

This quarter is a continuation of last quarter, and with the change of the semester, a lot of new things will be a part of my daily routines and rituals. But right now I should be reflecting.

Observations: Writing on paper, enjoyment, and WHY

I have trouble writing these sorts of lengthy pieces of writing because of the computer. No ideas. I believe that it was Chris that said it, something along the lines of: "Writing on a computer that looks like a published document. What could possibly make you hate a first draft more?" It wasn't exactly that, but I think that it captures the sentiment as well as the remarkable "Christopher Tone". So I've been taking to paper quite a bit. Most of my ideas come from paper, because it's casual. I can plan something out on paper entirely, then take to the computer to fill in the gaps and really carve it out and define it. This has allowed me to begin to enjoy the act of writing more than I have before. For me, a portion of Pilot is enjoyment. I ask myself a lot, "am I enjoying this?", because hard work should certainly challenge and test me, but it shouldn't be a slog. It's very possible to find a way to do something that isn't a slog. So when the answer is less than satisfactory, I find the solution. And in this situation, the solution to writing on the computer was writing on paper.

The second thing that came out of my Pilot study recently was a realization. It is sort of connected to the idea of enjoying my learning. Pilot is special compared to other kinds of school because there are so many other kinds of problem solving involved. There is a curriculum and standards, and then your own interests. It's quite the balancing act to figure out the perfect in between of the two, where you sacrifice little enjoyment and still make things and do things. And I know why I am choosing to learn the things I want to learn. That directly motivates me to get things done, simply because I want to.

French

Just like in English, I can read something without understanding it. But not understanding is a considerably clearer idea when reading French than English. Despite this, I can still find myself deceived when I read, and I've figured how to get around this, how to really tell if I understand. The book which I finished this semester was the Little Prince by Antoine Saint-Exupery. This is a very standard part of AP French curriculum at U32. But the book is so damn sad at the end and funny in the middle. In the past, I've felt a detachment to the characters when reading fiction in French. and as I've read this book and discussed it with Scott, that changed. There were multiple times where I understood the humor being employed, and that is what told me that I understood really what was going on. One of the happiest things that can happen when reading in another language, is to feel your own emotions.

Scott and I are reading a comedy next (*Gringoire!* by Theodore de Banville) , so I look forward to more of these moments.

As I have been learning a language, there are significantly more times that a word is so annoyingly on the tip of my tongue and there's a 50/50 chance that I'll get it. I have grown to be able to say most of my thoughts in French, to be able to communicate my ideas in some kind of way, even if I use the word 'montre' instead of 'emission' when talking about a television show ('montre' is the infinitive 'to show' in English. It also means wristwatch). I can also confidently say that most of the things I say have some kind of error. If it's using a franglish word that doesn't actually exist or making up conjugations, I get a bit worried. My flutist brain tells me that if I make a mistake without correcting it, I am bound to do it again. What I've noticed is that mistakes make words memorable for me, and it shows

the connections that my brain makes between different words and how my inherently English brain sees French.

Flute

I have been working through changing how I see my mistakes. My original perspective was one of negativity and anxiety, where each mistake is one step further from being perfect, being good. In mid November (I think), I had a conversation with Ruth Einstein who sort of set me on a journey to discover how being a perfectionist is a warped version of having high standards for yourself. She mentioned the word excellence a lot, which became the focus of the quarter. Playing notes and rhythms that build into music not because I want them to sound good, but because I am trying to give other people a good experience and fulfill myself too. This whole “philosophy” is still something I am trying to accept. I think in this quarter, I have identified the problem. For a lot of people that is the most important part. I will probably spend a lot longer than that trying to change my mindset.

