

Building a Culture of Reflection to Enhance Learning: Samples of Student-Faculty Reflections*

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- *Student*

I'm not exactly sure about whether or not religion comes in the genes, but I have always thought that humans are a naturally inquisitive and questioning creature. I think that somehow humans have the need to try and explain the unexplainable, the mysterious. For example: How Earth was formed? Is there a God? How were the pyramids built? I think it is essential for human beings to want or have the desire to question surroundings or the mysteries of the universe. We feel the need to explain everything around us. I think this comes from the feeling that the unknown is frightening and threatening. Having an answer of some kind is better than having no answer at all. Having an answer and having the option of believing in it tends to make people feel more secure, no matter how 'unreal' that answer, myth, story, idea may seem to be. Isn't it the ability to be inquisitive not only part of human nature but also what makes us human? Myths not only tell interesting childlike stories, but they explain human emotion and behavior, as well as try to answer some of these unanswerable, mysterious questions that the universe poses to us. For example: the Cosmogonies.

I love finding great quotes. They, for me, provoke my mind and understanding. They give me something on which to ponder. Here are a few I found earlier dealing with myths. They are thought provoking...

It is a myth, not a mandate, a fable not a logic, and symbol rather than a reason by which men are moved.
--Irwin Edman

There is nothing truer than myth: history, in its attempt to "realize" myth, distorts it, stops halfway, when history claims to have "succeeded," this is nothing but humbug and mystification. Everything we dream is "realizable." Reality does not have to be: it is simply what it is.
--Eugene Ionesco

- *Faculty*

Whoah, KB, you blow me away! Your reflections are astute and mature, the kind of thoughtful exploration and "inquisitiveness" (to cite your own idea!) that reveals a curious, restless, analytical mind. That's honors at its best, isn't it?

A couple of things strike me about your entry. First, I commend the way you respond to your peers' comments. Remember that the threaded discussion is a tool to help us build a genuine community of learners through reasoned, thoughtful, mature, sensitive, intellectual discourse. Without sometimes passing judgment--which is too easy to do in debate as opposed to discourse--we all need to learn to respect different views and understandings. The way you add to the discussion, tweaking ideas here and there, asking further questions, posing additional insights--that's what authentic critical discourse is all about. Cool!

Second, I admire the connection to something you learned in LA 101 and the way you apply it to what you're learning now. That kind of synthesis in learning is what distinguishes a sophisticated intellect, a serious scholar who appreciates learning as a process of connections and applications, not just a bunch of facts. Bravo for demonstrating that what you learned last semester isn't dead knowledge!

Third, I appreciate your sharing additional sources of information that deepen and extend our learning in this class. The quotations you share are wonderfully relevant. The Ionesco passage, especially, is exactly what we've spent our first two days discussing, though he says it much better than I. Notice his own way of emphasizing how myth is the fundamental expression of our story as human beings, our cry into the dark to say, "I am!"

Notice student's effort to clarify her own thinking, process class discussions, connect her thoughts to insights gained from quotations. Teacher responds with affirmation of peer interaction, connections and synthesis, sharing of external resources with others. Reinforces value of reflection and collaboration.

- *Faculty*

Thanks for the connection to Amy Tan's story, Brittany, a wonderful example of how deep, authentic learning is more than just muddling through the "facts" and "knowledge" of a course and returning them on tests. You go beyond the borders of our class and apply what we've been discussing to other parts of your learning experiences.

When a student can shift gears like that, shift from one learning domain or example to another, then she is truly engaged in higher-order learning. It's not enough to acquire knowledge. We have to be able to analyze, synthesize, apply, and evaluate information to make learning more durable and more significant.

Do you guys know Benjamin Bloom's "taxonomy of learning," a seminal theory about learning? Maybe one of you in education can fill us in! Hint, hint!

Well, my purpose is to follow up what I've said about learning in my responses to Brittany, Miha, and others so far. You may have read my postings and wondered if you were in the right class. Is this an English class or an educational theory and practice class?

Remember that I take very seriously how important it is for you to learn not only the course materials but also how you learn, what kind of a learner are you, when do you learn best, why do you learn--all the questions that make you a "reflective learner," the kind of learner that I believe defines honors. That is why one of your major assignments is this threaded discussion where we can practice reflective thinking, critical judgment, and writing skills. All of these contribute to enhanced, deep, lasting learning.

