cricket in Times Square*. One day, when Adam and I were happily immersed in the world of Henry Huggins, my husband and Justin burst in on us, breathless and overcome, telling me I just had to read *A Bridge to Terabithia* that very day. It was a profoundly rich summer for us as we talked about what we loved in the books. We also had a fabulous recording of *The Wind in the Willows*, which we listened to incessantly as we drove, chortling over the pompous and insufferable Toad.

I love remembering my own early experiences of being read to. The intimacy of sitting on a lap, and later of snuggling up next to a parent, as I followed my mother's or father's voice, was an essential part of my childhood. There had to be thousands of these experiences. I always enjoy asking adults what books they remember from their earliest childhood and many of the same titles resonate decade after decade; we never seem to forget our first books. *Goodnight Moon*, *Madeline*, *Babar*, *Corduroy*, *Where the Wild Things Are*, *The Story of Ferdinand*... But just as striking as the titles is the glow that comes over a grown-up's face as he or she remembers being read to. As a child, it was always important to me that whichever parent was reading also enjoy the book and show that pleasure: when my mother laughed out loud over Sendak's *Higglety Pigglety Pop* and *Pierre*, I felt validated. When my father wanted to read

just one more chapter of *Stuart Little* or *All-of-a-Kind Family* to find out what happened next, I was thrilled that we shared the sense of urgency.

Reading aloud is a shared experience in which adults and children enter imaginary spaces together. Those imaginary spaces can be actual fantasy worlds (Hogwarts, Narnia) or distant time periods (*St. George and the Dragon*, *Johnny Tremain*), but those spaces can also be the consciousness of the characters. By entering together into the mindset of a girl in the Middle Ages, a boy with a club foot on an 18th century pirate ship, or an enslaved boy in the American South, we can help our children develop empathy: we get a sense of what it feels like to be the shy one, the excluded one, the fat one or the one who has suffered loss. And by reading together many books by many writers with different viewpoints, we can talk with our children about the complexity of reality and human nature.

So often, parents read aloud to their young children with great enthusiasm but abandon the practice when a child becomes an independent reader. Sadly, I see many, many children who are 10 or 9 or even 8 who say that their parents no longer have time to read aloud to them. Families do get very busy in our culture, but it is an awful sacrifice to put sports ahead of reading aloud. Reading researchers have noted that children can listen to books far above their own reading level; listening level and reading level don't converge until about eighth grade. Reading aloud to children gives them access to higher level literature and vocabulary than they could read on their own. It helps create lifelong readers.

Reading aloud to children, especially to older children, provides an exquisite opportunity for a parent to initiate conversations about uncomfortable or puzzling topics. Race immediately comes to mind: how do we talk to children about race? Recent studies of babies and young children have shown that they are deeply aware of race, even when their parents and teachers claim that they don't notice it. When parents don't ever talk about race, or make vague statements like "We are all alike," children learn that the topic is forbidden. For young children, an antidote to such silence could be as simple as the parent pointing to an illustration in a picture book and noting the differences in the characters' skin color. Parents can be mindful about the books they

As we read aloud with an eye to inculcating empathy, we can talk to our children about our own values.

choose to read aloud, selecting stories that feature a diversity of characters, to foster such conversations. For older children, reading aloud books with historical characters during slavery or the Civil Rights era allows a parent to talk about the family's experiences and beliefs. One parent recently told me that her 6-year old was utterly thrilled by the picture book biography of Wilma Rudolph, the victim of childhood polio who was told she would never walk again, and who went on to win three Olympic gold medals. Their family conversations on resilience and grit have continued as they devour one biography after another, talking about hardship in their own lives and how they admire Jesse Owens, Ruby Bridges, Mary Anning, and many others.

Likewise, as we read aloud with an eye to inculcating empathy, we can talk to our children about our own values. One parent came to me and complained that her daughter only wanted to check out titles in the *Junie B. Jones* series and that she really disliked the title character's behavior. Often, negative models in literature are a way for children to try out, mentally, what it is like to be outside the realm of acceptable behavior. As a parent reading aloud, we can say, "Oh, I'm troubled that she's making a really bad decision here," or "I am so worried about him because he won't tell the truth." Just as a parent might explain to an older child why some music lyrics are offensive, so too a parent can

talk about love, jealousy, disappointment, aggression and grief; when done in the context of a read-aloud, it isn't a lecture anymore.