Something that I’ve been afraid of calling this whole perfection vs. excellence thing is fixed vs growth mindset(or at least comparing the two). They are sort of the same thing, but my defense for calling it something else is this: When I was little, I didn’t necessarily like cauliflower or broccoli (warning: this is a roundabout explanation). So my parents would mash the two together with butter and milk, then they marketed the hell out of it. This wasn’t vegetables, this was heckin’ tinkerbelle cauliflower. And boy was it magic to my five year old mind. Kids have always had this growth mindset stuff shoved down their throats, to put it crudely. So calling it perfection vs excellence is somewhat like hiding vegetables from a child so they’ll eat them (but I’m doing it to myself).

Here are some ways I have been able to employ this new perspective of excellence:

- 1) Playing with specific emotions that I want to convey as the end goal, and then working backwards with tone color, vibrato and other expressive elements.
- 2) When I make mistakes, and I feel frustrated, I have been working on immediately approaching them from a problem solving perspective. Sort of a ‘let go and move on’ way of dealing with mistakes.
- 3) Knowing my limits within a practice session. There is usually one or two moments in every hour-long chunk of practice that will make me feel somewhat defeated. So taking 2 minutes to walk around or get a drink of water outside the practice room has been a nice way to break things up.
- 4) When it comes to the days I don’t want to practice, taking out my flute for 5 minutes. And usually I keep going, but I will accept defeat if I don’t want to after those 5 minutes.

I don’t have any definitive way to tell if I have gotten better at flute playing at a different rate than normal, however I have found a lot more success recently than during an average year. This is going to be somewhat of a list of achievements and observations of late. I think I have been progressing much quicker through the 1st movement of the Prokofiev flute sonata. I’ve been playing it for a month or so, and I feel pretty confident about most of the technical portions of the piece, which is really different for me. I recently, on December 10th, had a performance at the Flynn. I have decided not to ever watch the footage because I know for a fact that I will be way too hypercritical of it to the point that it’s not even worth it to watch; but all the people I’ve talked to said that it sounded good or even great. That performance really tested the limits of my ‘growth’ zone; I was so nervous beforehand and so relieved afterwards. A lot of people have told me that those sorts of high-stress soloist performances become less intense as you do

them, but if I am going to be frank with the world, I do not think being in front of the orchestra is for me. And my audition for the New England Music solo and ensemble festival went unbelievably well. Since sophomore year when I got the second highest flute score (which I proceeded to do the following year as well), I have been aspiring to play first chair (the highest flute score). Somehow, and I still can't really comprehend how this could've possibly happened, but I scored as the highest woodwind, and I have been given the opportunity to play as a soloist at the festival, right after I said I was never going to do it again. The pri-madonna in me couldn't deny the opportunity. I suppose that talking about successes in such a ruthless list is a bit counter-productive to my new ideals; I just wanted to show that this just might be having some positive effect on my playing.

Facilitation

A statistically improbable thing happened due to weather. From the 6th of November to the 8th of January (when we finally held a meeting... barely), I missed or the SSJ meeting was canceled. In the entire quarter, there have only been about 3 or 4 meetings, 2 of which I missed. But I have been making the best of it! I have been finding the time to attend MS SSJ meetings and I have been taking them through the process of making a campaign (they are leaning towards environmental justice). And I have been working with Outright weekly, which has been a delight. Meg and I have been doing some work behind the scenes too: we are planning for SSJ to lead at least 2 workshops and hopefully make another round of visitations to elementary schools. Overall it was a sparse quarter for facilitation.

Final thoughts

When I went to a lot of Pilot presentations at the end of last school year, and overall hung around the independent learning crew a little more, I saw how Pilot leaves space for a student to learn about themselves. Every student learned things, but they additionally got to go on this great emotional journey of discovery. Cool stuff. When Jack was here last Friday he relayed that his professors thought it important to learn about yourself before you learn about how you best cope with exams and other higher pressure learning environments. This year is a brief interlude between existing within that environment, but it has been a place to learn and accommodate for myself. I think I've found the sweet spot of school stress: I am still productive, I do stuff and I make stuff, but I also go to bed at a reasonable time and for the most part I am not burnt out. This is an important place to find, and I don't think regular school leaves any space at all to do this. And it's so VITAL. So thank you to Amy and the whole crew for making this possible.

