

E-Magazine

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S DESK

by *Betsy J. Hunroe, Executive Director*

We are so glad to introduce you to the newly designed Vision, a biannual e-magazine of VAIS that features writers from some of Virginia's best independent schools. The theme for this edition is "the passionate educator," and while it arrives at a busy time of year, it also provides some great reading for your holidays. We think



you'll find some inspiration in these pages.

As a middle school science teacher, I was particularly interested in helping my students understand controlled and uncontrolled variables as they related not only to the scientific method but life in general. Not only did my students learn to identify the variables in experiments, they also grew to understand one of my favorite quotes: "...I am convinced that life is 10 percent what happens to me and 90 percent how I react to it. And so it is with you...we are in charge of our attitudes." (Charles R. Swindoll) It was important to me to help my students focus on the 90 percent (those variables that they could control) and not the 10 percent (those that they could not).

I wonder what variables affect an educator's passion? Some of those variables can be controlled. And some cannot. What role do members of the school's community play? Does the school's physical environment have an effect? Do new teaching methodologies spark passion, or does ever-changing educational technology drive us to yearn for the basics of pencil and paper? How does an educator's passion shift over the course of his or

her career? And once passion is **found**, how is it **fed**, and how is it paid forward? Does paying it forward, in fact, feed the passion even more?

There are myriad answers to these questions, and I'd love to hear your ideas. Drop me an email and tell me how you feed your passion as an educator---how you focus on the 90 percent of what you can control. And, if you're inspired by one of the authors selected for this edition of Vision, let them know! Nothing would make us happier than to know that our community is growing stronger through these connections.



Featured inside this Edition:

- Led to the Light of Teaching, *Ellis Glover*.....2-3
- The Incandescent Teacher and Reflections,
Huntington Lyman.....4-6
- Multisensory Adventures in World History,
Carolyn Latta.....7-8
- The Best Laid Plans, *Karen Zimmerman*.....8
- Follow The Children's Lead, *Maura Rice*10-11
- I Wonder if People Know, *Dorothy Suskind*.....12-13
- Teaching the Scientific Miracle, *Christen Mamenko*..13

Led to the Light of Teaching

by Ellis Glover, Head of School, Westminster School

In the fall of 1976, I was a lost puppy. I had left the University of Richmond several years before, the institution and I both agreeing that a separation was in our mutual interest. After footing the bill for four years of private university schooling, my father let me know that I was on my own. And, for reasons inexplicable to me at the time, the Beatles had not called for my assistance in reforming the band; Hollywood agents failed to contact me regarding a star turn in their next masterwork; and, despite my dreaming that it would suddenly materialize, I had not written the great American novel. So, after a disastrous attempt at working for my father and a humbling failure as a cab driver (I had a tendency to get lost, literally and metaphorically), I heeded a friend's suggestion and pursued substitute teaching in Fairfax County. I found that, for some reason, this I could do. And I remembered that there was this small private school in Annandale that my father had built and where I had served as a laborer during its initial construction. I contacted the founder and director of Westminster School and let her know of my availability to substitute teach.

Before long, she was giving me other tasks to perform, including chaperoning overnight field trips, proctoring a variety of tests, and organizing the 8th grade graduation. Later in the summer of '76, she invited me to her home for dinner and to discuss a proposal, the nature of which, tantalizingly, remained a mystery. After several cocktails, wine and a gourmet French meal, she offered me a job as her assistant. The provision, however, was that I would need to return to college and earn my degree. I agreed, although the prospect of returning to school did not appeal. Nevertheless, over the next ten years, I worked full time and attended school at night. After earning a B.A. from George Mason, I continued my education at Georgetown University. I recall so clearly returning from Georgetown and stopping by Mrs. Goll's home at 10:00 p.m. or so. There she would be

waiting for me, her husband having finished his repast and repaired to his study to parse his numbers, and we would sit by candlelight as I savored her delectable meal, sipped red wine, and bathed in her wisdom. We would talk about my current studies, my interest in poetry and developing my own writing skills, life's philosophy, and, of course, SCHOOL! What school is, what school could be, and what were the future possibilities for Westminster.

Jane Goll taught me how to be; how to muster the self-discipline to achieve my artistic dreams; and how to apply my skills and talents to elevate the students of our school. With her guidance and support, I founded the drama department, the athletic department, and a myriad of other programs at



Westminster. We talked, we dreamed, we argued, and we forged a school where children learned to evolve into the best manifestations of themselves, i.e., who they were destined to become.