So . . . every once in a while, you'll see me pause for moments of reflection, moments when we can pull back from content knowledge and examine the learning itself. How am I learning? What am I learning? How do I know I'm learning? Why am I learning? I call these REFLECTIVE LEARNING MOMENTS, and we will engage in such reflection often during the threaded discussion, during class conversations, even in submitting formal papers.

Be ready, then, for the RLM. It's all about learning, folks! What fun!

- *Faculty*

Kristen and others have pointed us in the direction of thinking about how all the different images of the hero suggest a certain kind of "multiplicity" or "relativism" in our thinking about myth. That is, since each image seems so different from that of other cultures and stories, then each must be equivalent to the other, and no one symbol or story or myth or religion is any more value laden than another.

I wonder if there's a limitation to that kind of thinking. William Perry, the pioneer educational theorist, talks about the different levels of knowledge and learning, pointing out that learners go through several defined stages in their intellectual development: dualism, multiplicity, relativism, and commitment. You can read a little about Perry's scheme at <http://www-honors.ucdavis.edu/fh/ct/kloss.html>.

In a nutshell, we begin our intellectual, moral, and ethical development first by seeing everything as black and white; this is dualism. Then, we advance to multiplicity, which allows us to see different sides of a problem but without the ability to distinguish among them, and so we are left with the naive perspective that all knowledge is equally valid. Then comes relativism, in which we recognize that new and different knowledge is contextual and colored by previous knowledge, but we are still limited by a dependency on authority of knowledge so that while we recognize that some ideas are stronger or weaker than others, we do not move beyond accepting all ideas as equal. The last and most liberating and sophisticated stage of development is what Perry calls "commitment," when we are free to construct knowledge from a complex reasoning process that makes knowledge our own.

I point out Perry's scheme because it is so relevant to the process of learning in a course such as ours, so rich and heavy with shifting ideas, multiple perspective, and challenges to our received knowledge and ways of thinking of ourselves, each other, our world, our beliefs. Whenever we are challenged to take the hero's adventure in learning, whenever we are called to the adventure of moving from one way of thinking to another, of engaging in a process of transformation, as Campbell puts it, then we are placed squarely on Perry's scheme of intellectual development.

So, I think it's important that we ponder what mythical thinking teaches us that can move us beyond just accepting that different stories reveal different cultures, which reveal different beliefs, which reveal different values, etc. Does mythology help us move to a larger, broader, deeper, more generous vision of ourselves, our world, our spirits? Is there a unity in diverse mythologies? Hmmmm.

What an RLM! You guys with me?

Teacher builds culture of reflection, shares learning theory with students to help them understand and value reflective writing and its importance to their intellectual development.

- *Student*

Wow! I am so impressed and motivated by my peers at Columbia College.

I thoroughly enjoyed the film on Wednesday, and I fully intend to watch the remainder of it. I was intrigued from the very beginning when Campbell was presented as a deeply spiritual person. I know this does not suggest any one religion or belief, but I tend to gravitate and trust this. What I took from the film was a much broader understanding and appreciation of the human imagination, spirituality, the unknown, God and the ways they intermingle. I guess what I was really struck by was the patterns, the patterns in stories that are patterned after something else. I have to think that it is no accident or coincidence that so much of what humans create (stories, art, music) that come from our imaginative/spiritual beings echo each other. The parallels are so powerful just as in nature that it is hard for me to comprehend anyone denying someone or something central to the universe in all it's AWESome (I hope this is not a misuse of the word Dr. Z) complexities. Wouldn't it seem that these are all just reflections, echoes of someone or something that is even more AWESome, consistent, indescribable, and unfathomable in grandness, wisdom, and might? (Words are inadequate here.)

Kristen, I really enjoyed the quotes and comments you contributed. I especially enjoyed the one by Mary McCarthy, "We are the heroes of our own stories," because I think it is so true and relevant. Campbell expressed myths as "the transformation of consciousness by trials." Isn't this the human experience? We live, we mess up, we have trials and we grow in our consciousness.

