Feelings, Facts, and Focus Forward-

Making Trips Meaningful

For many educators, planned class trips, on site trips or virtual ones, are “breaks” in the calendar maps. While they are, aligned to curricula topics, community cultural and civic institutions, students, teachers regard these excursions as needed literal fresh air, different venues and immersion in community for students. But why with such potential student life learning and life purpose opportunities inherent in trips, should teachers already scheduling them, limit the trip experience itself to just time spent outside of school, a “recess” from academic learning and real world connections? How about while still allowing the students inquiry and socializing time and a chance to savor “outside” of school new vistas, providing them an accessible, enjoyable, but intellectually and emotionally stimulating template, to focus thinking, experiencing, and purposing of this “trip” time?

I reflected on how I as a feeling, intellectually curious person, and a creative person, have always “reflected and experienced” trips, my parents, schools, and later I as an adult took. What stood out to me were three components of how I processed a trip- feelings, facts and focus forward. Of course I never gave myself as a child or give myself as an adult any assignment, I do always take notes, in a pad or currently on my cell phone or tablet. I in diarist/journalist fashion, jot down my feelings/emotions, list interesting facts told to me by docents or tour guides, read off signage or contained in brochures. I often am inspired by the place or experience to “do” or “take” positive personal actions- make a poster, reference an experience, contribute to a campaign or develop a scalable similar opportunity for students or community. All these recorded (even if just jotted down on a brochure or on my tablet) responses to the trip, are then readily available to me as a memory to process into my ongoing “daily” life. Why not as educators, actually “tap” the “value added” to students’ capacity to truly experience “trips” as more than just a “break” from learning?

With this easily attainable goal in mind, I developed an adaptable template that can be share with students prior to the trip and then debriefed with them after the trip experience.

Tour Focus-

Feelings, Facts, Focus Forward

Students: Focus on the three ideas below and take photos, sketch, record comments. After the tour, you will use your feelings and facts, to focus writings, art, poetry, projects and future actions forward. By “forward,” perhaps in your life plan ahead beyond this school year. Experience, engage!!!

Feelings:

What are you feeling as you look and listen and link to this experience as a cultural and connected human being and citizen of the world? Some potential emotions: pride, connection, empathy, awe, hope, optimism, concern, global, real, empowered, energized . . . . List words fit and use your native or first language, if you like.

Facts: List those learned and focus on exact numbers. Which of the facts and numbers and impacts surprised or alarmed or made you optimistic and hopeful? Which stand out to you? Why?

Forward Focus:

What do I as a young and an evolving leader, take from this physical site visit to my life and projects at school? What could I implement or adapt to my current community and persons I can reach right now? What ideas or inspirations does this offer me for my future?

Beyond just talking about the students’ varied responses and notes prompted by this template, encourage them to share aloud slide shows of photos, examples of art and sketches they created during and after the trip and the various facts they felt were worthy of noting. Push them beyond sharing these notes and creations to discuss their emotional reaction to the experience. For example the memorial reflection pool of the 9/11 NYC Museum, is a place that sets almost every visitor in quietly reflecting on the lives lost and the moments in which those lives were lost as well the survivor/first responder lives changed. While quiet is suggested by signage, few if any visitors need to be told that. In contrast to that solemnity, the cherry blossoms of the NYC Brooklyn Prospect Park, just conjure joy, smiles, uplift and optimism. No signs “tell” observers “to get happy” there.

Finally take the class time to allow the students to express their “forward focus” from this trip. What did this experience “inspire” them to do in the future? It might just be a plan to revisit the place or to bring friends and family there. It might be a desire to contribute by volunteering or raising money or creating a post or a sign to the mission of the site. It might be a review to encourage others visit.

17th century memoirist Cardinal de Retz stated: “There is nothing in this world that does not have a decisive moment . . . know and seize this moment.” Why not expand the fun of a trip to make an explicit “break” into capturing decisive moments of civic, cultural and personal experiences that push students to express feelings, focus on facts and find futures forward?