One of the fascinating things that adults do when they read aloud is to model their own thinking about their comprehension. Often, young children think that "reading" means merely saying the words on a page. When an adult pauses and says, "Hey, wait a minute, I'm confused. I need to back up and re-read that paragraph," the child notes this strategy. When I read aloud to children in the library, I often struggle with an unfamiliar word or name and let the children hear my effort to sound it out. For example, when I'm reading a Greek myth or a dinosaur book and can't pronounce something, I'll say aloud "No, that can't be right. Let me try again." Likewise, when the grownup exchanges a knowing look with the child that says "I'm making a prediction here!" the child learns that mental predictions are an important part of reading. Reading aloud and talking about our thinking helps children learn to make inferences: "Even though the author doesn't say it, I think she wants us to suspect..." Adults use basic strategies subconsciously to monitor their comprehension all the time. When we read aloud to children, however, we can make those strategies explicit. "This book reminds me of that other book we read" can encourage a child to make connections to other literature and other experiences. By talking about our own habits of mind as we read, we let children know that no one is a perfect reader but that we all get better with practice.

I recall one vacation in which my husband Matthew pulled out a stack of *Peanuts* compilations he had brought along. The comic strip had never particularly worked for me as a child, but he had adored it. As I unpacked in the next room, I heard shrieks of laughter as both boys watched their father: he was shaking with laughter, unable to read, and his eyes were squeezed shut as tears poured down his cheeks. It doesn't have to be all Newbery awards—sharing silly things is just as important. As the children's writer Gordon Korman once said, "What do we value most at a dinner party? A sense of humor, or the ability to recognize foreshadowing? And what do we spend our time



teaching?" I know that 9-year-old Justin, occasionally convinced that he was doomed to bad luck, gleefully discovered *schadenfreude* in seeing Charlie once again fail to kick the football. (Hey! It can't always be about empathy.) And the marvelous thing is, there is no need to stop: as our sons grew into their early teens, we read aloud the hilarious stories of P.G. Wodehouse, featuring the devious deadpan butler Jeeves and the nitwit Bertie Wooster, as well as selections from David Sedaris and *The New Yorker*.

A few years ago, I was walking across campus carrying a copy of William Steig's masterpiece *Amos and Boris*. Paul Bianchi saw it in my hand and beamed: "I just loved reading that one to my girls. When the mouse gets the elephants to roll the beached whale into the sea, the language was spectacular: 'he was breaded with sand...'" Favorite lines abound. Parents return a book to the library, telling me that catch phrases ("Ready, Aim, Fire!" from *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*, or "Some days are like that, even in Australia" from *Alexander the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*) have become a permanent part of the family vernacular. Like so many parents, I treasure many memories of reading to my children. Once, when Adam was about nine, I finished reading aloud *Mrs. Frisby and*

the Rats of N.I.M.H. and suddenly he was sobbing. "What's wrong?" I kept asking. "It does have a happy ending!" He finally choked out an answer: "I'm so sad because it's over and we'll never read anything this good ever again." But we did.

Recently I heard a story on NPR. A young soldier was about to be deployed to Afghanistan, and his pregnant wife asked him to write a letter to their unborn child in case he didn't return. The soldier offered instead to record himself reading aloud to the baby. During her husband's absence, the mother pressed the iPod to her belly as the words of Dr. Seuss

and others moved into the womb. The young father was killed in action shortly before the birth of his son. Trying to soothe the fussy newborn in the hospital, the mother placed the iPod next to him and played his father's voice, calming the baby almost immediately.

Although recordings can help fill a gap, reading aloud requires the participation of human partners, a pair who have keen eyes and ears and who are attuned to one another. Treasuring the days of our lives that are spent in the company of children, reading aloud to them long after they become proficient readers, is infinitely nourishing both for adults and for their children.

Learning to Bat Un-thousand, Teachers Embrace Mistakes

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Learning Pulleys

Elizabeth Hearn taught middle school science at Paideia for 14 years. Her success average with other life endeavors, such as gardening, running road races, and parenting is a .272 average.

Just after my eighth graders enter the room, I call them to gather around the front table to watch me demonstrate building a single-fixed and then a single-movable pulley. Thirty eyes turn toward the squeaky red plastic discs. The room is silent; they're engaged. By placing the rope on the pulley track, then pulling the rope back and forth to lift the mass that hangs from the clip below, I introduce them to the design of this simple machine. I then demonstrate how to measure the amount of force needed to lift the 200-gram mass, gingerly connecting the rope's loose end to a spring scale.