I really have never thought seriously before about our conscious and unconscious thinking and their contrast. I thought it was interesting that Campbell described "conscious controlling the unconscious." What is the source of our unconscious? So often the unconscious seems to bubble up in our daily thinking and we temper it with our consciousness. I think it can be exciting, revealing, as well as a little scary to explore this part of us. Sorry for the length of this, but I challenge you all to take time and explore the mystery of your own minds!!

Notice student's willingness to reflect on another's shared thoughts and apply her developing insights not just to specific course assignments but also to her own personal explorations of values and beliefs. Also, note her challenge to peers to "explore the mystery of your own minds," a call for reflection!

- *Student*

Hey everyone! I just want to start out by saying... I know this entry is kind of random, but ever since we talked about the chaos theory and fractals in class, I have been fascinated by the subject ever since. When she told us that she had some examples of fractals on the door in the CLC, of course I had to go look at them. But I mainly wanted to get these ideas out of my head and see what some of you were thinking.

I know a lot of you have probably seen the movie "The Butterfly Effect." Well, when I first saw that movie I thought to myself that there was no possible way for something like that to happen. However, after reading some information on this subject my thoughts have completely changed. It fascinates me that just a tiny change in an initial condition can drastically change the course of events in a long term behavior... "The flapping of a single

butterfly's wing today produces a tiny change in the state of the atmosphere. Over a period of time, what the atmosphere actually does diverges from what it would have done. So, in a month's time, a tornado that would have devastated the Indonesian coast doesn't happen. Or maybe one that wasn't going to happen, does." (Ian Stewart, Does God Play Dice? The Mathematics of Chaos, pg. 141)

This idea truly baffles and amazes me! While this idea could stem into hundreds of different topics, I want to address the issue relating to mythology and heroes. So my random thoughts do serve a purpose to our overall topic of heroes. It just makes me wonder... if one hero hadn't followed through with a certain course of events, would we have the heroes we do today? I know I probably sound confusing, so allow me to explain. For example, think about our LA 102 class for a second. Many of us just recently watched the video on Women's History. Think about the whole women's rights movement. If one woman wouldn't have decided that she was not being offered the same opportunities as the men, then we wouldn't have the women figures we do today. What one simple little act that a man did one day, could have led to the entire women's rights movement. Same thing with all heroes. What one hero does could possibly create the course of events for all heroes to come.

I don't know... I'm just still baffled at the whole idea of the chaos theory. It truly fascinates me! And I recommend going to look at the fractals on the door in the CLC. They show how something quite random and chaotic can have an overall pattern. They're quite interesting. I have some web sites for any of you who want to learn more about the chaos theory or fractals....

<http://www.imho.com/grae/chaos/chaos.html>

<http://www.mathjendl.org/chaos/>

So if any of you have any ideas on my random thoughts, I would love to hear them!

Reflection enables student to range widely over related interests, topics piquing her curiosity after a class discussion. She's making sense of her "random" thoughts. Note sharing of resources, an outcome of her reflections.

- *Student*

I found our discussion about what a hero really is to be very interesting. After thinking about it, I have been able to come up with a few theories about what a hero is.

First, we can say that every single human being is a hero just because of his or her mere existence. True, from a darwinist perspective. Indeed, according to the theory of natural selection, every being who survives the hostility of natural conditions is a winner.

However, some philosophers consider that biological survival is petty unless our life is filled with substance: in other words, unless our existence is inhabited by being. Without attributing to Nietzsche the discussion on existence versus being, I still find that he also touched upon the significance of the hero in his philosophical discourse. To him, all heroes are characterized by the will to power. Since biological existence is a given for all humanity and hence is not a distinguishing factor, heroes are those who were born to lead over the weak. The true heroes are the true masters. In Nietzsche's system, a master is someone whose superior nature places him or her beyond good and evil, beyond morality and laws. Nietzsche understands that we can have a human ("the superman") who, by virtue of a self-given, inner right and a superior nature, is allowed to overstep the bounds of morality in order to fulfill an ideal to the benefit of the many or of the entire human kind. The same rationale and structure of the extraordinary man are brought forth by Hegel, too, and the literary embodiment of the theory is Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov, in *Crime and Punishment*.