In the late summer of 1992, after a prolonged and painful battle with colon cancer, Jane Goll died. She was the kindest, wisest, and most passionate and

Led to the Light of Teaching *continued*

compassionate person that I have ever known. During the last days of her life, when only I and a few others knew that she was dying, I could not stay in my office. I felt claustrophobic and I could not breathe. I paced about the hot asphalt of late August gasping for air, wondering how I would live without her guidance and how the school would endure without her unerring vision. On September 5, 1992, she died, and I was at a loss as to how I would fill her shoes. How could I muster her charm, her strength, and her blazing certitude? I felt so challenged in assuming her mantle of leadership. And then, it occurred to me: I should not try to be her! I should continue with the same belief about myself that she had about her students. I should step up and be the best version of myself, with my own ideas and vision for the school. The epiphany was that I should do for the students what Mrs. Goll had done for me: to teach them that only through self-discipline would they ever be free; and, most importantly, to teach them how to plan out their lives so that they could achieve their dreams. I did not want them to become a lost twenty six year old roaming the world in quest of elusive dreams. I wanted to build their confidence, exercise their talents, and help to develop an unwavering faith in their own potential to achieve their goals and improve the lives of others. While participation in drama has been core to this goal, the entire Westminster program is designed to achieve these results. I am proud of what we have achieved at Westminster School, and I am eternally grateful to Jane Goll for leading me to the light when I was lost in darkness. I hope to continue to do this for the rising generation, and ensure that this mission is carried out for decades of children to come.

Ellis Glover, Head of School, Westminster School, Annandale - connect with Ellis at eglover@westminsterschool.com

Ellis has been the head of school for twenty-five years, and, before that, he was the assistant head for sixteen years at Westminster School. He has been teaching theater and enrichment classes, along with guiding and counseling students, for over forty years.



The Incandescent Teacher

by Huntington Lyman, Academic Dean, The Hill School

REPRINT - first published in the English Journal, April 1998

As teachers, we do a lot of talking about our students' needs. We are trained to recognize their needs, both present and future, and to respond with instruction, support, counseling, and caring. Many of us gain a deep satisfaction from providing these services, and we tend to go into teaching because it seems a worthwhile profession. We think we can help people, and maybe we can.

But we don't do a lot of thinking about our own needs. I am not speaking here of our need to take a night off for ourselves, to be with our families, or to feel socially and financially supported. I am speaking of our need to teach, to feel we are communicating information and helping our students grow strong. Teaching fills many deep needs I have: it is one of the scariest things I do, but it can be wonderfully rewarding in a way matched by no other part of my life.

Teaching, at least as it is undertaken in school, is a uniquely human activity, and the reality that we inevitably bring to it our emotions and desires is probably a good thing, overall. I readily admit that literature is incomplete for me without students: that is why I would rather be a teacher than a scholar or a writer. At its very best, teaching is the ultimate ironic art; painting on a canvas that disintegrates six times a day with the ringing of a bell. I hope my students see my need to teach; I hope they feel they are part of an important intellectual and personal enterprise. Every June, something real dies when a class disbands, and I mourn the loss of that particular community of minds whose dynamic energy I have been trying to harness and direct.

But our needs can get in the way of our teaching, too. Sometimes we need our students to succeed to make us feel successful. Sometimes we need to be able to fix a student's problem to make us feel useful. Sometimes we need our students to understand Shakespeare to validate our own understanding;

sometimes we need to be treated with respect to make us feel respectable. And when these needs get in the way of our teaching, they become part of the hidden agenda of the classroom, part of the jetsam that impedes the flow of learning and disables our students from becoming strong and independent.

We should recognize our needs and be honest about why we teach. Teachers love to play the martyr role; I know I sometimes paint myself as an underpaid, under-appreciated saint who carries on the business of raising children and communicating culture in a society overwhelmed by immediate gratification and making money. I like to imagine myself as culture's victim, toiling in an intellectual coal mine for a higher purpose that my wealthy neighbors can't even recognize. Sometimes the weight of February even makes this dark portrait of teaching seem a complete and accurate rendering of the profession.

