

September 3, 2007

Greetings Episcopal Families and Friends!

Welcome to the 2007-2008 school year. We have all had a busy summer, and we're thrilled to have the students back filling the halls with their sweet voices. With three weeks of school behind us, it's time to begin this year's first posting of "Thoughts from Ms. O".

One of the most exciting events of this past summer was a week-long institute that nearly two-thirds of our Lower School faculty attended on our campus. These teachers were trained in the Responsive Classroom approach to teaching from July 30 – August 3. Gail Lunetta, a teacher of gifted and talented students in Pennsylvania and a Responsive Classroom consulting teacher, spent the week teaching our faculty about classroom morning meetings, proactive discipline, modeling, teacher language and much more. Through carefully planned activities and discussion, our teachers considered their current practices and wrestled with how the RC approach could further assist our students in their academic and social development.

I, too, participated in this week of professional development. Although I am a consulting teacher of the RC approach, I felt it important to experience this training alongside my colleagues. I wanted to listen and watch as they began to learn the nuts and bolts of an approach they had heard me discuss and watched me use with students last year. I knew there would be a healthy tension between present practice and new learning. I expected intense conversation regarding how to incorporate this approach in areas outside the regular classroom setting. I anticipated there would be concerns about how the initial investment in time during the first weeks of school would or would not impact the curriculum we offer our students. I also knew there would be at least one person who would experience a fundamental shift in thinking, one that would change forever how they view the craft of teaching and the children with whom they interact.

I wasn't disappointed. I witnessed all this and so much more. I saw a group of teachers morph from grade level teams into an interdependent and collaborative faculty. We were no longer talking about change by grade level, but rather at a systemic level. I heard a group of professionals offer ideas and support for each other as they wrestled with new learning. I cheered when commitments were publicly made and actions taken to show they had left something old and moved toward something better. I cried (are we at all surprised?) when I listened to our teachers share the profound and deep respect they hold for each other and as they acknowledged the strength we hold together. It was, by far, the most influential week of professional development many of us had ever experienced and a remarkable way to begin the school year together.

Over the coming weeks, I will be sharing the various components of the Responsive Classroom approach with you. I want you to know and understand the strength of this approach and the research and theory behind it. Next week's topic will focus on the guiding principles that comprise this approach to teaching and learning. I hope you will return to learn more.

Thank you for entrusting your children to us, and may you and your children have a rewarding school year.

Until next time.....