Last but not least, Mircea Eliade (an interbellic Romanian scholar, founder of the school of thought in Chicago) opines that a hero is the human being who has been "born again" in his or her humanity. Being "born again" means inhabiting our biological life with thought, self-reflection and meditation, with emotion and spirit, with the culture and ideas inherited from our ancestors, thus, with myth and story.

An eloquent illustration of the lack of such self-reflection, of myth and of humanity are typically reality shows such as *Big Brother* et. al. Here, the audience's need for sex, emotion and excitement is fulfilled too plainly and too

directly, too "un-intermediately"; the substance that makes sex and love meaningful is thrown out and only the shell is left: the sign, the symbol have been perverted into mere reflections of vanity, into empty forms and the product is given to an audience who consumes sex rather than live it with a meaning of mythology and magic. Mircea Eliade believes that the most significant things in life, the uplifting ideas, the truest of truths, religion, the three thresholds of the being (birth, marriage and death) are all supported by myths and nourished by and passed on from generation to generation by the collective subconscious.

- *Faculty*

When Miha says that "biological survival is petty unless our life is filled with substance," she captures exactly what our course is all about: a quest for understanding, appreciating, and applying whatever that "substance" is that undergirds, permeates, and transcends our selves and nature. Is that what we mean by myth in the larger, archetypal sense of the concept: the core substance of idea, imagination, and faith that lies underneath, within, above, and beyond what we know and experience as so-called reality? Is our course a communal effort to discover how "existence is inhabited by being?" Ouch, my head hurts!

Miha also brings us back around to the central issue of existential choice as a pervasive theme in monomythic story. The "hero" figure is one who accepts the call to adventure, takes on the challenge of the journey, exerts the force of his/her will against the darkness of denial, defeat, and death: the hero says, "I am," and launches the quest for being within and beyond mere existence. The journey is one of substance, of authentic, existential power and meaning (Miha's very interesting application to "reality shows" is a perfect illustration of counterfeit selves acting out counterfeit dramas without genuine "ultimate concern"--to quote theologian Paul Tillich--or without the essential crisis of a Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* or Meursault in Camus' *The Stranger*.)

What Miha is helping to reinforce in our discussions is the primacy of being, the significance (there's that all-important root of signification=symbol again!) of choice or "will" (as the philosopher Nietzsche--who uttered the shocking declaration, "God is dead"--would put it). The monomyth, in a sense, is a dramatization, a signifying of the human impulse to assert "I am" in the face of an inscrutable universe. We will ourselves to be, an existential act that redeems us, that helps us be "born again" in our humanity, as Miha says in paraphrasing Eliade.

I'll quote Miha again and say that the hero pattern is, in effect, one of transforming "our biological life with thought, self-reflection and meditation, with emotion and spirit, with the culture and ideas inherited from our ancestors, thus, with myth and story." I couldn't have said it better.

- *Student*

Yes, Dr. Z., YES YES YES! Paul Tillich does catch the nature of all this and my, does he expose the vanity of reality shows: They are NOT an ultimate concern!!!

But are you ever a mind reader! :)

An exciting demonstration of how promoting and successfully implementing a habit for reflection among students can produce deep, connected learning. Note sharing of additional sources for the sake of raising the bar in peer learning, taking classroom discussion to deeper levels. Faculty response affirms demonstration of comprehension, synthesis, analysis, collaboration, sharing resources. Student's reply is uncanny in its acknowledgement of power of reflective learning: "But are you ever a mind reader!"

- *Student*

Cunt Cracker Ho Poor White Trash Bitch

How did you feel when you read these words? If your heart skipped a beat as much as mine does when I even read the word "nigger" than maybe you will understand what I'm saying and not give me strange looks when you see me. Some of you will and you'll have conversations about how minorities are overly sensitive about everything but ... One of my favorite books is "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" by Mark Twain. The book uses derogatory language that was customary at the time including the word nigger. I have read so many books that say derogatory things

about minorities and I'm glad to know what goes on in the world around me. That there are people who feel that way. Why, I'll never know. Being in the south I know that a lot of people reading this book know people who use derogatory language or voice stereotypes about black people especially. I'm not saying ANYONE in our class feels this way and I'm not angry or anything I just want to make sure everyone knows that language like this is NEVER okay. When I told one of my friends (who is white/Jewish) what book we were reading she said that she hopes she lives to see the day when we can read books about crackers and whores and for it to be just as okay as reading books with the word nigger in it. I just wish it would all go away. But if artists feel that they must express these things, and if they are drawing from real life, then I feel that these kinds of books should be read with lots of explanations of why this language is being used and always with another viewpoint present (What if an all white class was reading this who thought saying "nigger" was okay?). . . .