But it is also nonsense. It is a pleasure and a privilege to be a teacher. I spend my day with books I love, thinking about ideas I want to think about. I have control of my job in ways most people can only dream of, and what I do nourishes my soul. I am paid to read books and papers, to work with young minds whose honesty and humanity grounds me. I get time off every year to gather strength, and if I don't have as much money as some people I also don't have their ulcers, their car payments, their corporate scrambling, and their spiritual vertigo. Generally, I have found people respect teachers more than most professionals, and one of the perks of the job is listening to the most unlikely individuals confess a secret envy for what I do.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf observes that we learn almost nothing about Shakespeare's life from his plays because he never let his life obstruct his writing. There are no irritable moments in Shakespeare's work when we feel that his politics,

The Incandescent Teacher *continued*

his sexual preferences, his family circumstances, or his lack of money are impeding his creation. Woolf uses the word "incandescent" both to indicate the light of his genius and to suggest that Shakespeare, like the filament in an incandescent bulb, creates without burning himself up; all the energy is transmitted through the writer to the text. Thus, although the plays tell us nothing of importance about Shakespeare's life, they reveal everything of importance about Shakespeare.

In a profession plagued by burnout, I think we should seek to become incandescent teachers. We should be honest about our own needs and find ways to prevent them from becoming resistors. We should strive to lose ourselves in our teaching, to become invisible bridge builders, so that when our students cross from where they were to where they are, they remember the journey as their own. Perhaps this is the real meaning of Socratic irony: it is the wonderful ability of Socrates to morph himself to fit each student. Perhaps this is why Socrates, the model of the incandescent teacher, is impossible to pin down outside of the context of his interlocutors.

My first year teaching, twelve years ago, a student told me that the meaning of "incandescence" was "when they put your essence in a can." His definition made me laugh, but it seems now to contain some wisdom. May we have the courage to understand and to trust our teaching essences.

Find Lyman's latest thoughts on teaching in the following piece entitled "Reflections on The Incandescent Teacher." He is now in his thirty-second year of teaching.

Reflections on The Incandescent Teacher

by Huntington Lyman, The Hill School

One of the very few things I know for sure is that language is a miracle. It is the extraordinary and unique achievement of our species that we can put thoughts in each others' heads by making sounds with our mouths. Perhaps even more remarkably, by putting black marks on white pieces of paper, we can communicate thoughts with people who may live thousands of miles away, or have lived thousands of years ago.

In school, the sole audience for student writing is often a teacher who not only knows more about the topic than the student but is prepared to judge the writing, not learn from it or appreciate it. This is one reason students often write best for publication, when the imagined audience comprises their peers. Before graduation each spring I ask my 8th grade students to write to another compelling audience: their future selves. In January, I tell them, they will have finished their first semester in a new school. One day they will wake in darkness, the snow will be on the ground, and they will find an envelope with strangely familiar handwriting. Inside will be a letter from their younger selves. What, I ask them, do they think that future self will need? Encouragement? Hopes? Dreams?

I am reminded of this writing tradition as I re-read *The Incandescent Teacher*, a piece I wrote almost twenty years ago as a journal entry for a National Endowment for the Humanities seminar on Plato. I impulsively sent it off to *English Journal*, and it became my first published piece. It is interesting for me to hear my younger self, to think about what has and has not changed for me.

I still agree with much of what I wrote two decades ago. I still see teaching as an art form

Continued on page 6

Reflections on The Incandescent Teacher

continued

whose irony appeals to me, and I still feel that the metaphor of a builder of bridges captures one essence of teaching, since I strive to connect my very real students to the abstract and infinite conversation taking place in the slow time of books. I still feel the ambivalence of recognizing that teaching is not generally as respected as it should be with appreciating the privilege of living in an atmosphere imbued with both the gravity of important ideas and the energy of perpetual youth.

The passage of time has influenced how I read some moments of the essay as well. I remember, shortly after publication, receiving an email from a colleague who had been named Teacher of the Year in Oklahoma who wrote to tell me she had read this piece aloud when she accepted her award. The student who gave his creative definition of “incandescent” has become one of my closest friends; we meet every morning before sunrise to run five miles together. Like six other students in my first 7th grade class, he is also a Hill School parent; it is now common for me to teach my students’ children.