At the midpoint of the demonstration, I hear feet starting to shuffle. I look up to see students gazing left, then right, as they appear to wonder what *they'll* get to build, how soon *they'll* have their hands on the equipment. They see piles of ropes, pulleys, rulers, spring scales, binder clips, weights, and diagramming papers on the back counter, waiting for them. Picking up the pace, I instruct them to align their eyes with the number lines on the scale, to focus on the dip in the disc to read it, and I remind them we're working with force units of newtons, not pounds. My increasingly animated voice is not holding their attention. Except for the couple of science fanatics, their eyes are glazed over. I know that I'm communicating critical information, but I am losing them.

I release them to begin. They almost run to their stations, grab their lab sheets, and begin threading rope through their pulleys in preparation for their first build. Questions quickly arise: "Elizabeth, how did you attach the pulley to the table?" "Excuse me, Elizabeth, does the mass clip onto the hook of the pulley?" "Are we supposed to draw the

diagram before we build the pulley?" And, indicating no memory of the spring scale demonstration at all: "How do we figure out how much force it takes to pull the mass?" Although my display gave them a first look at the equipment, the students—when acting independently—apply only a little of what they've just seen. I answer their questions patiently, repeating much of what I said at the start, and wince at the realization that I am creating dependency upon me, the teacher, for a constant supply of answers.

Between their questions I play back the pulley introduction in my head. How did I describe what I was doing, what was the tone of my voice, where did the students stand, what was their mood when they entered the room? Where did I lose them? Am I playing to their strengths? Would I have been inspired to learn about pulleys if my teacher had presented material this way?

I have another class scheduled five minutes after this one ends. Anxious about an improved plan for the next group, I conclude that talking for the first ten minutes is too long, especially when students know they're about to engage something hands-on. Their eagerness overrides their patience for learning how to use the equipment and draws their attention away.

During the short break between classes, I make adjustments. I diagram a single-fixed pulley on the ActivBoard and write: "Today we're building pulleys. You need only a pencil."

I then stand at the demonstration table as students pour in. I hear the excitement build. One student asks, "Oh, we're doing a lab today?!" And another shares, "Pulleys! I love pulleys! I used one once to lift a basket of stuffed animals onto my top bunk at camp!" Quickly, I gather them and explain that within a few minutes they'll be constructing pulley systems themselves but that I need to give a brief introduction to the equipment first. They encourage each

other to quiet down and focus, understanding that this is the prerequisite before “play time” begins.

I build only the single-fixed pulley and quickly attach the spring scale and mass. They smile when the rope glides over the winch, raising the mass easily as I pull with my forefinger in the loop at the end of the rope. They fidget a bit, eager to tug the rope themselves. Yet one student, Rachel, seems dubious. “What about students who aren’t good at building things? Do we all have to do this?” she asks. I encourage her to come read the spring scale and touch the model. She discovers the machine’s simplicity firsthand and, feeling increasingly confident, describes for others that there are two types of force units on the scale, pounds and newtons. “Both of them are really easy to read,” she reassures herself. I chime in that we’ll use newtons and write the word on the board. Then I quickly point out the salient features of the diagramming method they’ll use and release them to build on their own. Demonstration time has been reduced from ten to seven minutes and I have engaged one student as a helper.

I feel better about the introduction but am not satisfied. And not surprisingly, questions soon arise. This time, I meet their inquiries with questions in return. One student says, “Where does the mass hang? I don’t get this!” I reply, “Which positions have you tried?” Then another asks, “Is it okay to hook the mass onto the end of the rope before threading it into the pulley?” Consciously positioning myself as a guide instead of the knowing instructor, I reply, “I’m not sure. What happens when you try that?”

As class proceeds, I am pleased. This class is more energized. They seem to enjoy the challenge that comes with not knowing everything ahead of time and not having all the answers served on a platter. Fortunately, this lab equipment is rugged so there is little risk involved with allowing them to discover the limitations of the pulleys. There are definite signs of improvement. They are asking questions that demonstrate interest, and they are successfully working their way through the lab exercise. Yet, at the end of the class, they aren’t fully confident that they know how to design pulley systems. They

still seem to believe there is one right answer and that I’m the one who knows it. Instead of exciting them to explore the unknown, it still seems they believe their task is to find one elusive, correct solution.