I live in a 100 year old, two story colonial home in historic Winnsboro right next door to General Cornwallis' home (not in an old shack) that was probably built by slaves (which I think is very ironic). Once when I was walking down the street to go vote with my cousin a white boy who was playing basketball in a church yard screamed out "Ku Klux Klan" at us (in fact I have friends who have family members that are in the Klan). I was so scared that we would be murdered in broad daylight. Can you image? That's fear, and yet I'm not afraid to be in an English class full of white people. Why? Because I don't think all white people echo the sentiments of that one person.

I love this book and I think that Kaye Gibbons is a great writer, but I think that its important that everyone who reads this book understands that the main character in this book is uneducated and has been raised in a racist environment (which isn't her fault). Some people, however, might read this book and think its normal to say the word "nigger" (She calls him a nigger and trash... page 21) or even "colored" (some one actually said that to me in this century). Anyway, don't be afraid to talk to me just because I acknowledge something offensive but also be aware that I have traveled around the world, been on Jeopardy ! and the Oprah Winfrey Show, and that my parents have their own non-profit organization...oh and I don't eat dirt.

- *Faculty*

Yes, Brittany is absolutely right in reminding us of the offense embedded in some of the language in Gibbons's novel. Generously and astutely, though, she suggests that the author has a clear and strong message in including such language. First and foremost, the language reveals the racist, small-minded attitudes of the characters--and Ellen is not exempt from the indictment, at least at the beginning--attitudes that are obviously depicted as reprehensible by the satirization of behaviors such as those exhibited by the father, his friends (even the black ones!), Aunt Nadine, and others. Evidently, Gibbons wants us to react with revulsion and censure when we witness the actions, values, and language of the racist characters.

Second, the language does sound an authentic or, as Brittany says, a realistic note. Such language, such terrible words, do exist, and one of the challenges of the novel is for us to hear them, react to them, and decide whether they are part of our language or not. Undoubtedly, Ellen makes the right choice at the end of the novel, turning her back on such unkind, inhumane, even vicious language.

Third, the novel's emphasis on the central theme of transformation, regeneration, rebirth is important in helping us understand Gibbons's lesson. Ellen's final values, outlook, language, identity go completely against her own earlier innocence and inherited prejudices. The word "inherited" is critical here, as if Gibbons is trying to show us that our racism is something that we're taught, and we need to wash ourselves clean of unexamined views: we have to BE ourselves and learn the purer values of acceptance, grace, and love. Without such redemptive values, we are no better than the violent, spiteful, hateful father in the story. . . . Isn't one of the purest purposes of great art to engage us in an act that hopefully will redeem us, move us from a lower to a higher state of consciousness? Isn't that what happens to Ellen in Gibbons's novel? Isn't that what happens to us as readers?

Thanks, Brittany, for your powerful, piercing, sensitive contributions to our discussion. I see in your writing exactly why Ellen Foster is a notable work of art.

Does making room for reflection in learning engage risk? The exchange above demonstrates that encouraging and incorporating reflective activities can tap not only deep learning but also deep emotions and potential conflicts within a student and within a community. Does incorporating reflective teaching and learning strategies involve more time for both faculty and students? Yes. Is it easier to assign conventional assessment activities without reflective components? Probably. If so, do we miss out on tremendous potential for enriched, poignant, powerful learning in intellectual and personal domains? You decide.

- *Student*

Mary, your entry is quite enlightening! I completely agree with your thoughts. We do, as first year students away from home, feel that we are now somehow 'free'. We think that just because we don't have the constraints of our parents, we are somehow free to live and do as we please. But like you said, it is not until we move out into the world as adults that we are truly free.