I also recognize one major change in my thinking. At the time I was powerfully drawn to Virginia Woolf’s idea of “incandescence” as a radical form of irony: the teacher who disappears when the lesson is learned. In 1997, I was just beginning to understand the infinite possibilities of the internet, but now my teenage son, unborn when I composed this piece, has more information at his fingertips than almost anyone in history. For most of human history, education meant learning to decode and gaining access to books. Today, education means learning to make sense and shape meaning from the constant inundation of information that threatens to overwhelm us.

Writers such as Michael Thompson and Ned

Hallowell have articulated a central truth in teaching that has only become more relevant: that connections to human beings are essential first steps on the path to becoming educated. In her TED talk, Rita Pierson reminds us that “Students don’t learn from people they don’t like.” My initial connections with students often begin with jokes, magic tricks, or my elaborate celebration of Halloween, and these are not distractions but ways to make connections that can be extended in the classroom. I now recognize that it is the very humanity of our teaching that has made us indispensable in a world in which so much data, so much information, so much material is so readily available. Our students need guides to show them why it matters, and they will only take those first steps when they trust us. They begin to care about our subjects because they care about us, and when they emulate us they are on the path to deeper and more complex thinking. I think that should make us feel proud and responsible.

I have been teaching for thirty-two years now. And I still have a lot to learn.

Connect with Huntington Lyman at huntlyman@thehillsschool.org.



Hunt teaches fourth, seventh and eighth grades at The Hill School. His views on teaching have evolved since his first publication in the English Journal almost 20 years ago.

Multisensory Adventures in World History

by Carolyn Latta, The New Community School

It is no secret among my students that I LOVE history. Some days, this enthusiasm is a byproduct of too much coffee, but most of the time it is excitement over the content I'm teaching. Investigating history allows us to explore patterns and understand causes and consequences. When people find out that I teach world history, the typical response is "Oh, I hate history. I'm so bad at names and dates." Guess what - so am I! The names and dates are not what make history relevant. Instead, it's the bigger picture. It's how the Hundred Years' War can show us the impact of new technology. It's learning that empires that are open and accepting of other cultures often end up more advanced than where they started. It's recognizing that one person, such as Martin Luther or Michelangelo, can have a big impact on the world. So how do I bring history alive for my students so they can explore these ideas?

It started after my first year of teaching. While reflecting at the end of the year, I realized several abstract concepts were totally lost on my students. Very few of my students could tell me how the Crusades changed the world or what the Age of Enlightenment was all about, even after we had spent a significant amount of time on each topic. This shaped my goal for the following year. I needed to figure out how to make my lessons more efficient, while maximizing my students' learning potential. The key to this puzzle lay in how my students learn. At my school, every child has dyslexia or a related learning difference. There are only eight students in my room at a time, but each of them exhibits dyslexia in a different way. One of the best ways to bring history alive for these students is through multi-sensory activities.

During my second year of teaching, my ninth grade students quickly learned to associate my class with crazy activities and simulations. The beauty of teaching history is that it is easy to create reenactments so that students can "experience"

history. I challenged myself to create two or three simulations for every unit and saw a remarkable increase in the success of my students. Instead of approaching the Crusades with lectures, videos, and worksheets, I decided to send my students on a fake Crusade through campus. Every aspect of our journey reflected key points my students needed to remember — from the rousing speech by Pope Urban II (which provided the reason Europeans went



on Crusades), to the marauding middle school students who attacked us on our journey, to the falafel and mint tea refreshments waiting at our destination, where we discussed the innovations of Muslims in the middle ages. All of my students were able to explain what a crusade was and why they were important, but the success of this activity continued to show up throughout the year. My entire spring curriculum circles back to the cultural diffusion that happened because of the Crusades. One of my students who routinely struggled with history was able to recall the main ideas months after the lesson. Granted, he referred to it as "the falafel activity," but he was also able to tell me what Europeans brought back with them from the Middle East and how those items helped change Europe, which in turn helped him understand the

Multisensory Adventures *continued*

Renaissance and Scientific Revolution.

Many of my students struggle with reading comprehension and ADHD and would not benefit nearly as much from reading a textbook or listening to a lecture. Multisensory activities like simulations allow them to access my content and give them a place to connect what they read for homework with what we discuss in class. Students who had once barely participated were jumping out of their chairs to share thoughts and contribute to class discussions. By allowing my students to experience history, our discussions deepened and students were able to recognize the bigger world patterns on their own. Multisensory activities can be one of the most powerful tools in education and I have seen that each student is capable of learning. While my students may not always share my love of history, they are excited to discuss our class activities and feel the success of understanding my content.