As I observe this second class, I consider whether this experience is enhancing their critical thinking skills. I’m also concerned that the ambiguity of my answers will prevent them from completing the exercise on time. How do I generate confidence in those intimidated by building? Are they learning more from me than from themselves or each other? Will it enhance their retention to learn from their own, direct experience? How do I further remove myself? As the period progresses, I manage better at holding my tongue, and the students begin to find their own answers. By the end of class, they are referencing the demonstration model and diagram. Discussions between working partners grow into healthy debates and the lab begins to feel fun. The students almost complete the lab by the close of the period.

Between the second and third classes I have a twenty-minute break. The next class presents another chance to make changes. I consider and then decide to go with a radically different approach. The diagram comes off the board and the demonstration table is pushed back into line with the student tables. The equipment is visible when the students enter the room, and I am at the back waiting for them. They’re curious and come right back to me. All I say is, “Here’s today’s challenge: With a partner, use one of each of these pieces of equipment to build what you think would be called a single-fixed pulley. Then, determine how many new tons of force are required to lift a 200-gram mass with this type of pulley. Complete the written lab exercise questions on this sheet.” I end the instructions and step aside.

Although suspicious of my silence, they collect all the pieces and have at it. When they ask, “What is the thing we’re building called again?” I point to the board where it is written and pretend to zipper my lips. Surprisingly, the questions about how to build a pulley come less often and aren’t targeted at me. I hear them debate, laugh,

and engage amongst themselves more than the students did in the previous classes. They see this as a challenge and my silence is taken as an indication that I am comfortable with missteps and exploration. After all, how can they be held responsible for mistakes if the teacher never told them how to do it? This is freeing, and I see the creative problem-solving and independence flourish. Nobody asks about how to use the scale; they figure it out. Within ten minutes every student pair has settled on an acceptable solution. We're twelve minutes into class and they have just completed the exercise that took the others twenty or more minutes. The remainder of class is spent in a similar way, building and diagramming a second type of pulley.

Teaching as Batting Average

The above scenario is one part of a teacher's job that few people ever see—and that few teachers get a chance to discuss—the process we use to improve our work. The process is often intuitive and becomes second nature with years of practice. As I write this, I am articulating much of this for myself for the first time. I am fascinated by how people learn, myself included, and examining my own learning process can in turn help me better understand how students are learning.

Self-reflection as I taught the eighth graders about pulleys helped me discover which adjustments would improve the lesson. I felt somewhat ill-at-ease during the first

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two periods as I struggled to ask, then answer, questions to improve my teaching. When I look back on my teaching efforts in this way, the picture isn't always pretty. The reflection process is challenging, and it feels like a lot of time is being used to obtain outcomes I can't necessarily measure. Furthermore, admitting my flaws (even if only to myself) can be painful. Yet my thirteen years teaching junior high science have helped me see that reflection is a

critical process for improving my classroom practice. If I don't dissect my previous efforts, both good and bad, my classroom environment grows stale. The excitement I experience daily as I watch myself and my students learn would not be there to energize my work week after week, year after year, if I could not engage this process. Our headmaster, Paul Bianchi, enjoys comparing teaching, as well as many other things, to baseball. Though such comparisons echo through Paideia's halls, his words from a recent conversation are worth including here:

I think it's so true that [teaching is] a batting average. Even on a good day, in a good class, you are not going to get it all right. You are not going to bat a thousand. If you replay a day you can look back and ask, "What didn't I see?" and "What didn't I do?" and in the best of all possible scenarios, "What would I have done?" Having the perspective that teaching is a batting average, that you are not going to get it all right, enables you to think about those things without feeling as bad. The last guy who batted over .400 was Ted Williams from Boston. He batted .406 in 1941. That's 40%. That's getting a hit 40% of the time and that's extraordinary. You could have a good career if you could get a hit 28% of the time.

This metaphor gets repeated because it is so important. It opens the door for teachers to see themselves as mistake-makers, and encourages them to dissect their learning process.