The other day I had a disturbing realization. I was thinking about my four years of college and wondering what exactly I was to do afterwards. I was thinking of what I was supposed to do, where I was supposed to go, and who I was supposed to be with. It worried me because after college, we must venture out into the world almost completely alone. This concept ties right into our story that we're discussing in class. As we venture out into the world, it is almost as if we are a stranger all again. We must find out just exactly "who are we", "why are we", just like we were discussing in class. It's a scary concept to think that we will be venturing out into the real world, and become a stranger once more in order to answer these questions. Well I just thought I'd share my some-what disturbing realization with you. But I do know that I am going to enjoy these next three and a half years before I have to begin answering some of these most difficult questions. And just to let you know... I definitely don't feel like a stranger here at Columbia College!

- *Student*

Angela...This is what the college is here to teach us. Even though we are away from our parents and we feel free. We are here at Columbia College to learn how to make it out into the real world. I see these four year as our training wheel years. We will take chances and make mistakes, but we always have something holding us up: the community around us. Yes, in three years you will have to venture out and this time you will take chances, make mistakes, and some of them you will just have to face the consequences, but unlike "The Stranger" you do have family and friends that you can turn to for support. "The Stranger" in a unique way is reminding us of what we do have. We come to realize that we do not want to be a stranger. We want to be the unstrange. So no matter what happens. We are not the loner, we are the people who have the most support. This should be the most encouragement of all.

Perhaps not the most earth-shaking technical analysis of Camus' <i>The Stranger</i> , but notice how two students launch from class discussion into some preliminary thinking about their academic careers, purpose for education, challenges in college life, even personal values. Reflection provides a springboard.

- *Faculty*

Hey, critical thinkers, did you catch the RLM? Remember that I'm fond of encouraging students to reflect on their learning, a critical process that enhances, deepens, extends learning. Learning without reflection is useful, but it is often only the acquisition of knowledge, a limited and limiting act. When we reflect on what we're learning, we question its worth, its relevance, its connections, its applicability, its endurance. This kind of reflective learning is what critical thinking is all about: holding knowledge at bay, as I said in class on Monday, keeping it at arm's length so that we can examine it, deconstruct it, ponder its value, review it, and make it real to our lives.

What is critical thinking? How do we learn in deep ways rather than superficial ways? You might want to look into Benjamin Bloom's learning taxonomy; education majors might be able to share what they know about Bloom's ideas. In short, Bloom suggests that learning consists of different stages:

- *Knowledge (identification, recall)
- *Comprehension (organization, selection)
- *Application (use of knowledge)
- *Analysis (separation of whole into parts)
- *Synthesis (combination, comparison to form new knowledge)
- *Evaluation (judgment, decision, value)

The scheme is both heirarchical and circular--that is, the taxonomy suggests an increasing complexity in learning from knowledge to evaluation, but it also allows for a more fluid or circular process wherein we move freely from one modality to another and back.

Critical thinking in its most vital, vigorous form engages us in a process that goes beyond acquisition of knowledge to the other forms of learning. When we are able to activate the entire complexity of Bloom's taxonomy, we become sophisticated learners and critical thinkers. We move beyond simple "declarative" knowledge (what) through the stage of "procedural" knowledge (how) to the higher level of "metacognition" (why, relevance, value).

Now, what does all this have to do with our course? What's the worth of pausing to think about our thinking, learn about our learning, engage in an RLM, a Reflective Learning Moment? Well, the more we can understand not just what we learn but how, when, where, and why, the more engaged we will be as learners and the deeper and more impressionable our learning will be. And, after all, isn't that what honors is all about? *Think* about it.