Carolyn Latta, History Teacher and College Counselor, The New Community School, Richmond - connect with her at clatta@tncs.org



Carolyn teaches Upper School World History and is in her third year of teaching.

The Best Laid Plans

*by Karen Zimmerman,
The Covenant School*

It was a Friday afternoon, but it did not have the frenetic feel of a Friday afternoon. Students were circulating from desk to desk, examining vibrant drawings of Greek vases, recording information about Greek gods and goddesses, and conversing quietly: "Hey, I am your sister!" "Look, I am married to you!" Ancient Greek lyre music played in the background; pictures of ruins and artifacts rolled across the Smart Board.

While this sounds like a meticulously-planned lesson, it was anything but. And yet for me, it was a magical class that I relived with pleasure all weekend.

This lesson was part of a sixth grade unit on Greek Mythology. For the past few years, I have struggled with the best way to teach students about the Olympian gods and goddesses, many of whom they already know intimately from prior study or from their own reading of Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson series. Mostly I have had students research an assigned god or goddess and then make a presentation to the class. The drawbacks of this approach: first, presentations eat up much class time; also, many are not particularly engaging for students.

This year I tried something new. I started by showing students a short clip about Athenian pottery, both the red and black figure types. Students were then assigned a god or goddess to research. Next they used their expertise to design a vase, incorporating information from their research into the design. I gave each student a red piece of paper with a vase template and some sample borders to recreate on their vases.

The results astounded me. Using just pencils and later black sharpies, students created lovely and intricate designs while at the same time applying their understanding of a particular god or goddess.

Continued on page 10

Follow the Children’s Lead: A Path to Being a Passionate Educator

by Maura Rice, *The Congressional Schools*

“Can we do that project again, Ms. Rice?”

That is the question that tells me that something is going right in my classroom. That is the enthusiasm my students have when something interests them, sparks their curiosity, and engages their whole selves. In a classroom of four and five -year- old learners, it is crucial for an educator to be passionate about what he or she is teaching. Finding ways to channel your own positive energy and excitement about specific topics, concepts, and content into authentic learning experiences is also key. How can I relate the concept of patterning to their favorite read-aloud story to make it more fun, relevant and meaningful? Can we use our campus as a classroom and experience our learning in a hands-on way as an alternative to sitting inside for a lesson today? “Yes! I often think to myself. That will be so much fun, let’s do it!” When I show my excitement for learning, that excitement is returned to me tenfold by my students.

However, and this is perhaps more important, I have found that my true passion, and theirs, comes out when I take a moment to really listen to what it is my students want to learn about. When these young students take the lead in their learning and have a sense of ownership about what they are doing, their excitement and passion seem limitless-- and then so does their learning potential. Recently, during our unit about Fall, we took a closer look at pumpkins. Of course we carved them, examined them inside and out, used the pulp and seeds for sensory exploration, and had a marvelous time turning the pumpkins into a spooky jack o’ lanterns. The children loved their pumpkin science time, and made personal connections and comparisons to how they used their own pumpkins at home with their families. When our week of pumpkin science ended, one of my children asked, “What are we going to do with our pumpkins now? Can we still use them even though Halloween is

over?” This child’s sentiment was echoed by the rest of the class. Their interest had been sparked! So I listened and made it a goal to turn their passion for pumpkins into purposeful, intentional, and exciting learning experiences.

More than three weeks later, we are still visiting our pumpkins (or what is left of them!) which we put in planters outside in our outdoor learning space. The children ask to see the pumpkins every day, and we have been recording our observations in a classroom science journal. The children have loved watching the pumpkins in different stages of decomposition, and it has inspired lessons about mold, life cycles, and seasonal changes. We have had more discussions about “how” and “why” than ever before! It struck me as we marched from our classroom to our outdoor space one morning that the children’s passion had influenced the way I was teaching. I was excited, ready to discover and explore right along with them.

