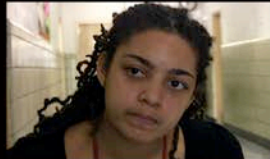
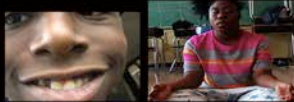


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"Unusually frank...remarkably engaging documentary."
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"The New Public...is a fine addition to the larger conversation and has theatrical appeal." – John DeFore, Hollywood Reporter



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www.thenewpublicmovie.com



DISCUSSION GUIDE

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Introduction

The School

Brooklyn Community Arts and Media (BCAM) High School is a small public school that opened in fall 2006. The school currently enrolls approximately 430 students in grades 9-12. BCAM is designed to personalize the education experience in a way that cannot be achieved by large, comprehensive high schools. The school emphasizes the importance of strong family and community partnerships. It is focused on providing an active, inquiry-based, college-preparatory academic experience that also emphasizes visual/performing arts and media studies.

BCAM is not a charter school, thus the school and its students must adhere to all New York City Department of Education academic, graduation and budgetary guidelines. The school has an unscreened, open enrollment entrance policy that permits any New York City student to apply and be admitted without prerequisite or special proficiency. A large percentage of students enter significantly below grade level. This admission process is in keeping with BCAM's mission to make high-quality education accessible to a community that is often excluded from the highly tiered and selective New York City Department of Education high school system.

The Film

Collaboration is a core value at BCAM and the filmmakers chose to mirror that collaborative spirit in the filmmaking process. From the beginning of the project, cameras were circulated throughout the community, and much of this footage was incorporated into the final cut of the film. The filmmakers' intent was to tell the BCAM story in an honest, three-dimensional way. Unlike films that fit their content to create a narrative that drives toward a specific and often message-driven resolution, *The New Public* follows the school's idealistic and, for the most part, novice teachers where their stories take them. It shows rather than tells. The open nature of the film allows viewers to enter the narrative and make meaning of the experience in discussion with one another. This guide has been written to support that process. While these conversations can move in many different directions, it is anticipated that they will raise a number of overlapping questions. These might include:

- Can a teacher be idealistic and realistic at the same time?
- Can a teacher adapt and change without giving up core values and beliefs?
- Can a school adapt and change without giving up its core mission?
- What should a "good" school aspire to achieve?
- Who gets to tell the story of a school? How many true versions can there be?
- Can individual teachers use stories to transform experience – including crushing failure – in ways that create meaning for their own professional and personal lives?
- What is the job of a school?
- Is the job of a school achievable?

Discussion Protocol

Group size: 10+ (The structure may need to be adapted for groups larger than 20 people.)

Time: 3 hours (Includes viewing the film,)

Pre-Screening: Establishing Group Norms (Approximately 15 minutes)

In order to create an open and honest dialogue around the film, we encourage facilitators to quickly establish a safe and supportive environment for participants. Thus, the following *Norming Protocol* might be particularly helpful to encourage rich dialogue.

Ask participants to sit or stand in a circle so that everyone can see each other. Circles encourage openness and unity.

1. Welcome:

- a. Welcome participants and frame the purpose of the screening. For example, you might begin by saying:

"Welcome. I'm excited for us to engage in this very important conversation about public education in our communities. In a few minutes, we will begin viewing the film The New Public. This documentary, filmed in Brooklyn, New York, is about the first four years in a new small school."

- b. Introductions: Quick go-around with names and role or school.

[For a large group, ask participants to stand up if they ... graduated from high school less than 10 years ago; have started a school; have taught in a school; went to an urban school; are parents; etc.]

The facilitator might model this by saying: *"Hi, I'm _____ . I am a [fill in role] from _____."*

- c. Ask participants: *"What do you notice about who we are in this room?"*

Ask the group for a few responses. Some examples of responses might be:

- *"We are diverse in our age and where we are from."*
- *"Most of us have started schools."*
- *"Some of us are principals while others are teachers."*
- *"We have many perspectives: parents, community members, students, etc."*

2. Norms:

"In order to make sure that we are able to have a rich and meaningful dialogue about public schooling, we want to make sure we establish a safe space. To do that we are going to spend a few minutes naming our Norms for discussion (these will help us make sure that our voices are heard and honored and allow us to explore the complexities of urban education)."

- a. Turn and talk.

"Turn and talk to the person standing next to you about one thing you need in order to feel safe contributing to a dialogue."

- b. Ask for responses and record them on chart paper.

[For a large group, post the norms and ask for one or two responses or additions to them from the audience.]

"Let's take four or five comments from the group. What is one thing your partner(s) said that really resonated with your group and you feel is important for the whole group to hear?"

Sample responses might be:

- *"Be open to all opinions."*
- *"Don't jump to judgment, assume the best intentions."*
- *"Speak from your own experience, not in generalities."*
- *"There is room for all voices to be heard."*

- c. Ask participants to look at the chart paper and read the list aloud.
“Are there any norms that are missing from this list that you feel are really important to your participation today?” [If yes, add those to the list.]
 - d. Ask participants to give a “thumbs up” that they agree to the norms.
3. Framing the Film:
- a. Background about the film.
“Read the opening paragraphs from the discussion guide.”
 - b. A lens for viewing.
“As you view the film, you may be struck by the humanity of the students and teachers. Just as we are suspending our judgment of each other, I would invite you to consider what questions the film, and its characters, raises for you as you watch.”