Works Cited for Semester 1 (the starred sources are the ones I used this semester)

Facilitation

** Allison, Meg. Personal interview with the author.

I meet with Meg usually once a week to talk about SSJ, and we plan agendas and stuff.

But That's Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Author(s): Gloria

Ladson-Billings Reviewed work(s): Source: Theory into Practice, Vol. 34, No. 3, Culturally

Relevant Teaching (Summer, 1995), pp. 159-165 Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd. URL:
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1476635> .

Taught me about culturally relevant pedagogy, which is incorporated into my zine.

Erdman, Nikki. "Defining: Equity, Equality and Justice." 27 May 2021,

achievethecore.org/2021/05/defining-equity-equality-and-justice/. Accessed 23 Oct. 2023.

This source helped me craft my own definition for the difference between equity and justice.

** Maurice, Mercedes, et al. "Outright Weekly Meetings." Zoom (online). Lecture.

Weekly meetings with Outright are a part of me learning how to be a good youth organizer.

** Polgreen, Lydia, and Masha Gessen, hosts. "We Need Better Narratives about Gender." *The Ezra Klein*

Show, produced by Ezra Klein, Ezra Klein, 10 Oct. 2023. *New York Times*,

www.nytimes.com/2023/10/10/opinion/ezra-klein-podcast-masha-gessen-oct-2023.html.

Accessed 23 Oct. 2023.

French

** *Academy Visual History with Agnès Varda*. Narrated by Agnès Varda, Academy Museum of Motion Pictures, 2019.

I used this interview to learn more about French culture and listen to a native speaker.

** Anonymous. *Après un rêve*.

The final poem I fully translated in quarter 2.

Apollinaire, Guillaume. *Sous le pont Mirabeau*.

This is one of the poems I read and translated.

** De Banville, Theodore. *Nuit d'étoiles*.

One of the poems I translated from French to English

** De Saint-Exupéry, Antoine. *Le Petit Prince*. Wordsworth Editions, 1943.

I have been reading this book to get better at reading and understanding french in a novel format.

** *Les Glaneurs et les Glaneuse*. Narrated by Agnès Varda, Cine Tamaris, 2000. *Internet Archive*, archive.org/details/var-da-gleaners/The+Gleaners+%26+I_Agne%CC%80s+Varda_2000.mp4. Accessed 7 Jan. 2024.

I used this film to learn more about French culture and laws too, like how people are allowed to glean.

Prévert, Jacques. *Le Cancre*.

A poem I read for French, about the class dunce. I also translated it into English

**Thompson, Scott. Personal interview with the author.

This seemed like the best way to cite my mentor. I have been talking to him in French twice a week for over a month now. He has been the main source of my French learning thus far.

**Verlaine, Paul. "Clair de Lune" ["Moonlight"]. *Poetica*, 1869, www.poetica.fr/poeme-60/paul-verlaine-clair-de-lune/. Accessed 7 Jan. 2024.

I used this poem to help me understand the relationship between French and English, by translating between the two and creating my own English version

Perfection vs Excellence

** Einstein, Ruth. Personal interview with the author. 14 Nov. 2023.

I interviewed Ruth about classical music and perfectionism after Chris recommended her to have a conversation with me.

** "Neuroplasticity." *Psychology Today*, www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/neuroplasticity. Accessed 7 Jan. 2024.

One aspect of my essay is problem solving, which is related to the ideas of neuroplasticity and flexible thinking

** "Perfectionism." *Academic Resource Center at Harvard University*, President and Fellows of Harvard College, academicresourcecenter.harvard.edu/perfectionism. Accessed 7 Jan. 2024.

A part of my research has to do with the negative effects of perfectionism.

** Puderbaugh, Matt. and Prabhu D. Emmady. "Neuroplasticity." *StatPearls*, StatPearls Publishing, 1 May 2023.

Helps continue my research on neuroplasticity and how it applies to excellence.