

From the HEAD OF SCHOOL



Greetings and welcome back to school!

Today we launch another school year. As has long been our tradition, the seniors greeted the incoming freshmen with a themed welcome. This year's theme was Harry Potter-

esque, which created the perfect environment for sparking fun and imagination. And as has been our custom, our administrators joined in the festivities as well. John Schafer dressed as Voldemort, and Tony Lapolla donned the robes of Professor Snape to help welcome our students. I am happy to report that we are off and running with glorious abandon.

As I reflect on today's events, I am reminded of the importance of creating the right environment in which our students can thrive and learn. I had this thinking brought into sharper focus for me this summer as I spent time enjoying the World Cup Soccer matches with my family. We spent the month falling in love with the teams and the players, engaging in the mini-dramas that cropped



up along the way. Soon after the final match a *New York Times* article appeared from one of my favorite columnists, David Brooks, who wrote an op-ed comparing soccer to life. Brooks argued that rather than relying only on individual achievement, success on the soccer field is shaped by the influences of those around you. He articulated that there are three fundamental things that shape this success: environment, networking, and what he called, "the power of the extended mind."

I found these statements worth considering, especially in an age where celebrity and honoring the individual seems to be at an all-time high.

We spend a lot of time at Menlo working to create the right learning environment, as we believe it shapes the student experience more than any individual aspect of our program. And the outcome of a Menlo education reaches far beyond the constellation of facts, skills, and habits of mind acquired during a four- or seven-year tenure here. Though these are certainly important, they are not the whole story. The product of a Menlo education is a life forever changed by the environment created here—a refrain I hear from our alumni over and over.

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In his article, Brooks cites research supporting the idea that we all reside in what he refers to as “distinct moral ecologies” where our surroundings, the people and the accepted norms, shape our conception of what is “normal.” We expect our students to be good citizens, well behaved, and open to learning. Because of the environment that surrounds us—our school values, our teachers, and our families—they are. The complete absence of many destructive behaviors that an alarming number of schools in our country deal with is not a result of our brilliant rules or exacting enforcement, it is because the environment has made it such that students will not tolerate these behaviors on campus.

Secondly, Brooks points to the “structure of your network.” It is not a coincidence, in my opinion, that most of the truly interesting work in independent school education is happening on the West Coast. There is fluidity to the structures in this part of our country that allows for innovation and exploration. Taking this one step further, Menlo’s existence in Silicon Valley, where innovation and

reinvention IS the structure, offers a distinct advantage, rendering interesting ideas and curricula, an openness to change, and an orientation towards continual growth and renewal.

Finally, Brooks discusses the strengths of the “extended mind”—in other words, how “our consciousness is shaped by the people around us.” Menlo’s extended mind includes students from many different feeder schools along with teachers that range in age and areas of expertise united in a passion for our students. It manifests itself in a student environment that, unlike many schools of its caliber, is more collaborative than competitive and one in which students look out for each other. At Menlo there is a clear understanding of the value of the extended mind and an awareness that, in an increasingly unpredictable world, the person with the greatest sense of the whole, what Brooks call “an awareness of the landscape of reality,” is the person most prepared to meet the world they will find.

It is my deep hope that all of us engaged in a Menlo education today are here, at least in part, because they sense the environment is the right one to best prepare our students for success in their lives. As I watched the wizards of the Class of 2015 welcome students to campus with uncommon grace and care, I thought about the collective enterprise that we are engaged in, and I could not have been more proud.

Here’s to a wonderful school year.

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KnightLine is published in .pdf form on the Menlo School website each month, with an email alert including a link sent to all parents. For questions, please contact Alex Perez, Director of Communications, via email at alex.perez@menloschool.org or by calling 650.330.2001 ext. 2330.

