

AIMS

MD | DC
SERVING INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS
IN MARYLAND & THE NATION'S CAPITAL

LEARNING TO LEAD

NEWSLETTER

Welcome to Learning to Lead!

January 2018

Leadership for the Long Run

*By Gretchen Martin, Middle School
Teacher, Gilman School*



So often when I am in social contexts I'm asked that inevitable question: "What do you do?" When I respond with, "I teach middle school... BOYS," the reaction is nearly always the same: an incredulous stare, a short laugh, and one word -- "WHY?" In fact, when I first interviewed at Gilman School, I knew that the middle school was the place for me. Our emphasis is on relationship-building and truly knowing the boys before we challenge them to be their best selves. Gilman's Middle School is a crucible for experimentation and learning, with the knowledge that they are loved and supported. Middle school is the perfect place to create a culture of leadership with small actions at a time when students are still forming their sense of selves.

When I was a student, I moved to an independent school for 7th and 8th grade, and despite what I thought were my best efforts, I struggled. I felt out of place as the relatively poor kid in a wealthy environment, I missed my old school, and I just couldn't figure out what I needed to be successful. After a rough 7th grade year, I was fortunate enough to end up in Mr. McIntosh's 8th grade pre-algebra class. While I loved Mr. Mac -- he had been my cross-country coach -- I was terrified of math, and even more terrified of disappointing the coach who I respected so much.

When practice started in August, Mr. Mac started running with me. He would spend the whole run working through problems and encouraging me. He listened to me argue that I would never be good at math, I wasn't smart, and I wasn't a good student. And then he told me to stop complaining; no one ever got better at anything by whining. I became a better math student and a better runner, since I was desperately trying to get fast enough to get away from him. I vividly remember the day when I finally got a 100 on a math quiz. He placed the quiz on my desk, looked me in the eye and said, "No more of this 'I can't do math stuff,' okay?"

For the first time, I actually believed someone when they said I could do this. I believed it in my gut, in my soul, that I could do math, and it transformed me. That small interaction, that one passing moment changed my fundamental identity. Mr. Mac had taken the opportunity to build a relationship with me as a student, and when the moment was right he was able to help push me to be my best self.

Early in my teaching career, I struggled to connect with one of the boys in my advisory. He was a weak student who became frustrated with my efforts to intervene and move him in the right direction.

In his 8th grade year, I forced him to join the honor committee, for which he strongly resented me. He sulked silently for two meetings, but during the third, he finally spoke up when addressing a social justice issue. After the meeting, I thanked him for participating and said how much I enjoyed hearing his opinion. He stayed involved in student organizations, reinvigorating the Gay-Straight Alliance in the Upper School. After his first year of college, he came back and visited me; he had decided to pursue political science and wants to be a community activist. He told me that he realized during his time on the honor committee that he was a leader, that this is the ability that defines his identity.

The power of a good teacher is profound and goes beyond his or her ability to deliver material. A teacher can have the power to shape more than students' knowledge of grammar, but can shape their knowledge of themselves. Recently I was asked what my mantra as an educator would be, and I chose a passage from author Marianne Williamson, who writes, "Our greatest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our greatest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, and not our darkness, that most frightens us."

When looking to create a culture of leadership, we do not need to make major changes right away. If we want our students to be agents of positive change in the world, we need to model that. We need to help our students identify those moments in themselves before they can identify them in others. Look for those small moments where you can impact the lives of your students or colleagues. Do not be frightened by your light, but let it shine and spread and light up your schools and communities.

Student Spotlight -

Brendan Shelley, St. Paul's School Class of 2020



Many high schoolers use the summer to sharpen their skills or to pursue their interests. As a student leader at St. Paul's School in Baltimore, MD, I was looking for a summer leadership experience that would push me out of my comfort zone and help me grow as a leader. I found the perfect program at the Shelton Leadership Challenge. The Challenge is sponsored by the General Hugh Shelton Leadership Center at North Carolina State University which was started by General Shelton upon his retirement as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under Presidents Clinton and Bush. General Shelton is committed to values-based leadership and is dedicated to developing the next generation of leaders grounded in personal integrity, professional ethics, and selfless service.

As a rising 10th grader, I was a little nervous about spending a week away on a college campus without knowing anyone. However, that nervousness didn't last long because the program is all about teamwork. We were immediately introduced to our teammates and after an inspirational introduction we began our first team challenges. Over the week, the teams participated in classroom leadership activities, physical challenges, and nightly activities. The Challenge uses every minute of the program productively and each activity is designed to achieve these specific outcomes:

"Model General Hugh Shelton's values-based leadership principles and traits inclusive of honesty, integrity, compassion, social responsibility and diversity.