Observation, Reflection, Collaboration

When I slow down enough to observe my learning process when teaching at my best, I notice that I begin with **observation**—closely watching student learning as well as my own teaching. Scrutinizing tiny details, such as how a student enters a classroom or reacts when a question is posed reveals their intellectual and emotional readiness. Rachel, mentioned above, let me know she didn't feel she could complete the lab on her own, and I saw in that moment that some extra time with the equipment could be critical for her. Additionally, positioning myself to see shuffling feet during the pulley demonstration helped me pinpoint the moment I began

losing student attention. Staying alert to such reactions helps me know students' needs so that I can adapt my approach.

The meaning of these observations deepens through **reflection**, which is characterized by spending time asking probing questions—questions I may not ever know the answer to, but that can lead me to think more expansively about the observation. There is a big difference between a question that is general and leads me to negativity or stops me from looking further because it is too dispiriting (*What's wrong with these students today, or this year? Why won't they listen to me?*) and one that opens doors and leads to profound think-

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ing (*How can I generate confidence in those intimidated by using machines?*). If I can let go of the need to find an instant solution, I can ask questions that have the potential to reveal the full complexity of the issue without limiting my awareness. These questions are the ones that energize further exploration.

Beyond close self-observation and asking open-ended questions, in order to grow and teach as well as I can, it is critical to make the time to share insights and dilemmas with colleagues. Collaboration allows teachers to exchange perspectives and hear each other's ideas for improving our practice.

One form of valuable teacher collaboration is to observe each other teach and then discuss what was observed. There is a reason professional athletes seek coaches. Athletes find a fresh set of eyes to watch them because they know that from their own perspective they can't see everything: their position relative to others on the court, their choice to shoot or pass, the bend in their knees as they jump, the follow through on the shot (sorry, Paul, for basketball instead of baseball metaphors). Every part of every action is open for evaluation but the athlete herself is not always in the best position to see it. Working directly with a trusted colleague is an obvious way to leap past the limited perspective.

But such collaboration doesn't occur naturally in schools. Teachers teach in different rooms simultaneously, and non-teaching hours are filled with planning, grading, and

one-on-one student interactions. I often go from 8 a.m. until 4 p.m. without talking to another adult, except perhaps on my way to the bathroom. In some environments, perhaps with incentives for performance in place, teachers can even feel competitive with each other, thus worsening communication even more. With sufficient administrative support, however, mutual trust can be fostered, and these observations and conversations can happen. When they do, they are frequently beneficial. In the example above, I might have been far more hesitant to give the students free reign with the pulleys had I not recently watched a colleague in the science department struggle with an analogous dilemma and successfully utilize a similar technique.

Fortunately, there is a wide array of collaborative opportunities on Paideia's campus that reflect the administration's overwhelming support for teachers as learners. When High School Coordinator Paul Hayward was asked how Paideia manages to grow good teachers, he responded: "It helps to know that one teacher doesn't need to be the whole solution. When sharing doesn't happen, a teacher can feel isolated, unsupported, and inadequate."

Following is a list of relevant faculty groups at Paideia. Not all involve directly observing each other's teaching in action, but each taps strategies for learning to observe and reflect on student learning as well as a faculty member's own development.

- The Mindfulness group discusses ways to include meditation and mindfulness in classrooms.
- Collaborative Focus Groups (CFGs) pull together teachers from all levels of the school in small learning communities for sharing dilemmas and brainstorming curriculum ideas.
- Assistants' Group offers support for assistant teachers for everything from curriculum development to classroom management to partner teaching.
- Blumenthal grants fund summer teacher conversations about curriculum.