Example of the teacher building a culture of reflection, encouraging students to be reflective about themselves as learners and how the reflective process supports, sharpens, enhances content learning. The operative word at the end is *think!*

- *Student*

I have to say that I'm surprised that no one has commented on the essay that we had to write...unless I just didn't notice it. Personally, I enjoyed analyzing the movie, looking for examples of Campbell's ideas. It almost like one of those LA 101, "What does it mean to be human?" concepts that you can find yourself analyzing in situations that come up in every day life. Anyway, I was talking with my roommate about this class and what we discuss in it, and the subject turned to the recent essay assignment. My essay was about the animated movie, *Titan A.E.* I don't know how many of you have seen it, but it's your typical...archetypal...story about a young guy in the future that suddenly has the task of saving the world. So, I told her about some of Campbell's ideas and she applied it to a recent movie that she had seen, and now she wants to find out more about it because she thinks it's really interesting. The point is that she isn't in honors, and I think one of the goals of the Academic Achievement Hall (and maybe even one of the goals of the Honors Program) is for the students in the honors program to share their newfound knowledge with some of the students that are not in the program. For example, the Roundtables that are directed toward honors students but available to all. I just thought it was cool that I was able to do this on my own. Now that I have called attention to it, have any of you found yourself doing this with any students that aren't in honors?

- *Faculty*

Kristen, maybe when you finish your graduate degree you can come back to Columbia College and take over the Honors Program!

Your thoughts about the responsibility each honors student has for helping the entire student body ratchet up the quality of academic expectations and achievement on campus are exactly consistent with the goals of the program. You have special gifts to share with your peers, with faculty, with the entire campus community, and one of the charges I always repeat at honors orientation and beyond is that you should strive to make our whole college aim for the highest standards implicit in honors education. We want *all* our students to be reflective learners!

I'm proud of you! Keep talking to your honors buddies and to other students and faculty about what you're learning; how you are able to make valuable, rich connections in your learning; how you are determined to bring other students into a reflective learning community that respects and celebrates liberal learning, engaged academic conversations. Such efforts are a powerful sign of the importance of our honors program. You're terrific!

And I don't want to end my response to your piece, Kristen, without a quick RLM for the benefit of our class! Notice, everyone, how Kristen has expressed a keen desire to reflect on the value of her learning in writing the recent essay. Most students simply complete assignments, take tests, finish essays, get results, and move on without much thought to the reasons for the assignment, the role of course work in enhancing learning, the value of a particular achievement in a class in a larger framework of deep, lasting learning.

What did you learn from writing the essay? Why did you select your particular topic? How did the assignment help you formulate ideas, synthesize course concepts, practice writing and research skills? How did you apply your

knowledge to deepen your learning and make it more durable over time? Have you revised the essay for improvement? What did you learn from revision? These are all critical questions in making you a reflective learner, one who doesn't just take in facts and information to store them briefly for returning them on tests and essays (what a colleague of mine at another university calls "bulimic learning"--ugh!).

So you wrote an essay. So what? Kristen is laying down a challenge for us to be reflective learners, to go further in ensuring that what we have accomplished in our work is really lasting, meaningful, and connected to LA 101 or 102, or science, or math, or religion, or philosophy, or history, or education, or other instances of our learning journey. Bravo, Kristen! Anyone else want to take up her challenge?

Very significant demonstration of the value of engaging students in a culture of reflection. Notice how the student invites peers in the class to reflect on their written work and to share their reflective practice with other students, effectively raising expectations and standards for reflective learning across campus. The teacher's affirmations and added challenges to go beyond completing assignments to reflecting on one's learning outcomes reinforce the value of reflection in deep, lasting learning.

- *Faculty*

What an interesting fusion of personal experience and learning with what we're focusing on in our class, Mary Frances! I applaud the way you bring together an outside reference that, at first glance, doesn't seem to relate to our course discussions but that, with further analysis and reflection, turns out to be very relevant.

One of the virtues of reflective writing is that it opens up the potential for *_surprise_* in learning--that is, through the process of writing reflectively, we often discover, by surprise, new avenues of growth in our intellectual, emotional, spiritual development. Learning, indeed, is a journey, and we are often surprised by the diversions and invitations of the "road not taken," the adventure of untapped learning.

So, what have you learned this semester that has surprised you? challenged you? What "doors" have you opened or closed to learning? What roads have you taken or not taken? All of these questions (forgive the metaphors) are keys to unlocking the power of reflection. All of these inducements to reflection are what you should be thinking about as you begin compiling your learning portfolio in the class!

