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W #2

Understanding

Being in the field of English education, learning about how students read and understand literature is something of the utmost importance to me. It is one of those things where I feel that knowing that sort of information is vital to my craft; it is vital in the creation of lesson plans, activities, and/or the assignment of novels to actually “teach.” When I first read the assignment title of “Teaching One’s Discipline,” a plethora of images and quotes attacked me at once which then led me to the development of this paper. The first page of Chapter 12 entitled, “Teaching Literature: Making the World Safe for Franz Kafka,” included many important quotes both influential to the fluency of the chapter and thought provoking enough for solid, experience based reflections.

“Writing, reading, and arithmetic did not qualify because they were secondary elaborations upon a more basic activity: perception.”

Perception. The dictionary sums up the definition into one word being “understanding,” but being a student of English, I feel that perception means more than that. With this being said, I agree and disagree with how Inchausti looks at perception. First off, I feel that perception is not a “basic activity.” Having taught more than my fair share of classes during my summer internship and now my pre-service teaching, I find that student understanding is not as “basic” as Inchausti

or other educational theorists may claim or should I say, hope. I couldn't tell you the amount of times that I've explained something so thoroughly in my instructions and yet get more than a handful of students raise their hands asking questions. Never once did I find this an annoyance by any means, but it always ~~interested~~ intrigued me as a future educator. How can I feel comfortable with any "brilliant" assignment that I pour my heart and soul into when I know that some students don't "understand" the most basic instructions of write a full page essay?

During my LL ED 412 class this past week, we talked about how some teachers assign papers *perceiving* that students *perceive* how to write. The fact is: teachers assign writing assignments without developing students' *perceptions* of the key word of the assignment... writing. After the lesson, I thought about it for a while comparing it to my own experiences and it was 100% true. I looked back at all the assignments I've ever assigned thus far in my short educational career that hasn't even begun yet and I realized something. I realized that I taught the background information needed to *connect* to the writing assignment but I didn't teach how to *develop* the ideas necessary to write the assignment. Once you understand or *perceive* something, then and only then can you dive deeper into the topic to develop your own ideas which leads to learning.

"The students were told that they were not to behave, listen, or write in class.

Instead, they were to act, hear, and compose."

I agree 100% of what Inchausti is saying about how in school, students act, hear, and compose. I will even go to lengths in which to say those three verbs are the reason why there is education. This summer, my professor, Mr. Whitney, told me that "anything you write down on a piece of paper... is published." Because of that one quote, everything I've typed for class or

leisure is written based on the concept of it is officially “published.” Why is this important? Well, if you think about it, everything we say, hear, or read in our lives affect us in some way. We used to listen to our parents when we were little and chances are those words have shaped us into who we are today. On the flip side, the things we say to other people whether they be friends, family, or co-workers have an effect on them too. Our words have created stereotypes, first impressions, and trust to other people... “published” into their minds forever. In school, more than anywhere else, all three of these verbs are used by students and teachers to develop or publish themselves in someone life. In a way, this is one of the main reasons why I want to become a teacher.

Knowing that every word that I say, every day that I *act*, every comment that I *compose* on a student’s paper, or every story that I *hear* and respond to will be remembered either positively or negatively... is amazing. To connect back to Inchausti, everything that they do, say, or write, I will always remember and reflect back to as well. *Teaching and learning is just one big published cycle that can never be erased.*

“Writing, likewise, was for notes to your friends, but composing was a craft.

Listening was a passive act; hearing, a form of co-creation.”

I feel that the final quote on the opening page of Chapter 12 sums up both of the antecedent quotes into one. In the first quote I spoke volumes about how writing was somewhat of a craft that students had to learn and develop; it wasn’t a perceived gift that just happens. In the second quote, I wrote or *published*, if you will, that whatever we say, listen, or write is forever. In order to make these texts “forever,” both the speaker and the listener have to co-create the words used to make it their own. I suppose that is what makes English and literature that much more special than all the other subjects. In Math and Science, there is one set answer. You

both get it wrong and move on, or you get it right and forget it. In history, it's interesting to learn about the past, but that's all it is, the past. I am an advocate of "history repeats itself," but it never changes. You cannot perceive it any other way than what the textbook says. But in English, you can take any novel, poem, lyric, or student composition and *co-create* it to make it your own and reflect it both to the past, present, and future. Sure, to fully understand how to do this with the English subject is a craft that is developed over time, but once one truly grasps the concept, it is a beautiful thing. I feel that Inchausti is slowly beginning to grasp this idea as the book moves on and he is finally *perceiving* (notice the why the title is entitled, *Understanding?*) not only himself as an educator, but his students as well, no matter where the subject of English takes them. Sir Francis Bacon put it best when he said, "Knowledge is power." I strongly believe that until both the educator and student realize this, then and only then will learning occur at levels that both the teacher and pupil (and parents) can both be comfortable with.

Note: All quotations were taken from Chapter 12 of *Spitwad Sutras: Classroom Teaching as Sublime Vocation* by Robert Inchausti. Westport: Bergin & Garvey, 1993.