

Friday Reflection

1/18/2019

Despite the atypical Southern California weather, this was a typical week packed with curricular and extra-curricular activity. One of the days, however, seemed to sum up my entire week. Wednesday is fixed in the center of a weekly school calendar, and this particular Wednesday proved to be the center piece of my experiences this week.

Mrs. Burgess, one of our French teachers, scheduled a field trip to LA to visit an art museum. After several requests, I decided to clear my calendar on Wednesday to help with their supervision. There are many field trips in a year from our school and I rarely attend because of my daily responsibilities. However, upon reflection, I thought there might be value for me to experience this event with French and Photography students so that I could gain a deeper understanding of the purpose behind this annual trek.

It started in the morning just before our normal start time of 7:45, when I met students at the Tustin train station already gathering for the excursion. Some students I recognized well and others not as much. I quickly started to acquire more names for my morning greeting sessions. I think it is valuable to greet students and teachers as they start their day, but it is that much more powerful when I can use their name. On a school tour this week, some parents heard that I knew the name of every student- I quickly dispelled that myth. I try; and names are important, but I have to work at it every day. Wednesday was a good day to commit several other students' names to memory.

It turned out that we had 44 students participating in this field trip. About a third of them were French students, while the rest were Photography students. We piled in the train together and headed to LA Union Station. The ride started a bit awkwardly as we found ourselves on the quiet train, learning quickly that it is appropriately named. Our students were extremely respectful on the entire trip but, keeping 44 excited high school students completely quiet was not only impossible, but not needed. We just moved down to the next car.

Students talked and chatted on their way down, and it gave me an opportunity to get to know our students and teachers in a different way outside the normal school experience. I gained such insight into the high points and challenges our students face. One young man, who has some additional challenges compared to most students his age, openly shared his reality. It was fascinating to learn about life from his perspective. What was even more impressive was the reaction of two other students sitting opposite him. They listened, asked questions, and offered genuine encouragement. Probably what this boy didn't know is that these girls also shared some challenges in their lives that might not be as visible on the surface.

Something else I picked up from these students was how they cherished meaningful aspects of their senior year. Students always want their time in high school to rush by, but seniors often start to understand the transition that awaits. Senior year is both special and scary. Scary because decisions need to be made and plans determined for how they will spend their time after high school. There are so many unknowns and uncertainties about things like applying to college and

financial aid. Some of the conversations I heard from students on the train reassured me that the efforts our counselors dedicate to creating explicit information and options is so supportive. For example, last night, over 100 parents and students received hands on support for applying to college and financial aid. I saw the gratitude in the faces of some of these parents and it immediately ignited my own gratitude for such a dynamic guidance team.

The train conversations observed on Wednesday also pointed to how precious key moments can be for students. Much of the impact of a moment seems to depend on how much is dedicated to making it happen. This notion was supported yesterday afternoon when I watched our girls water polo team compete for the last time this year at home during their senior night. The game was incredibly suspenseful as we rallied back from a large deficit to almost pull out a miraculous victory. However, the meaningfulness of the event was still to come. Parents, friends, and athletes gathered around under a shelter to get out of the rain and honor our senior water polo players. This particular group of girls have shown a great deal of resiliency and determination, investing countless hours to improving their skills and developing as a team. Tears rolled down cheeks as the reality set in that this was the last home game for a group of young ladies that has grown close through all their highs, lows, and hard work.

Finally, we arrived at Union Station and waited for the next connection. There was an open piano on the station floor and some of our students played some simple tunes for a few minutes. At the conclusion of their casual attempt at playing the piano, a man sat down to play. He played showtunes from many years ago that I only recognized from old records and movies. The students listened in amazement as he ran his fingers up and down the piano. When he finished his song, our students clapped in authentic celebration.

Ms. Burgess and Ms. Rado rushed us off to our next connection boarding a train for Pasadena. The experience in the train station and subway train exposed our students to some of the realities of urban life, and they shared an appreciation for their life in Tustin. After about 40 minutes, we exited the train and engaged in a brisk walk in the rain toward our final destination. It reminded me that it had been almost an entire week of rain. Just like on this field trip, the rain was inconvenient, but it didn't stop us from accomplishing all that we had planned for either on this field trip or in school in general. I tried to explain to students how different life is in other places where frigid temperatures and snow are daily occurrences. They respectfully listened and tried to understand, but I could tell it was only an intellectual exercise for most.

After walking by several upscale clothing and car dealerships on Colorado Blvd. in Pasadena, we arrived at the Norton Simon Art Museum. The students quietly assembled inside, followed directions, and listened attentively to an elderly woman who introduced herself. For the next two hours, our students respectfully and authentically listened to not only information about art, but also a great deal of contextual history. Most of the time when I visit a museum, it consists of a self-guided tour that amounts to quickly moving from one exhibit to another trying to take it all in. However, this visit was a highly structured learning experience where students learned from an expert as they observed a few pieces from some of the most famous artists of the western world. The tour guide was passionate and knowledgeable, but not particularly dynamic. Many high school students might have tuned out and not paid a great deal of attention, but I was

impressed with the focus and interests these Tillers showed. It reminded me that we have a whole school full of adults who don't just try to teach information, but they also try to help students gain an appreciation for learning. The students represented our school and their families well as they listened attentively to learn. I told a few students before the visit that my experience traveling with Tustin High School students is that others notice what respectful students we have. This trip turned out to repeat that dynamic. When the tour guide finished, she called our students close together to deliver a heart-felt compliment on their engagement and behavior.

After leaving the museum, we walked towards the train station looking for a place to eat. About half the group chose a sit-down restaurant that ended up taking more time that was allotted. It took a great deal of group cooperation and focus to get everyone paid and out of the restaurant. Again, it was another example of how considerate and awesome our students were on trips like this.

On the trip back, I was able to interact with more students and I took advantage of the opportunity to make some connections to the Challenge Success information given at Tuesday evening's parent meeting. Margaret Dunlap from Stanford University reported the results of our high school surveys and how that connected to some of the latest research for helping students thrive in school and life. For example, the presentation challenged the notion that rigor in schools equates to the volume of work. Our Challenge Success Team has explored such research and looked at the results from our surveys. Next week will be a task force meeting among teachers and admin who will look at the school day schedule for next year. How can we leverage our time so that tutorials, late starts, and CCR's help our students thrive? I am excited to dig into this important work that Challenge Success is helping us tackle.

As the day ended, I was grateful for having taken the time to engage. Hundreds of emails awaited me and I was forced to fit five days of responsibilities into four, but I gained so much from the experience. I appreciate teachers who go out of their way to make learning real. I appreciate students who want to learn. I appreciate working with teachers, students, parents, and staff who are just great people to work with. It was a good day. It was a good week.

Go Tillers!

Dr. Jon Tuin

Tustin High School Principal