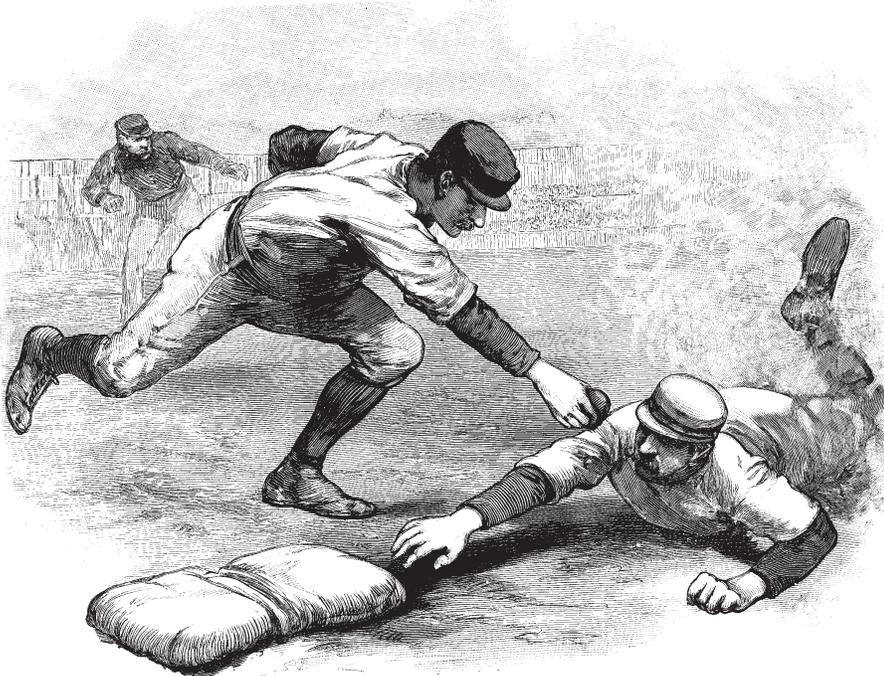
- The Leadership Forum gathers faculty for discussions about leadership in educational settings.
- Grade level meetings allow teachers to share insights about the progress of individual students and to refine curriculum.
- A book club reads and discusses Parker Palmer's *The Courage to Teach*
- Weekly levels faculty meetings maintain the teaching community and provide learning opportunities through faculty programs.
- Department meetings focus on curriculum decisions.
- The Mentorship program offers support for new teachers.
- Teacher's Group offers the opportunity to explore the complex relationship between a teacher's personal and professional life in order to deepen our perceptions of our selves, our students, and our daily experiences as teachers.

Teacher collaboration not only fosters improved teaching in direct ways, but is an opportunity for developing friendship, which indirectly leads to more idea-sharing. Relationships that have grown as a direct result of participation in these collaborative meetings are socially fulfilling as well as energizing to the work of teaching. The open discussions that occur, for example, within a Collaborative Focus Group, might continue outside of the formal meetings and lead to further insights on improving teaching practice.

When expectations are high, as they are for any teacher walking into a room full of students—or for the baseball player stepping up to bat—success depends on the ability to accept failure as part of the daily fabric. This acceptance allows for clear-sighted observation, as well as flexibility in one's response. One must have a plan and be willing leave that plan behind at a moment's notice. Teachers face constant opportunities to make adjustments. Whether a teacher of art or science, English or agriculture, within the span of a single class there are countless chances to tweak a lesson. As minor a change as whether to hand out a paper before or after a verbal instruction can significantly alter the engagement with an assignment.

As a bonus, when we give ourselves the space to try again, we are also modeling for our students how they can do the same. A teacher that is willing to see her own shortcomings and understand the growth that stems from errors is likely to embrace her students' unintended missteps as learning opportunities. In this way we create that elusive learning environment where students are encouraged to take risks, where they know the mind-stretching effort will be understood and failures can be celebrated for the opportunities that they are.

Unique as it may be for a Headmaster to analogize Ted Williams' 1941 batting average of .406 to his teachers' success rate, Paul Bianchi's forthrightness about the nature of teaching frees us to swing and miss. By observing our teaching, asking questions about what we see, reflecting openly, and sharing our insights through collaboration, we can discover how teachers—through our own glorious fallibility—learn.



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College counseling at Paideia and elsewhere has evolved. Students become engaged in the process much earlier and technology has had a dramatic impact as well. John and Lenore talked about changes and trends in college counseling.

John Stubbs, director of college counseling came to Paideia in 1998 after having worked at Harvard University.

Lenore Carroll, associate director of college counseling, came to Paideia in 2004 having previously worked in admissions at Emory University, at Howard Westlake School in California as a college counselor.

What is the most dramatic change you've seen in college counseling?

Lenore What used to be typed or written on paper is virtually now an electronic application and the communications between students and the college is electronic. Because of the new information exchanges, students know more about colleges and can act quickly. College information such as information about specific professors and programs is much more accessible. Students can now go meet professors who teach in programs they are interested in.

John When I was starting out, the paper pieces of the application were at the tail end of the application process. The common application first appeared in the early 2000s. Since then, the number of schools that use a common application has grown exponentially. Before it was mainly the private colleges that used the common application and now all the public universities are using them.

At Paideia 85 to 90 percent of the students use the common application. Using a common application means that early in the process a student can print out a copy and use it as a draft. College applications are usually available between July 1 and August 1.

