



BESANT HILL SCHOOL
est. 1946

VISITING SCHOLAR: David Wandera

AUTHOR: MARY SPENCE

In February of 2020, Dr. David Bwire Wandera, an Assistant Professor at The College of New Jersey, visited our community for two days. David learned of Besant Hill during his work at the Middlebury Bread Loaf School of English (BLSE), a graduate program that runs during the summers in the mountains of Vermont. David is the Director of the Writing Center at Bread Loaf, where he helps students connect with tutors and provides support for writing projects. Additionally, he is a coordinator for the Bread Loaf Teacher Network, which is responsible for uniting teachers from around the world to share knowledge, curricula, and support. While at BLSE, David met with Besant Hill English faculty member Mary Spence, who works for the school as part of their Acting Ensemble. Mary knew of David's scholarly pursuits in transcultural literacy practices, multimodal pedagogy in K-12 classrooms, discourse analysis, and the ethnography of communication and research methods. She approached him to discuss the unique diversity in the Besant Hill classrooms, and their conversation was so exciting that they decided David should visit Ojai to experience our community firsthand. Thanks to Shannon Rowan, Portia Johnson, and Alex Smith, a visit was organized and coordinated.

David spent a day at Besant Hill observing classes and taking notes. He met one-on-one with several students, and even got the chance to speak Swahili with Tindi M. '21 and Bibiana M. '21, as David is originally



DAVID WANDERA PRESENTING
IN THE ZALK THEATER

from Kenya and speaks several languages. David was especially interested in our Instructional Support Program (ISP) and our Student Mentoring Program, and he was particularly impressed with our art classes and advisory program. In true *Aún Aprendo* spirit, David held a workshop with the faculty after his observations, providing insightful ideas and personal stories as a window into international students' experiences of studying in the United States. The following day, David held workshops with our students, engaging them in thoughtful exercises to explore their own sense of



DAVID WANDERA VISITED BESANT HILL SCHOOL FOR TWO DAYS FROM NEW JERSEY

diversity and inclusion.

Here are some of David's impressions of Besant Hill:

"I am writing to say thank you for the honor of your invitation to present at your school...I am very grateful for the hospitality extended to me by the entire Besant School community, and I enjoyed my stay there immensely. As I told some folks over there, towards the end of my first day at the school I would be walking about somewhere on the school campus and would hear a student or teacher refer to me by my name which made me feel welcomed in the community. Also, the school is

located in an absolutely beautiful location! Through its robust curriculum, student effort, administrative support, and teacher-initiatives, Besant is doing a lot to achieve communication across difference. Put differently, there are many highlights of my visit and class observations (i.e., some really good work in the way of authentic communication across difference is currently going on at the school)...I came away with a sense that Besant embraces the diversity in the student body (and teaching staff)."

Read more at www.besanthill.org.

Besant Hill School offers a rigorous college preparatory curriculum, including more than 20 art electives, AP-level courses, competitive athletics, engaging fitness program, outdoor education, experiential education programs, small class sizes, and a 4:1 student-teacher ratio.

Aún Aprendo

"I am still learning."

**BESANT HILL SCHOOL
OF HAPPY VALLEY**

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