Boston University Wheelock College of Education
& Human Development

2026 Alumni Award Celebration, Amanda Geduld (Wheelock'18), Raul Fernandez

Raul Fernandez: I will introduce our first awardee in just a moment. But first, I've got to tell you about this kid named Carter, who I was just reading about. Carter, a boy with multiple disabilities in York County, South Carolina, was the first, was in the first grade, the year the suspensions began. By sixth grade, he had been suspended out of school for seven and a half days, and in school about a dozen times. There were lunch suspensions where he sat at a table alone in the cafeteria and bus suspensions, which meant he couldn't ride to school at all.

Carter is one of hundreds of thousands of students with disabilities across the country who are suspended from school each year, but none at a higher rate than those in South Carolina, where the widespread use of "off the book" suspensions circumvents the legal protections that kick in for students with disabilities once they've been kept out of the classroom for more than ten cumulative days.

I know Carter's story and how it demonstrates a broader pattern of inequitable discipline practices in South Carolina and around the country because of Amanda Geduld's writing. Amanda, BU Wheelock Class of 2018, is a reporter at the nonprofit news organization, The 74, which is dedicated to examining the issues impacting the education of America's 74 million children. She is also, I am fortunate to say, one of my former students.

Amanda was a teacher for many years before turning to reporting, and that shows in both the care she takes in her subjects and the critical lens she brings to exposing flaws in our system. Her attention is most often focused on our youngest learners. She covered the federal shutdown that put Head Start at risk for more than 65,000 children, and the weeks after it ended, when thousands of kids still couldn't get back in.

Remaining relentlessly on that beat, she published a survey of more than 150 providers documenting what happened when regional offices serving 22 states were shuttered. Directors learning about it through word of mouth and panic text messages, then boilerplate emails two days later, and then months with no one left to call.

Every one of the kids and educators impacted by this has a story to tell, and Amanda is masterful at finding them and informing us about them so that we can do something about it. That's why Amanda's reporting has been cited by state education departments and by

national policy organizations. And it's why the Education Writers Association has used her work on school discipline to train other education reporters.

Now, I'm not saying that she became what she is today because of the summer she spent in my diversity and justice in education class. I'm not not saying that, but all on her own. And Amanda is brilliant, passionate and formidable, and her talents have been recognized. She has received the Fred M. Hechinger Education Journalism Award, as well as the Pulitzer Travel Fellowship, and now we are proud to award her with the BU Wheelock Young Alumni Award. Please join me in welcoming and congratulating Amanda Geduld.

Amanda Geduld: Good morning. Can everyone hear me okay?

I first want to express my immense gratitude to Boston University. Wheelock College of Education [& Human Development] for this amazing honor. It is particularly special to have this presented by Raul, who when I think of my time at BU, is a professor I continually return to as one of inspiration. So maybe you can take the credit.

I was teaching high school in Roxbury when I was enrolled at Wheelock, and it's kind of a magical thing to be both a teacher and a student at the same time. I think it makes you a more critical student and hopefully a better teacher. I remember sitting in Raul's class and thinking, this, this is what I want a classroom to feel like.

While I don't remember everything I read in grad school. Apologies. I can name and frequently return to the texts we read and discussed in his class that helped to shape my view of the inequity that plagues our education system today. It was in his class that I had the earliest memory of being introduced to the work of Nikole Hannah-Jones, who writes extensively about inequity and education and inspires just about everything I write today.

While I was formally trained in teaching and pedagogy at BU, I like to think my earliest experiences in the classroom began many years before. When as an eight-year-old, I would design math and reading lessons for my favorite stuffed animals.

Fast forward 12 years or so, and I found myself in the most rewarding, excruciating, and intellectually challenging job I could have ever imagined. I loved so much about the six years I spent in classrooms in Boston and New York, but I also found myself so deeply angered by the systems, and I felt so helpless.

During that time, I was repeatedly drawn to investigative journalism, wanting to write about and expose what I saw while centering the voices of those most impacted: teachers, students and parents. I remember at my first teaching job, after perhaps a bit to frequently voicing my frustrations, being told by a boss no one likes a whistleblower.

Seven years later, when I began my training as a journalist, a professor said, those who thrive as investigative journalists are those who have a low threshold for indignation. I felt like I was finally where I belonged.

Within the field, education journalism is often viewed as a place where you pay your dues until you move on to real beats like politics. But this framing misses so much. Our education system is inherent to every other system that touches our lives, politics, housing, health care, carceral systems, and so much more.

For me, education journalism isn't a stop on the way to a desired career. It is the desired career. And I'm so grateful to work for a newsroom that centers that coverage every day. Because of my time in the classroom, I know not only what stories I wanted to tell, but also what stories were going untold. Illegal withholding of services, not just English language learners, but also to their families. Grade inflation that benefited schools while harming kids. Exclusionary discipline for students of color like Carter and those with IEPs.

The work I do today would not be possible without the time I spent in the classroom, and those years wouldn't be possible without the immense learning and growth I did at BU. A few quick thank you's. I grew up in institutions that didn't always value teachers or view teaching as a worthy career, but that message was always countered around the dinner table by my dad, who is here tonight.His sister, Eileen, who died before I was born, but whom I was named after and remains my greatest inspiration, was an incredible leader in New York City public schools, and to him, there was no better thing to be. Thank you for always being my biggest cheerleader and believing the path that serves the most is always the most important one.

I also want to thank my editor, BU alum, Kathy Moore, who couldn't be here today, for taking a chance on a baby journalist with essentially zero experience because she believed deeply my time in the classroom would benefit our newsroom. And thank you to her for being my partner in this work each and every day.

I can't close this out without thanking the classroom for giving me the greatest personal gift I could have asked for. My wife, also here, who started off as my co-teacher a little over a decade ago. Thank you for being my tied for number one biggest cheerleader, keeping me focus while I'm in deadline, and reminding me of why this work is so important to us both.

I also want to add a quick thank you, inspired by Carter to all of the families, teachers, students who trust me with their stories every day. This work would not be possible without them.

I'll just close with a quick plug. Please read the work of nonprofit education newsrooms. Read my newsroom, The 74, but also read Shock Beat, Hechinger, all the small, scrappy

nonprofits working day in and day out to hold this administration and this country accountable for what happens to our most vulnerable students inside our classroom walls. We need it now more than ever. Thank you.