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GEEA Study Tour 2023- Reflection

They say that for teachers, summer is a time to rest, recharge, reflect on the past year and for me, to look forward to a new school year with new challenges and opportunities. As a participant in the GEEA 2023 trip to Peru, I was able to do all of that while immersed in an experience that enhanced my view of the global economy and the true purpose of education or human capital investment.

Landing in Lima, I was struck by the energy in the city that was expressed by the traffic and driving habits of my cab driver. It was late at night and yet the roads were full and along the roads were vendors selling everything from souvenirs, bottled water and food. Lima struck me as a vibrant city and I was amazed to learn that there were 43 different districts within the city of Lima and each district had its own Mayor and local government. The more time I spent in Lima, this decentralized form of government became visible in the wealth distribution amongst the different neighborhoods in the city and it made me wonder if that somewhat decentralized system was efficient and effective for a city of 11 million people. The differences in wealth distribution became most evident on our first school visit in the District of San Juan de Lurigancho at the Cesar Vallejo School. I was instantly struck by the level of poverty in this area of Lima and how it contrasted with our hotel neighborhood of Miraflores. The school was built by the families and had only one computer for the entire school. Upon our arrival we were greeted warmly by the staff and students and were divided into different classrooms. I had the good fortune to watch a 7th grade class that was learning about inflation. The teacher was a young man in a dress shirt and tie and had a warm command of his students. On the white board was the essential question of the day; "What is the inflation and how does it impact your family?" The students were seated in rows, dressed in their school uniforms. The instructor led the students through a discussion about inflation and how it impacts the students and their families. His teaching style was professional and focused and he used many techniques that I use in my own classroom to engage his students. He made the difficult topic of inflation real to the students by asking them what they hear from their parents about the

price of goods that they have to buy in the stores. He asked students to share what their families earn and what are some goods that their families struggle to purchase. Hands went up from all corners of the classroom, so it was obvious the comfort level the students felt with their instructor. Students shared their family occupations, incomes and the types of food that they buy that are more expensive now such as eggs and cooking oil. The instructor recorded many responses on the board and then discussed the national minimum wage as a comparison to their families incomes. Many families earned below the minimum wage (perhaps they are working in the “informal labor market” which I will discuss later in this reflection) and he then asked students to talk about things that were trade-offs for their families since the price of necessities were on the rise. His ability to blend many important economic concepts into one lesson was masterful. I was extremely impressed by the student engagement in the lesson as almost all of the 20 students in the class spoke during the class. Students also seemed to grasp the concept of inflation quickly as the instructor made it relevant to their lives. Following the discussion, the students were asked to respond to a series of questions on a worksheet that were based on decision making scenarios based around a families budget. Students worked together in pairs to start the assignment. As I reflect back on my observation of this class I am struck by the power of a good teacher to create magic in a classroom. Amidst the poverty in this area and the lack of updated teaching tools, this young man engaged a group of students with important and relevant information at a level I don't see from experienced teachers in my school. It was inspiring to see this instructor at work and reinforced for me the importance of a caring teacher that can build positive relationships with their students. He is a role model for his classes as he demonstrates the power of human capital investment. The entire staff at this school was wonderful. They welcomed us and had us participate in a traditional Peruvian dance in the courtyard and it showed how these teachers were following their passion for their profession and education and I am sure that will carry over in a positive way to their students and their families in that community.

The incredible work of the teachers at Cesar Vallejo School was reinforced as we visited many more schools across Lima. Each additional school we visited was slightly more affluent than the last, culminating in our visit

to the La Molina District and the Altair School. The Altair School provided the sharpest contrast to our first school visit. It is a private school with an IB Curriculum. The buildings were new and all equipped with the latest technology and class sizes were small. The students at the Altair School struck me as similar to the students that I teach at Redwood High School. They were focused and came from wealthy families. The lesson I watched was in a business class and the young teacher walked the students in the IB class through the concept of how businesses can gain feedback from their customers using polls, surveys and focus groups. The purpose of the lesson was to distinguish between the different tools businesses use to solicit feedback and discuss the pros and cons of each tool. Most students took notes on their laptops, but many also used paper notes. The instructor was knowledgeable and had a good relationship with his students. One student, who I was sitting near, was not originally engaged in the lesson and the instructor finally called on the student with a question directly and asked for his opinion and then praised the student following his contribution to the discussion. Following that interaction, the student became more engaged in the lesson and was eventually volunteering to participate in the discussion. I spoke to the instructor after class about that interaction with that student and he said that the student is bright but easily distracted or bored and he has built a solid relationship with him to allow for him to “cold call” on that student in attempts to re-engage the student in the lesson. This again proves that success in any classroom, whether it is in Lima, Peru or Larkspur, California is dependent on the student teacher relationship. My observations at these schools and the schools in Cusco and the Amazon reminded me of the importance of a passionate teacher and reinforced my faith in teaching as a profession. I ended the school year a bit disappointed with many of my colleagues at my school as they complain about our students and the “conditions” in which we work. My time in the classrooms of Peru, especially in the Amazon and the poorer parts of Lima reinforced my love of my job and for that I am grateful for the experiences I had on this study tour.

When I think about what I will take with me from this trip to my school to share with my students and my colleagues, two things stand out to me. The first was the visit to the Peruvian Central Bank and how Marco

Vega shared with us the information about the large percentage (75%) of the labor force that is “informal”.

The economic impact of this high percentage of informal workers means that many do not pay taxes into the system so there is little worker protection and limits the revenue for the central government. This is reflected in the lack of spending in public services such as infrastructure and education. It leaves the economy and its workers in a fragile state. With that said however it was impressive to see Peru’s economic indicators in relations to its neighbors and its overall macroeconomic stability. This information will be relevant in the class I teach when we learn about measuring the economy and having a more in-depth comparison to the US economy will be interesting and relevant for my students. The other information that I learned in our visit to the Peruvian rainforest will definitely be included in my curriculum this fall. From our guides Oscar and Josmile at Posada Amazonas I learned about the private partnership with the indigenous people in the region and the profit sharing agreement that benefits their community. This stood out as significant to me as a model that others should follow in less developed regions of the world as a way to promote tourism and smart, safe economic development. I felt much better about my tourism footprint in that lodge knowing that my presence benefited the local community and my learning about the region made me honor and respect the greatness of the Amazon in a way that I would not have if I had not experienced it firsthand. Much of the information that Oscar provided about the carbon capture programs and the trade in that region and infrastructure development with road construction opened my eyes to the struggles and opportunities that less developed regions have in promoting sustainable development. The construction of a road to Cusco cut travel time down from 7-8 days to 12 hours and the impact that can have on trade and economic growth is immeasurable. This would serve as a great example of efficiencies that can be created by infrastructure investment to create long run aggregate growth and would be a good example of a fiscal policy in contrast to our current spending on infrastructure by the Biden Administration. I also learned about how the community makes decisions collectively by meeting once a month to discuss issues and plans for development of their community. This struck me as a great way to demonstrate traditional economic systems and it would serve as an interesting contrast in class to a market based system.

After this trip I feel revived as a teacher and I am excited to share my experiences with my colleagues and my students. Thank you for the opportunity to learn and grow through this trip, I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity and for all that I have learned.