

School District of BELOIT

David Garcia | Professional Educator, Fruzen Intermediate

December 2021 – Through The Iris

I love the colors nature emits

I am fascinated by the majestic beauty that surrounds our natural environment. Nothing soothes my soul (not even rock music) like the natural tones set by multi-colored fall leaves against a skillfully layered blue sky backdrop. On my phone, I store more than 300 photos of early sunrises and late sunsets. Photographing mages with mesmerizing skies has recently become a personal hobby for me. When I carefully compare most of these photos, it amazes me that no two sunrises or sunsets are the same.

Build a colorful kaleidoscope of human connections

During the frigid winter months, my family and I enjoy taking nature walks near a local township cemetery close to our home. Last year, we discovered three American Bald eagles roosting high on some distant trees on a field; two grown adults and a young squawking immature eagle that cries out while flapping its wings as though to grab the attention of its parents. Now, we cannot wait for winter to arrive, so we can trek through the tundra along the rushing river to witness nature unfold right before our binoculars high up in the branchless trees. On our nature hikes, the mysteries created by living systems we discover along our path remind me that learning should imitate an adventure that is always open to pursuing new discoveries. This endless adventure should also lead us on numerous expeditions that expose us to colorful inquiries that produce continual questions rather than thoughtless answers; yes or no answers. Through these journeys, we as human beings can begin to discover the world we live in and use our differences to build a colorful kaleidoscope of human connections.

This journey should not be strictly about discovering ourselves because we risk creating isolating barbed wire fences that could breed irritations. These irritations can deeply divide us through our infatuation with ourselves. As an intricate web of complex human interconnections, learning should imitate an active biological system that seeks to create, evolve, and nourish life, not kill it.

On the other hand, schooling and education in their most current form impart the truth as a means to an end. A process in which learning resembles an immovable rusted mechanical conveyor system that forges raw lifeless malleable steel into melancholy

School District of BELOIT

silhouettes that dance to a necrotic symphony of nothingness. This outdated process yields students to be seen as controllable beings because the system works to control how the world enters them and does not consider the colorful world students bring to learning.

In addition, taught in this automated design are independent jigsaw pieces (math, reading, science, writing, social studies) that fail to connect and make connections with students' lives and the world that goes on around them. It's as though this lifeless information is seen as money that can be deposited into an account only to be retrieved later. Learning does not occur in the context of the four classroom walls; it extends out like green branches representing school subjects within a colorful ecosystem that thrives amongst dead weeds.

Like a complex system of life, learning should be guided by more questions

As an illustration, to compare the world of color with a world with no color, I refer to the novel, *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. *The Giver* is about a stale and colorless society that serves as a dark contrast to nature's ever-evolving active living systems. It is also a story about a futuristic utopian society where community members experience sameness. The novel is written from the perspective of an eleven-year-old boy named Jonas. Jonas is a bit different than most other society members in that he has pale eyes; most others have dark eyes. Jonas possesses the unusual ability to perceive things that change in terms of color. The rest of society is not aware that things have color. Color is as absent as pain and fear. For example, Jonas saw the color red in an apple, in Fiona's hair, and in people's faces at a ceremony since human tissue has red color in it.

As I reflect on my love for nature and *The Giver* novel from an educational perspective, I cannot imagine myself as a teacher not seeing my students through more color. Even in the face of the challenging, risky situations my students experience at home that might place them at risk for failure in life, I adjust the knobs in my eyes to zero in on the colors my students emit. My focus should be on what my students can do and not what I think they cannot do. It is so easy to zero in on the negative colors than the positive ones. Despite some of my students demonstrating shades of grey representing challenging attitudes, behaviors, or social situations at home, I amplify the lens to let their colors overcome those dark, dreary colors that could cast a dark shadow on their destinies.

School District of BELOIT

I must ask myself some tough reflective questions

In addition, whatever specialized teacher training I have accumulated should not blind me to neglect equitable behaviors that might enable my students. I must be aware of the implications my teaching methods or strategies have on my students. Why do I treat certain students the way I do? What am I doing to actively change the system to give all students a chance to succeed in school and life? Am I aware that how I use specific teaching strategies leaves a particular group of students out of the educational process? Do I teach to unearth my students' potential, or do I make them live out bleak destinies brought forth from humiliation and shame I might impose on them?

Students see themselves through our eyes

We can choose to blanket our students with colorful, positive, and dignified colors for them to radiate, or we can bury their self-respect with dark shades of grey. Our students bring to our classrooms vast color experiences grown from their everyday curiosity to belong somewhere. Every positive colorful human interaction we have with them should act as a paint stroke on their inner art canvas to be utilized as a tool to navigate through life's journey. We have to enable them and not disable them with our tendency to use sharp tongues.

If we emit a dreary outlook to our students, they will likely follow through on those perceptions. The goal in our interactions with our students must be to inscribe a sincere and vigorous work of art that shines with a "can do" and "capable" disposition to confront a world in need of transformation. A world, as I write, that increasingly gets violent, hateful, discriminatory, and insensitive towards humankind.

How will you choose to adjust your iris and look at your students this year?