Lenore There is a move also to apply to many more schools. At Paideia, the increase in the number of schools that a student applies to has been more of a creeping percentage point—higher here and there. There are high schools out there where

students find out the top 25 schools and apply to all 25 schools. The increase in applications here is currently a moving target.

On the admissions side the increase in applications means a school like Vanderbilt gets 31,000 applications for admission.

John Another very noticeable trend is that the application process is starting earlier and earlier. Colleges offer two choices are early decision and early action. The first option is binding, if accepted the student must go, the second is not. The number of Paideia students applying for early decision is a fairly constant number. It's about six or seven students who are being taken out of the application pool.

Lenore Students and their parents feel the need to apply some place earlier. This is fine, but an early decision is a binding decision and you can only apply to one school. From a college point of view, early decision admission helps them with modeling the freshman class and helps them smooth out the flow of the admission workload for the school.

John Seventy percent of Paideia seniors are putting in early applications to University of Georgia and other schools. UGA has a big program for applying early decision. For most students there is no down side to applying for early action, but most will say, "Why stop there?" once they've been accepted at a school.

Harvard stopped its early action and decision process for two years, but restarted it 2011 because it was losing valuable applicants who were being accepted earlier elsewhere and not bothering to apply to Harvard.

Lenore I feel the students are in a big rush towards resolution by taking early action.

John Students feel that if they don't get in line they will miss out on an opportunity. Our kids feel like they have to be doing something.

What role does college visitation play?

John: It's good to visit schools but don't feel compelled to visit all the schools they apply to.

What about parent involvement?

John This generation of parents has been more involved in their kids' lives and they realize that the college application has changed a great deal since they went through it. Many parents come in asking, "Should my son or daughter be doing more service and what should my son or daughter be doing this summer to get into college?"

What are some college selections trends that affect students?

John It used to be that there was a dean or admissions officer in the admissions office. Now there is a vice-president of enrollment management. There is a big business approach to college admissions, which results in using marketing using business practices to manage admissions for business reasons. Marketing means kids are getting information earlier.

College costs and the current economy are making more kids and parent more aware of state schools. The Georgia HOPE scholarship and the quality of flagship state schools like the University of Georgia and Georgia Tech are making those schools more attractive to our students. The UGA Honors program is more attractive to our kids as a result of HOPE.

There are more girls in the national applicant pool for college. More students are applying for college and a higher percentage of high school graduates nationally are going to college. If you look at the top 10 of any class, most likely the majority of the students are going to be girls. Colleges are paying attention to the gender ratio because they don't want to risk turning off their constituency because they have too many girls and there are no boys.

Lenore In a way, the common application generates common applicants. All the girls do the same things, which can make the common application difficult. There is no way for a girl student to express herself. They can do everything right and still not be accepted to a school. Afterwards, they ask "What could I have done differently?" and the answer is "Nothing."

John Colleges act in their own interests in building their classes and the strategy has always been part of the college admissions but it may play a larger role now.

Paideia students attend a wide a variety of schools. Each year, students from a graduating class attend an average of 60 schools. We do well for a school of our size in a world where there are a lot of competitive schools. Schools are turning away from traditional feeder schools and really looking for students from underserved populations.

Why do Paideia kids do well in the college admissions process?

John You talk to any college admissions person and most of them will tell you that they find our kids interesting and you always hear, "They will talk to you." Paideia's approach to teaching involves supporting a student to do something they are good at and providing encouragement and opportunities. Kids at Paideia have found their voices. It's a pretty genuine voice, and they're not just saying the right thing, and I credit the school environment. Paideia students are used to talking to adults and oral communication. It happens in the school's writing program as well. People get to practice their voice and they know that people are listening to them. In the college admission world, it is generally viewed that the school's assessment of a kid is trustworthy. It's a personal process that stretches across the school. College admissions people will frequently say, "Oh yeah, I remember her!" That's huge.

Lenore Much of the success is due to the school's "Framework of Values." "Being in the present" [one of those values] is a fundamental foundation in the college admissions process at Paideia. Students need to hear, "Concentrate on high school."

I think that's why Paideia does well because we are focused on the present and students at this school get all this support developing their voice and their interests.

The 97 members of the Class of 2012 are attending 71 different colleges and universities in 28 states, the District of Columbia, and Canada.

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