

In the fall of 2016, I wrote a proposal to the Parents Association thinking that I might be awarded the opportunity to have a particular experience. However of course, the reality always goes differently than planned. And that's the greatest thing, especially for a teacher: to be confronted with unknown experiences and opportunities for learning. Educator, Lucy Calkins, asks our children to use the phrase, "I used to think..., but now I'm thinking..." I like this one because it's slightly different than "I used to think..., but now I know..." I'm up here now acknowledging that it's really hard to quantify and show the learning that's happened, but realizing that this process of grappling is exactly the stuff that good learning is made of.

Thanks to the Parents' Association, I was lucky enough to travel to Greece last summer. I used to think that I'd travel there and I'd bring back all this critical information for my students to learn, but now I'm thinking that it's much more complicated than that. What I found is, unsurprisingly, that ancient Greek history is really, really vast, and that I needed to be in the complicated role of student while I was there. I found myself in wonder wandering these different museums and archaeological sites, asking questions, being confused, and trying to get all the pieces straight in my head. I found myself constantly checking the Greek timeline and the Greek map and trying so hard to place events along the continuum. I found myself staring, mouth agape, at the looming Parthenon which gazes upon you everywhere you step in Athens--as it has for thousands of years. I found myself so immersed in this wide-eyed learning that, honestly, it was hard to keep the fourth graders in perspective. I used to think I would learn a whole lot of information and bring it back for the students to ingest, but now I'm thinking that learning doesn't work that way. It's written in our own *New Face of Rigor* which says, "We know it is no longer enough to require the memorization of important facts and figures....We know that Brookwood students must come to love learning, for it is a process in which they will necessarily be engaged for the rest of their lives." This exciting learning process was one that I felt tangibly when I was there in Greece. Though I tried to keep this somewhat dictionary definition stance of teacher--bringing back ideas and information for my students--I continued to fall back into this happy world of unknowing and learning; the world we hope and expect our students to be a part.

It's been a wonderfully challenging puzzle to put this piece together for you today, too. I used to think that I'd bring to you excerpts from the fourth grade plays; however, now I'm thinking that it was the student experience of learning the characters, of building the sets, of making costumes, of understanding the Greek Myths, and of learning to negotiate within their small groups that was important. It was their experience that was so important and that if I simply showed you their final product, even if I curated some grand performance for you, it would take away from the real learning that happened inside our classroom.

So too was my experience in Greece. I could show you images from my journey (which I have and I will if you want!) and share with you clips of the incredible learning that I took away. However, the most important learnings have much more to do with my experiences of learning--of being a student--that I had while I was there and the momentum that came back with me to the classroom.

For example, I used to think that while I was in Greece, I would focus on learning more about classical Greek theater and mythology, with the hopes that this information would impact the way the students were able to work on their Greek Plays at Brookwood, but when I got there, I, interestingly enough, started to think much more about other things--the history of the Parthenon, for example, particularly caught my attention. The history of that building is way more incredible and vast than I

knew before visiting Athens. I used to think that it was a significant structure in the history of Classical Greece, but now I'm thinking about how many different groups claimed ownership to it, about how many different uses it had over time, and amazingly about how Countries--to this day--are still arguing over who "owns" various parts of the Parthenon!

Being open to learning about The Parthenon in this way created a helpful touchpoint for me to learn so much more about the overarching history of Greece overall. And, this realization impacted the way that we're shaping our social studies curriculum. We're creating more opportunities for students to find their own touchpoints for the units we teach about in fourth grade: ancient Greece, China, and Egypt. We are asking students to be more and more independent in their learning, finding touchpoints of their own and navigating their interests so that they really love learning. For example, after learning some background information about ancient China as a whole class, we released the students to do their own research on whatever topic they found to be most interesting: the terracotta warriors, ancient Chinese medicine, inventions, you name it. They just finished up presenting about these topics, and as an audience member, the enthusiasm around knowledge-building was just so real.

Coming back to Brookwood after my experience in Greece, I'm thinking about how cool learning is! While I didn't exactly curate the learning experiences for the students that I expected to curate, I stand before you right now a better student myself as well as a more excited educator. I'm so grateful for the opportunity that I had to travel to Greece, and I'm looking forward to the ways that it continues to impact both my teaching and my thinking about learning. So, thank you Parents Association!