

Walkthrough Notes (Week 2)

My walkthroughs take me through all or most of our classrooms in about a 2 hour time period. I watch and listen and sometimes get to participate. My aim in these walkthroughs is to watch for patterns more than observing individual teachers or students. I then report on what I see. What consistently strong classrooms I observed this morning. From room to room, teachers were posing questions that matter and guiding students through tasks and steps that required their engagement.

- One group of seventh graders were generating definitions of “time.” The other was sharing examples of questions that called for qualitative versus quantitative observations.
- In 8th grade, one group was listing the qualities of good graphs while the other generated ideas about “identity” and where one’s identity comes from.
- One group of ninth graders was examining 3 different sets of data related to food consumption and production in the U.S., a process we call building background knowledge. The other was in teams outlining characteristics of different agricultural methods they had researched.
- In tenth grade, students about to study Transcendentalism had to pick a word from a list that they will explore, research, and write about with great thoroughness: free thought, intuition, wildness, nonconformity. The other group was starting on their first problem of the week, reviewing the kind of thinking and writing that such a POW requires.
- In Division 3, one class was discussing how their work and learning would be assessed this year – is it just about achievement? Does each individual’s effort and improvement affect their grade? The other class was getting set up to use google docs and the internet to share their work with the teacher and their classmates this semester.

In every room, I could see and feel the respect these teachers have for our students. It shows respect to ask students to think about big ideas. It shows respect to solicit student input and ideas. It shows respect to listen to what students have to say. With this as the starting point – that students and their thinking matter – teachers are moving forward into our first semester.

Walkthrough Notes (Week 3)

(From walkthroughs on 9.15 in the morning and 9.17 in the afternoon)

In the previous week, there was a pattern of teachers and students working through key definitions, themes, and expectations to be established up front. This week, more and more classrooms were already into the substance of first projects or expeditions.

- In 7th grade, the Mini-me Expedition was getting underway, with students working on their learning styles profile in Math/Science and continuing their learning about time with a timeline activity out on the field. In Spanish, students are learning new vocabulary while trying to get used to just hearing the language spoken to them as they follow instructions given to them mostly in Spanish.
- In 8th grade, it is clear in Spanish class that students have made those initial steps into the language as they themselves use the language to ask for help or clarification. Students there had to use the vocabulary they know to generate a list of descriptions for different categories in the classroom. For Math/Science, students were conducting tests of the mentos dropped into Diet Coke experiments, measuring the height of the soda spray and trying to adjust their procedures to maximize the height of the spray. The conversations and debate went straight to the heart of scientific inquiry. And in English/Social Studies, students were deepening their thinking about culture through a documentary film, “Baraka”, which showed them cultural practices and patterns from around the world.

- In 9th grade, students in science and social studies were preparing for their upcoming farm visits. They were assigned to their groups and to the farms each group will visit, with instructions on the research they need to do and the interviewing and documentation techniques they need to use when they go to the farms. At the same time, they were building their background knowledge about modern agricultural methods so they know something about farming when they go to do their interviews. While I wasn't in Math or Science, those classes are working on understanding patterns and reading *To Kill A Mockingbird*.
- In 10th grade, students were away that day doing field work at Walden Pond in Concord, laying groundwork for their study of Transcendentalism. In science, students were setting off on a project to create atomic superheroes – representations of an element from the periodic table that has significance in biology.
- In Division 3, Seniors were in senior seminar hearing a presentation from the school's College Advisor, Fred Itterly. They reviewed the college application process and then went back to crews to process what they'd heard and think about their own searches. At the same time, Juniors in junior seminar were researching possible fields for the internships they will arrange later in the year.
- In wellness classes, all different grades were enjoying the beautiful weather, playing flag football, learning lawn games, and mastering wiffle ball while speaking Spanish.
- Not every class is meeting during each walkthrough.

While we focus on our methods, there is a great deal of content at the heart of these classrooms. The projects and expeditions underway all require students to understand important subject matter. That's what I saw and heard in week 3.