Did I plan to spend more than a month on pumpkins? No! It was the pure passion of the children that affected me, and when I stopped to listen to what their smiles, curiosity and squeals of joy told me, I became just as passionate as they were. I followed



Continued on page 10

Best Laid Plans *continued*

When the presentation day arrived, I opted for a “museum walk” rather than an oral presentation so that students could move about the classroom and be engaged at all times. Students displayed their vases on their desks next to some written information they provided about their god or goddess. My original plan was to have each student start at a desk and, upon hearing a chime, move to the next desk to record information on their Olympian Gods and Goddesses charts. However, it soon became apparent that this was completely unnecessary. On their own, students moved easily from place to place, busy and focused. One student said, “This is really fun!” Midway through the first of my three 6th grade sections, I decided to play the background music, found from a quick search on YouTube. The pictures accompanying the music worked beautifully; some were even of Greek pottery.

As the exercise ended, once again I found myself rethinking my plan, which was to have students glue their vase designs into their notebooks. Students had taken such pride in their work and simply loved their vases too much. One said, “When can I take mine home? I really like it.” Another made sure a beloved teacher came from another classroom to see her vase. So I decided instead to photograph each vase, with the photos to be glued in their notebooks. The original vase designs now grace the walls of our hallway and of my classroom and will be sent home in a week or two for students to appreciate and enjoy with their families.

I am already thinking ahead to next year and ways I might tweak this lesson; however, what strikes me most about it is simply this: some of the best teaching moments are truly serendipitous.



Karen Zimmerman, 5th and 6th Grade Language Arts Teacher, The Covenant School, Charlottesville - connect with her at kzimmerman@covenantschool.org

Karen has taught English and writing in independent schools and in other academic settings for over 25 years.

Follow the Children’s Lead *continued*

their lead, and it led us down a path of discovery, authentic learning, and unbridled excitement!

To be a passionate educator is to embrace learning, in all of its whimsy, its twists and turns, its pure adventure. It means being able to be flexible and foster the children’s intellectual curiosity, even if it comes from something unexpected. It means going outside to visit three-week-old pumpkins, just because the children cannot wait to see how they have changed. The children, all of our students, are the catalyst for passion within educators. To truly sustain enthusiastic teaching and learning, the path is clear: follow the children.

Maura Rice Maura Rice, Junior Kindergarten Lead Teacher, Congressional School, Falls Church - connect with her at mrice@cssov.org



Maura has been at Congressional for three years, and this is her second year with the 4-5 year old age group. She absolutely loves working with young children, believing they are magical!

I Wonder if People Know

by Dr. Dorothy Suskind, St. Catherine's School

"I wonder if people know?"

This question bounces through my brain, inserting itself in conversations with both myself and others as I ponder my own identity as a director, teacher, parent, and student.

Currently, I am the Middle School Director for a JK-12 school for girls, but when people ask me what I do, I say "I teach." Though I no longer have a classroom of my own, I do have an office where five to eight girls join me daily for lunch. As we circle up on the blue blanket spread across the floor, there is reciprocal teaching and learning as they girls revisit game day wins and defeats, commiserate over conflicts with friends, and share stories of home. Soon I hope to have a before school writing club rolling, where small groups of girls will gather to write their stories and respond to the work of their peers. On those early mornings, I will share my writing, too. I wonder if people know that once you are a teacher, that identity infuses your soul? Despite changes in my own role, I still consider building relationships with students, teaching, and learning to be essential elements of my job.

My Middle School faculty knows the power and importance of their work. Just this morning, I awoke to an email from a teacher detailing her plans for an upcoming field trip, and her passion for her content area wove through her words. As I arrived at school, I noticed our fifth grade teachers all wearing their Grade 5 T-shirts, an outward display of their camaraderie and teamwork. Then, at lunch, I felt a jolt of gleeful anticipation as the ding of my phone reminded me of this afternoon's poetry reading and tomorrow's boat design challenge where the girls will get in our school's pool to see whose duct tape and wire creation will withstand the weight of the most cans. I wonder if people know that I am so inspired by the work of my girls and faculty that, late this afternoon, as I revised a posting for an upcoming teaching position in our division, I fought the urge to

apply myself?

Yesterday, however, for forty-five minutes, I was neither an administrator nor a teacher, but a parent conferencing with my son's advisor. Her gentle kindness is evident in the rich relationships she forms with each of her students, and I can see that she values my son's unique self as she recounts detailed stories of his days at school. I wonder if other parents know that as educators we feel the same swells of emotions when we watch our child teeter on the edge of failure, the same frustrations when we wish our child would put more effort into his work, and the same exuberance as we leap out of the stands and cheer as our child scores a goal? I wonder if the parents we serve know that inside our parental frustration we, too, have said things to our own children's teachers we wish desperately to recant, and we, too, have experienced unconscionable fear while contemplating the uncertainty of our own child's educational journey? I wonder if the parents we serve know that we love their children just like we love our own, and it is that love that drives every decision we make in the classroom?