Assess baselined leadership skills and preferred practices using Kouzes and Posner's "Leadership Practices Inventory" and a 360-degree reflective model with the incorporation of assigned leadership roles and responsibilities during the week.

Identify important leadership traits and competencies such as interpersonal skills, leadership styles, needs and skills assessment, teamwork, goal orientation, motivating others, personal presence and public speaking, ethical decision making and changing behaviors.

Engage in a youth-adult mentoring civic engagement model to enhance appreciation for social

responsibility and intergenerational respect.

Develop and practice skills related to self and team reflection to better understand deeper meanings while relating current experiences to future applications with the ultimate intent of continuous personal-quality improvement.

Prepare a leadership self-development plan for accomplishment of short-term objectives and life-long goals.”

Courtesy of the Shelton Leadership Program website

The Shelton Leadership Challenge was a spectacular leadership experience because we learned important concepts through interesting and challenging activities. The program provided many opportunities to take responsibility and to lead. However, it was being a member of a team that was the most essential part of this amazing opportunity.

We started off each day with the pledge of allegiance and an overview of that day’s cornerstone value. Part of the program included classroom activities, but they weren’t boring at all. The classroom activities included challenges and projects that made you think and problem solve. The leaders treated us as young adults and we felt that our contributions to the lessons were important and our opinions were respected. We also participated in both a high and a low ropes course with challenges that focused on teamwork. On one of the days, our team did a community service project.

One of the best parts of the week was having so many opportunities to take responsibility, make decisions and to be a leader. In the group projects, you could practice leaderships skills like collaboration, public speaking, and motivating others. In one challenge, the teams competed to see who could build the tallest structure out of newspaper. Since I has been a counselor at a young engineers’ camp for several summers, I spoke up and offered some ideas on how to build a foundation that could support a tall structure which allowed our team to win the challenge. It felt really good to be able to contribute to the success of the team.

On the ropes course, I learned so much about myself. In one situation, I made a decision to help a struggling teammate through the course even though it cost me the opportunity to win. I was really proud when we crossed the finish line together and I felt much more gratified than if I had won the challenge.

While I had a lot of fun at the Shelton Challenge, it was also a very valuable learning experience. With the program’s intensive focus on achieving leadership learning outcomes, I left the week with new skills and perspectives that I am able to utilize in my school and community service activities every day. I am looking forward to applying for the advanced program where a team of Shelton Challenge graduates uses the leadership skills they learned in the first program to independently create and put on a community service project.

The Shelton Leadership Program

at:<https://sheltonleadership.ncsu.edu/youth-shelton-challenge>.

The 2017 Leading Girls Workshop in Review

Jessica Clark, Director of the Center for Ethical Leadership & Service, NCS
Rachael Flores, Director of Diversity & Multicultural Education, NCS



Dozens of educators from around the Washington area came to NCS on Nov. 6 to discuss and learn more about building practices of inclusive leadership for girls in their schools.

The Leading Girls Workshop, presented by the Center for Ethical Leadership and Service, was a chance for teachers, staff, and administrators to examine the existing landscape for female leaders with a focus on how different aspects of their identity affected their path toward leadership. This

exploration included conversations about institutional barriers that women must overcome to achieve and maintain their position and the responsibility schools have to address them. The participants then turned to practices that can encourage today's students to become tomorrow's leaders, working through case studies to glean insights about promoting confidence and mitigating bias.

By the end of the 90-minute session, each educator had substantial research and best practices to take back to her school for implementation, as well as contacts with others in the region who are pursuing similar goals at their institutions.

This is the fourth consecutive year that NCS has led a workshop on girls' leadership, and it was the first open to faculty and staff from coed schools. The organizers of the session were Rachael Flores, the director of diversity and multicultural education, and Jessica Clark, dean of student life and director of the Center for Ethical Leadership and Service.

Inspiring Student Leadership through the Teacher-Coach Model

By Joe Ali, French Teacher & Coach, Calvert School



There are a handful of additional responsibilities that comes with being a teacher. Helping out with duties, advising students, helping out with drives and fundraisers – but what more and more schools are pushing now is the Teacher-Coach model in sports.

As we are so often confined to the four walls of our classroom, stepping out on the field or court with students in a new mind-set can prove to be beneficial to not only the students but the coaches as well. The challenges that students often face in a classroom differ greatly from those on the sports field allowing teachers to see different personalities and successes from students.

