

*...because you haven't learned  
to see the beauty of a busted fruit, the bright stain it will leave  
on your lips, the way it will make people want to kiss you.*  
Excerpt from: **When My Brother Was an Aztec** by Natalie Diaz

**Recognize:** a hip hop admonition to give attribution or due respect (dap) for lyrical or other dominance; literally, to learn again, to know again; on a certain block in Spanish Harlem on one day - most days really - it foreshadows glimpses of the transcendent, found only in a liberal arts education. *An emotion recollected in tranquility.*  
From: **The Urban Taoist's Dictionary**

An *a cappella* lullaby from the Tuvan people of southern Siberia had just stopped playing during 7th grade advisory. Tears of recognition welled in a young student's eyes. She told us she had heard a song just like it at her uncle's funeral in The Free and Sovereign State of Tlaxcala. There in central Mexico, a woman quietly appeared and began to sing, in Aztec, a song to ease the passage of a soul. On 103rd Street, our student had recognized, in this recording from the central Asian steppes, that same universal experience of transition she heard on the edge of the Sierra Madre Oriental. In Tuva, it was a baby passing from wakefulness to sleep. And in Tlaxcala, an elder passing from life to death. Our student recognized. She knew again, for herself and for all of us there in that room together. She found what once was lost, and together we knew in a moment something quite ancient and so human.

Fifty years ago my father recognized the better angels of an addict's soul on the same site where we built a school in 1992. He gave respect to people that society despised and had discarded like so much busted fruit. We too, at The East Harlem School, have sought out those better angels - in ourselves as professionals and for children from families of low income and the deepest values. Being an independent school has allowed us to pursue that level of excellence usually only afforded a fortunate few. I have been, and proudly remain, a part of elite schools downtown where a daughter or grandson is not subsumed to an aggregate number. And I work in one of those zip codes where other people's children are flattened into statistics. As we know, percentages applied to poor people speak to disease, poverty, race, and exclusion - not the higher things of a true liberal arts education. The brilliant individual in a shining community constellation. I see our students today as the children I left behind so many years ago to attend Collegiate School downtown. And now what we bring to those I once left behind exceeds most of what I have seen offered anywhere in the city. Beyond a lapidary liberal arts curriculum, we have created a place of deep serenity and virtue - a place where students joyfully engage in challenges designed to foster human excellence and to eliminate despair. A place where families honor the teacher and where families, in turn, are our honored partners.

And I recognize *you* are the reason why we are free and independent to pursue an equal and shining education for the poor. From our founding, you have granted us the independence from the whimsy of bureaucrats, politicians, and waves of reform that always seem to drown any hopes of excellence for the many. Because of our virtuous beginnings and your support, we stand as one the last few schools in the country to offer families of low income a liberal arts education worthy of a free and democratic people. If our way can't be brought immediately to scale, and maybe it can, your steady recognition of our noble but lone work will one day right the balance of justice, and all will have their common human dignity recognized and honored.

Yours in truth and truly yours,  
Ivan