Continued on page 12



I Wonder if People Know *continued*

Three days over this last month, I have become a “student for a day” as I transformed into a fifth, sixth, and eighth grade girl. I wonder if people know that on these three days of full immersion, every piece of my adolescent anxiety surfaced as my algebra quiz hit the table and I didn’t know how to do the first three problems; how my heart sank as I walked into the lunchroom and fretted over where to sit; and how self-conscious I became as I tripped up the stairs as I rushed to my next class? I wonder if the students I partnered with those days know I am huge introvert; that I found the fast pace and social nature of school emotionally draining; and that I can’t comprehend how they muster the afternoon energy to do Act Two of sports, music, dance, and homework? I wonder if the girls know how in awe I am of the effort they put into their work, their willingness to ask questions and take intellectual risks in the classroom, their dedication and energy to explore outside passions, and their gentle kindness to each other?

I wonder if any of these girls want to be a teacher when they grow up? I hope they know it is a job that will stretch their intellect, challenge their patience, and offer insurmountable joy. I wonder if the girls know that I think I have the best job in the world.

Dorothy C. Suskind, Ph.D., Director of Middle School, St. Catherine’s School, Richmond - connect with her at dsuskind@st.catherines.org



Dr. Dorothy Suskind is the Director of Middle School at St. Catherine’s School in Richmond, Virginia and serves as an Associate Adjunct Professor at the University of Richmond where she teaches undergraduate courses in English and graduate courses in Education. She has also taught preschool, first grade, second grade, fifth grade and served as a reading specialist.



Editorial Advisory Board:

Kimberly Failon, Director of Communications, VAIS

Catherine Campbell, Director of Content Strategy; English Faculty, Highland School

Jennifer Harter, Assistant Director of Marketing and Communications, St. Catherine’s School

Teaching the Scientific Miracle

*by Christen Mamenko,
Millwood School*

Each day of teaching is a scientific miracle. As teachers, we are asked to give 150 percent of ourselves on a daily basis — divvied up between our students, their parents, our lessons and our personal lives. But, what does that even mean? From a scientific standpoint, it is impossible. For example, on a cellular energy level, if an organism gives 100 percent of its energy to any endeavor, death is the only outcome — think Charlotte's Web. On a mechanical level, no machine, humans included, can ever be 100 percent efficient — even HAL had his issues. Since there are highly effective teachers, the majority of whom are not dropping like flies, it must be a miracle.

It was the first week of the school year. All my hours of preparing lessons and activities were finally going to be put to the test. I had the entire first day planned in my head. At the last possible minute, I remembered I needed an extension cord to be able to run my PowerPoint lesson. Who would have guessed that the one I bought was incompatible with my projector? School began with running off copies and quickly switching gears to having a low-tech class day. Four days later, I had taught two lessons, done five activities, completed two labs, solved “my computer won't work” problems, and stretched my voice to the breaking point. Of course, my duties did not end once I was “off the clock.” When I got home from the first day, I had to add more photos to my PowerPoint lecture for Thursday, buy antacid tablets and vinegar for our next lab, upload documents and grades to the online website, do some school marketing on Facebook and try to keep my small (very small) knitting business afloat. And, you know what? I'm still alive!

There is only one word to describe why teachers defy scientific principles every day — PASSION. Because despite stolen pencils and passed notes, I

had the opportunity to teach my students how the French's hatred for nobility led to the kilogram, not to mention teaching them a song and a dance to help them remember which way to move the decimal when doing unit conversions. That passion allows us to be able to give all, and then some, of ourselves to both our careers and our personal lives. Take that, Watson[1]!

*Christen Mamenko, Upper School Science Teacher,
Millwood School, Richmond - connect with her at
cmamenko@millwoodschoo.org*



As both director of the Millwood Entrepreneurial Studies program and teacher of all upper schools science classes at Millwood School, Christen is able to guide and direct the students to various pathways of success as they prepare for

college. With many cups of coffee, the past ten years in the classroom have flown by - Christen can't wait to see what the next ten years bring!

[1] Watson is the IBM computer that competed against Jeopardy's biggest winners in February 2011 and dominated!