

I have this student, let's call him Joe. He's kind of slow, a bit mentally challenged; enough to be labeled with a disability. I gotta tell you though that if Joe's disability has something to do with the reasoning he exhibits, maybe more of us should suffer from the same kind of disability.

I've had the opportunity to observe him for a few weeks now. This fourteen year old, despite his slowness, seems to be in tune with what matters. This past Saturday I asked the kids to take out a piece of paper for an activity. Of course there is always someone in class without paper who has to borrow from the others. This was the case last week with one of the kids sitting at Joe's table (they sit 4 to a table, as I teach in the school's art room). While the other students at his table were oblivious to this kid's need for paper, before he even asked, Joe was handing him one. I've seen him do this kind of thing time and again for the other students. Always attuned to their needs.

I proceeded with the activity and asked them to list ten things for which they are thankful. Joe is a slow thinker and writer, but the kid managed to finish that list before anyone else, listing things such as family, school, friends, food, while some of the other kids' minds were bogged down with so many material things they just didn't know which ones to write first.

Even though he seems to be far off somewhere, he lives in constant awareness. His mind is occupied with what's in front of him only. And I believe this is what allows him to be so in tune with those around him and their needs. With us, if we seem to be far off somewhere is probably because we are. I know half the time our minds are preoccupied with legit concerns, I grant you that, but the other half of the time they are so full of insignificant material, it seems like there's almost no room in there for what's important, what's essential — the now — that which is right in front of us.

Later, I spent part of that class talking about siblings and the importance of that relationship in our lives. Some of the kids shared their own sibling experiences, some of

which were pure nightmares. And during the break, Joe came to me and said: “My sister thinks I invade her privacy so sometimes we fight. When I go home now how can I get near her so she doesn’t think I’m doing that…I don’t want her to hate me.” The genuine concern in the tone of his voice, coming from a person like him, broke my heart and at the same time put a smile on my face.

I don’t think I need to explain to you why. All I’ll say is that at that moment, and after what I had witnessed from him throughout that class, I thought to myself, geez, we should all be so disabled.

“Let us not look back in anger or forward in fear, but around in awareness.”
-James Thurber

“*The aim of life is to live, and to live means to be aware, joyously, drunkenly, serenely, divinely aware.*”
-Henry Miller

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