

PARK TUDOR

Commencement May 20, 2018
Head of School Gareth Vaughan

Welcome to the Park Tudor School Commencement Ceremony for the Class of 2018.

This week we have had the opportunity to recognize the accomplishments of the class in various ways and at various events, and so today I decided to spend a little time reflecting on the nature of education and in particular, the nature of a Park Tudor education and the impact we aspire for it to have on the lives of our students.

In the foyer of Teacher's College at Columbia University is a bust of the pragmatic philosopher and educationalist John Dewey (incidentally not the Dewey of library catalogs).

I have always been drawn to Dewey's work. His writing can be dense and repetitive. I had a professor at Columbia who bemoaned the fact that Dewey wrote without the benefit of a really good editor.

But Dewey sits for me in the perfect place on the educational continuum, equidistant between the strictly traditional, teacher-centric approach and the experiential free thinkers.

He advanced the theory of schools as a "community of inquiry." His idea was that students, working together with a teacher – sometimes as a guide, sometimes as an advisor, sometimes as an observer, but also as an equal participant in the learning – would create the best educational environment. He believed that teachers also learned from their students.

Patricia Shields writing about Pragmatism offers a metaphor for the community of inquiry. It makes use of the old Buddhist parable of the blind men confronted by an elephant. The one who touched the leg thought he had found a tree. The one who touched the trunk thought he had found a rope. They all argued about what they had discovered from the narrow confines of their individual experiences and so could not reach any conclusion. If they had formed a community of inquiry, so the argument goes, they would have shared their experiences with an open mind and thus realized they were facing an elephant.

I had lunch last week with a graduate of Park School Class of '59 and I asked him what were the elements of his Park education that still resonated with him almost 60 years after he graduated. He talked about the friends he made and still had from his class and the very special connection he had at school, and for many years afterwards, with his English teacher, Mr. Foxlow, for whom one of the Park Tudor Upper School prizes is named.

I cannot imagine that kind of student-teacher connection enduring if Mr. Foxlow's approach to education was to be only the expert at the front of the room. I think that at the heart of lasting student-teacher relationships, and particularly at Park Tudor, is the acknowledgement that we are all members of a community of learning. And that teaching and learning does not flow in one direction from scholar to scribe, from teacher to student, but that we learn from one another, that education is a two-way process.

I know that in the short time we have been together I have learnt from you.

Poem, *Lessons of Another Kind* by Leslie Owen Wilson

<https://thesecondprinciple.com/homepage/poetry-corner-poems-teaching-learning/lessons-another-kind/>

I sincerely hope that you have a Park Tudor teacher in your life that will be your Mr. Foxlow.