- *Faculty*

Holy cow! I couldn't have asked for a better representation of the value of online reflective writing than Angela's post and Kaleigh's follow up. Look at the way Angela organizes her thinking into logical, coherent paragraphs, practicing key writing skills. Look at the way she shares both academic and personal insights into the novel. Look at the way she engages in collaborative learning by responding thoughtfully and critically to Kaleigh's original post. Look at the way she reveals her discovery with Chelsea of the connections between our class and a TV show. Look at the way she hints of the deep learning involved in her reexamination of received ideas, opinions, positions. [By the way, the issue of "signs" in the novel would make a great paper topic, don't you think?] I'm awed!

Then, look at the way Kaleigh adds another layer of learning by sharing further connections between our class content and current events, tying one of the many poignant stories of the tsunami catastrophe with one of our class discussions about family, choice, existential crisis, the agony of the human condition, etc.

Now, are these students just accumulating facts and knowledge? Well, yes, but are they also going beyond mere acquisition of information for the purposes of a course grade? Are they actually *_changing_* their brains, their emotions, their maturity, their sympathy, their vision? You betcha! I'm ecstatic!

Yes, folks, we just had another RLM! You with me?

Notice teacher's continuous reinforcement of the value of reflection in learning, repeated invitations to reflect on both content and process of learning.

- *Student*

I am still reeling from that movie last evening. For those of you who couldn't make it, I would really suggest a viewing. What a powerful piece of art. I kept thinking about our discussion afterward and the part where we disagreed about what made Ada and Baines fall in love. I started digging around the internet and found a site about the movie: <http://www.fys.uio.no/~magnushj/Piano/>

There are parts of an interview with Jane Campion, who wrote and directed the movie. In it, there is a paragraph about the influences and tones in the movie. The African Queen, one of my favorite movies of all time, is mentioned as an influence. The story of the African Queen is the same as The Piano: the woman thinks she despises the man but they end up falling in love.

Also: The interview says, "The Piano insist on the central role in the narrative of explicit sexuality--unlike Wuthering Heights and African Queen. We see in this insistent sexuality Jane's reading of Freud. The Piano's mood is gothic, its temporal context is victorian (notice the clothes used to hide the legs of the furniture). The scene is New Zealand, but the sexual overtones are decidedly Freudian." That piece definitely made me think about more of the symbolism in the film!

Anyway, these were thoughts floating around in my head. Once they are straightened out, I'll post more later. Take a look at that web site- it plays some of that beautiful music as well....breathtaking. Enjoy!

- *Faculty*

What a great resource, Chelsea! Thanks for modeling for all of us what honors learning is all about. You've taken an extra step not so much to do extra work but to enrich and deepen your own and our comprehension, analysis, and evaluation of the film. You add a serious, scholarly dimension to our understanding of the film's many complex angles. The web site offers different avenues we can pursue to make our appreciation more sophisticated and intelligent.

Okay, it's RLM time! Isn't Chelsea's motivation to learn and her initiative to share in the construction and deepening of our community knowledge exactly what authentic collaborative learning is supposed to inspire in us as learners? Remember that what lies at the heart of genuine collaborative learning is the deconstruction of the authority of knowledge--that is, the student takes responsibility for her own learning and shares in the authority of building knowledge, starting from her own base of received information and changing, growing, deepening her learning through critical observation, reasoned judgment, shared commitment to discourse, and real openness to ideas. She doesn't remain passive in learning, waiting for the teacher to give the "right answer." I told you at the beginning of the semester that our course would be a unique adventure in learning, didn't I? Has it been true?

I would say that Chelsea's effort here reveals collaborative learning in the best sense, wouldn't you? And I have seen the same effort revealed by many of you throughout the semester. Isn't honors inspiring? Thanks to all of you making this such a great class! And thanks for the great web site, Chelsea! (You're right: the musical score is exquisite, lovely!)

<p>Student uses reflective writing to explore her response to a course assignment, go beyond assigned work to find additional resources, share her work with peers, and openly acknowledge that her thinking (learning) is continuing in process. The latter point underscores the dynamic nature of reflection, thinking that informs thinking and stimulates more thinking. The faculty response returns class focus metacognitively to the reflective process exhibited in the student's shared work, continuing to build a shared vocabulary for reflective learning.</p>

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