The role of coach is not so different from the role of an educator in the classroom. We are there to be role models for our students while also providing the athletes with the necessary tools needed to succeed. With no need to assign homework or assess students with letter grades while out on the field, the feedback we are required to give our athletes is much more personal and sincere rather than something being right or wrong.

Not only does the role of coach empower the educator to learn new ways to communicate feedback with students, but it also shows the student a totally different side of the teacher. I am a firm believer in relationship over content as a model of how to be an effective educator for adolescents – and being a coach allows me to create relationships with students I don't have in class as well as strengthen the bonds we have created together between four walls.

I have always enjoyed the ability to be outside and working with kids on a sports team because of the camaraderie and sense of community that happens over the course of a season. In class, a student may succeed or fail alone – but a team struggles triumphs collectively. As we teach our students the importance of identifying their strengths and weaknesses in the classroom, a coach can help students identify when a teammate is struggling and how to best bring them up – whether it's a pat on the back or words of encouragement; this can all be transferred back to the classroom.

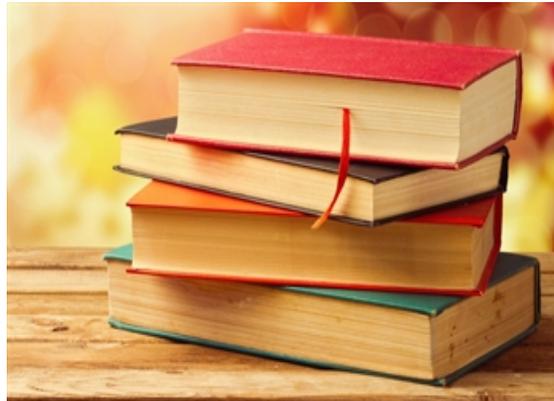
A student in Baltimore said, "I love having my soccer coach as my teacher. He knows how to approach me when I'm struggling and has really helped me feel comfortable in his classroom, sometimes his energy and positivity make me feel like I'm in the middle of a game when we're in class!" This proves that the energy and transference of positive coaching practices can help students in the classroom.

It's CLEAR to students when their teacher is passionate about the subject they teach, and it's just as CLEAR when the coach is passionate about the sport they are coaching. What students sometimes lack from their coach is the passion for helping the child achieve their personal goals and grow as a student and athlete collectively. When a teacher becomes a coach, the students can quickly see that

this coach isn't doing this task for their own benefit – they want to help! There's an unfortunate stigma around youth coaches that many of the coaches are more worried about their own win/loss record rather than developing the essential character and leadership skills for the athletes. Teachers that dedicate their own time to also coaching are the types of leaders our students look up to when on a team. They feel comfortable and trust the teacher – plus, the sports field allows for a little more relaxed atmosphere because the kids know they aren't being graded. Instead, these kids are working their hardest because they know they will be rewarded with playing time.

We can help students become better leaders and members of the community if we show the kids we care. By dedicating additional time each day as a coach, students see the passion and enjoyment we have with working with kids and helping them achieve their goals. So if you're a teacher and have been thinking about trying out coaching, take a leap of faith and you'll soon realize how impactful we can be in our students' lives in and outside of the classroom.

Composing the Leadership Classroom - or - How I Learned Not To Teach Plutarch



Beau Dagenais, 12th Grade Dean, Boys' Latin School of Maryland

A few years ago my colleague Jimmy Morrissey and I stumbled into a better deal than we were able to recognize at the time: "Team-teach two sections of a leadership course for upperclassmen each year as a part of a new interdisciplinary program," our administration said. No set curriculum. No real charge other than a commitment to an unconventional vision of teaching and learning and a commitment to long-term community building. We would have three consecutive semesters with each group before serving as semester-long advisors for culminating independent projects. We said yes quickly and loudly; I gave up a section of sophomore English, Jimmy jettisoned some Precalculus.

We had a few months to plan--time that amounted to staring at the big question of what a leadership class should look like. What should we teach? What should we read? What should we experience? The beauty (and terror) of a project like this is that it's totally wide open. Everything is fair game. I know how to construct an English curriculum, but a leadership curriculum is a different animal.

So I kept talking about Plutarch.

Emerson calls Plutarch's Lives "a bible for heroes." That sounds like leadership to me. I kept telling Jimmy how much we needed Plutarch's "Lycurgus" and "Solon" early in the leadership experience we were planning. I couldn't wait to think about how a leader persuades people to be virtuous or inspires a love for justice. I dreamed of seminars poring over Plutarch and discussions after reading Lincoln's letters or Machiavelli. I dreamed of a version of my AP Literature classroom.