Screening *The New Public*

Post Screening: Engaging in Dialogue About the Film (Approximately 45-60 minutes)

1. Return to Norms (5 minutes)
 Ask participants to re-read the norms from the beginning of the session and to keep these in mind as they engage in a dialogue together.
2. What film did you see when you watched *The New Public*?
 - a. *“Before it fades, think back to the strongest image you have from the film – the scene or sequence that will stay with you the longest – and jot down what you see.”*
 - i. Turn and talk.
 1. *“Pair with one other person to listen and share. Please explain why you chose a scene or sequence.”*
 - ii. Share the selections each group made.
 [For a large group, ask for five participants to share the scene or sequence briefly, then, ask the audience the questions below. Summarize their responses.]
 - *“What do you notice?”*
 - *“Did everyone see the same film?”*
 - *“What are the variations?”*
 - *“Why might those variations occur?”*
3. Discussion prompts.
 Choose one or all of the following prompts to guide your discussion. Depending on the time allotted, this may take 30 minutes to an hour. If the group is large, consider breaking into smaller groups and reporting out or choosing only one of the options below.

Option 1: What is the story of BCAM? How might the following people respond to this question?

- James O'Brien, the principal
- Kevin Greer and the other teachers
- Moses
- Lateefah
- John
- Earline Tribble, Moses's mother
- The filmmaker

Option 2: What questions does the film raise for you about the BCAM story in particular and building a school in general?

[For a large group, ask participants to write their questions on index cards, or chart a list of questions from the audience. Ask the audience to respond to the questions from the perspective of characters in the film and the filmmaker.]

Option 3: Use one or more of the following specific quotations or critical moments to trigger other thoughts about the BCAM story.

The following prompts might help guide the discussion. Consider either posting the quotations, reading them individually, cutting them up and pulling them out of a hat, and/or asking participants to raise their own quotations for discussion.

JAMES O'BRIEN, principal: *"I think what will make me a good principal will be what made me a very good point guard. I think my job is to make everyone around me better."*

PRINCIPAL O'BRIEN'S discussion with faculty and students about whether or not to expel the students who stole the laptops.

PRINCIPAL O'BRIEN'S discussion with parents about whether or not to scan students every day.

PRINCIPAL O'BRIEN [about how he feels on graduation day]: *"Triumphant, but not overly romantically triumphant."*

JOHN DARGAN, student: *"You're a very strong person, but I am very sensitive, and it make me uncomfortable to cry in front of you. Because if you cry, it doesn't show you are a real man or whatever. That's what people say."*

JOHN: *"What made you a strong person, Mommy? Because I need some pointers. Because it's hard for me to be strong."*

JOHN: *"I don't like to argue with my mother. So I spend all my time outside the house because there won't be any arguments. It's not a home anymore. That's why I need to go to college, need to go away."*

KEVIN GREER, English teacher [on urban teaching]: *"You're pushing this boulder up a hill and it's eternally falling back on you. But, while it may not be the complete answer, I do believe that schools are their best chance."*

KEVIN GREER: *"The thing is, I need to meet the students where they are. It can't be my thing. It has to be their thing."*

KEVIN GREER: *"Most kids want to learn, the reason they resist is because they don't know how to do the work. So they do exactly what I'd do, which is to avoid it. We like to do things we're good at, we hate to do the things we're bad at."*

LAVIE RAVEN, English teacher: *"If you provide too much of a democratic environment or an open environment then space will open up for looseness, for bad behavior. These kids get away with too much."*

LAVIE RAVEN: *"Education is an experience – a life experience – so instead of just teaching the content, why not create a community dynamic? Now obviously the class doesn't have to be called Next Sun Rising. It could be called Reading 1."*

JESSICA VALORIS, college advisor: *"I don't know if it was thoroughly thought out about what it means to have a school in the middle of Bed-Stuy ... to be working with black children who are dealing with a whole plethora of issues going on around our community. There needs to be a conversation with all teachers around race, class. But we're so focused on getting students to graduate, that there isn't really space for that conversation."*

LATEEFAH, student: *"I don't think you can leave [your baggage] at the door because every time you try to get over it, you can't. Because there's still going to be that one thing in the back of your mind that's bugging you. So you can't. But you can try."*

LATEEFAH [to young men who tease her]: *"You don't fight girls? Then bring me a girl. Next Tuesday, bring me a girl. I'm going to sit there and be scared over three dummies? That's a laugh."*

EARLENE, Moses's mother: *"Honestly, I could care less about the rapping, I could care less about the dancing. I mean, Moses, God knows, when you're on stage, love it. But I want to see the grades."*

MOSES: *"They really think that they know what's best for me. Nah. I'm alright, thank you."*

MOSES SR., Moses's father: *"I'm over here because I had to remind you of the fact that when things go bad, remember that you have a stone, a brink, a rock to rest on. [There are] people [that] don't have that."*

CHARLENE FRAVIEN, guidance counselor [the night before graduation]: *"I did not sleep well last night. It was kind of like the night before my wedding." [Filmmaker asks, "So is it a success?"] "I think we did create meaningful relationships with the students, and the students also with each other – and I'm not looking at numbers for that."*

- How do you respond to these moments?
- Do they pinpoint ideas, issues or problems you think are important to the story of the school?
- Do the ideas or issues have significance beyond the BCAM story?
- Is there any controversy embedded in these moments?
- What questions might a BCAM skeptic ask about this moment?
- How might a BCAM supporter respond to those questions?

4. Wrapping up discussion: One lesson or take-away.

As the time draws to a close, ask participants to consider one lesson or take-away they have from the conversation. In no less than a word and no more than a sentence, ask participants to share their take-away with the group (go around so that everyone's voice can be heard; if the group is large, ask for volunteers).

NOTES.