(Jimmy's good at harnessing my enthusiasm: he can bring clouds down to earth. He didn't say no to Plutarch. He let me figure it out for myself.)

--

While Jimmy and I occupied the heady space of planning a leadership curriculum without ever teaching a class, we wondered (and still wonder) what the leadership classroom should look like. It didn't take long to agree that it was a place--like any other good classroom--that should be driven by relationships.

And we thought about what students of leadership need. After three years, we're still figuring it out, but here's what we've seen:

Our students need confidence.
Many need someone to listen.

Many need to be encouraged to find and exercise their voice.
They need to belong to a community.
They need praise and recognition.
They need to feel valued and challenged and capable.
And love. They need love. (Less Plutarch. More love.)
They need the same things that all students need.

Of course students of leadership need skills and knowledge too. But those needs are secondary. The primary needs--love, belonging, self-esteem--are heaviest. We see leadership class as a place to devote time and energy towards these needs. It didn't take long for us to realize that the leadership classroom offers an opportunity to meet these primary needs, needs that get short shrift in many traditional academic settings.

Our students sign up for the class for a reason, we always hope. On the first day of class, some of the reasons included:

"I want to become a better listener."

"I get nervous talking in front of people and it kills me. I want to get over it."

"I want to find something I'm really interested in."

"I heard that this class can help make you a better person."

"I get frustrated that I get really angry. I want to work on that."

"I hope that I can force myself to be more outgoing."

"I like helping other people."

I'm amazed at how so many students inherently understand that working on leadership means working on yourself, how it's internal before it can be external. So we try to find programmatic ways to build character and confidence and foster healthy relationships. We try to build a community that encourages dialogue and reflection. All in the hope that it moves us toward knowledge that matters, knowledge that teaches us how to live, knowledge that, to use bell hooks's phrase, "enhances [our] capacity to live fully and deeply."

So we spend time redefining leadership and debunking the old top-down paradigm. We read and talk about and practice Servant Leadership and Adaptive Leadership. We celebrate authenticity and character and relationships and vulnerability as necessities for a leader. We do case studies and role plays. We watch many TED talks. And we read more. We practice pitches and presentations. We cultivate our grit.

--

After three years of team teaching Leadership, Jimmy and I still don't know what we're doing. I think that's a good thing. At the very least, we try to look at what's happening while it's happening. We always say, stealing Kate Wade's phrase, that "we're building the airplane as we're flying it." Writing about writing, Sarah Manguso says, "Slowly, slowly, I accumulate sentences. I have no idea what I'm doing until suddenly it reveals itself, almost done."

Montaigne, better than most at understanding the liminal space we occupy, said, "If my mind could gain a firm footing I would not make essays. I would make decisions. But it is always in apprenticeship and on trial." Over and over and over again I tell my AP Literature students that the word "essay" comes from the French verb *essayer*, "to attempt." It helps. Each essay is an attempt at knowledge. An ongoing project.

--

I once had to tell a student that he didn't win a class election. I dreaded it. Before opening the door to let him into my office, I remember thinking, "This is going to be hard."

It was a beautiful spring afternoon in Baltimore. Full of promise and lazy warmth. New blossoms and seasonal allergies. It smelled like summer. And I had to tell one of the best kids that he was out of the running for student body office. The votes hadn't fallen for him. And I knew how much this student had wanted it.

I tried to prepare. I thought about my body language and tone of voice and how I'd occupy the physical space to let the student know he was loved and valued. I thought about my words. I tried to be intentional. He walked in. I gave the young man the news and immediately said something vapid. Trivial nonsense about it being a tough way to end the day. He was disappointed. We talked for a while. At one point he looked at me and said something I haven't forgotten: "It's a good day. Don't worry about it," he smiled. "I get to decide whether my day is good or bad. Your class helped to teach

me that.”

--

A fundamental mystery of teaching--and teaching leadership reminds me every day--is that we don't know what we're doing. I mean it in the best possible way: we teach and we teach and we teach and we don't know what exactly is happening or what is going to happen. We don't know what effect we're having on our students and on ourselves. (This point seems obvious but I always find myself forgetting.) A mystery and a rare kind of joy: hidden gifts and unexpected surprises.

Lead a Workshop!

Interested in leading a workshop at our Learning to Lead Conference in 2018?

[Click Here!](#)

Write an Article!

Interested in writing an article for our Learning to Lead Newsletter?

[Click Here!](#)

Read a Previous Issue!

[Issue One](#)

[Issue Two](#)

[Issue Three](#)