Cultivating an Entrepreneurial Spirit of Discovery

An Examination of the Development of Critical Thinking, Reading and Writing Skills in University Students

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What is an Entrepreneurial Spirit of Discovery?

From the Undergraduate Course Catalog introduction:

What makes the University of New Hampshire (UNH) an outstanding institution? Every day, brilliant, dedicated, inventive, hard-working people come together to teach, learn, and discover, always with an entrepreneurial spirit that has made many of our academic and research programs world-class. Faculty and students alike are motivated by passion, by a spirit of inquiry, and by a desire to make a difference in the world.

entrepreneur- noun, a person who organizes and manages any enterprise, especially a business, usually with considerable initiative and risk

spirit- noun, temper or disposition of mind or outlook especially when vigorous or animated

discover- verb, to see, get knowledge of, learn of, find, or find out; gain sight or knowledge of (something previously unseen or unknown)
### Summary of the Course

- “Intro into African American Literature and Culture”
- 500-level English class
  - Writing intensive

### Summary of the Students

- ≈30 junior and senior English majors (Teaching and Journalism)
- Self-identified as never having taken a course in Race and Ethnic Studies prior to this one
- Majority reported growing up in all-White or mostly White communities
Evaluation of Students Critical Thinking, Reading and Writing Skills
From the Beginning to the End of the Semester

• Students require more prompting from Dr. Wilburn in class
• Students dialogue with the text much less
• Students rely on personal experiences and not the assigned reading to provide support for their class contributions
• Students offer simple, superficial analysis of the text in writing and in discussion
• Students’ writing is not well organized with many grammatical errors

• Students can readily respond to Dr. Wilburn’s prompt for classroom discussions
• Students dialogue with the text consistently and view it as helpful, if not essential
• Students use less “I” statements and class contributions are more grounded in the text
  • Students’ responses are more perceptive and articulate
  • Students’ writing has much clearer logical flow and better use of grammar
• Student responses are short, no references to course material or other sources are used.

Dr. Wilburn is guiding them word by word through the sentence.

• Students require lots of facilitation by Dr. Wilburn to produce the proper level of analysis.

Class Notes From Sept

Class Notes 9/11

What is the purpose of Mills’ first sentence?
Breaking down the sentence, what is epistemology?
- process/science of knowledge

What general body of knowledge are we talking about?
- “Anglo-American” refers to a white socialized body of knowledge

What does this mean?
- body of knowledge born from white culture
- been developed through white history

What does... “Cartesian” mean?
- knowledge from Descartes
  - -> logic, reason, philosophy, math, science
  - -> “I think therefore I am” a famous quote from him that implies a self-centric way of thinking/being
  - -> the self is at the center of existence
  - and is the starting point of our being

... “Miscognition” mean?
- process of knowing or thinking something false

... “Structural group-based” mean?
- systematic denial of being wrong by force of the groups way of thinking

... “Classically individualist” mean?
- puts the self, the individual, above all else

... “Self-paradoxically” mean?
- self-centered, conceited

... “Selipism” mean?
- extreme ego-centrism

... “Blithely indifferent” mean?
- happy and uncaring
- blissfully and uncaringly ignorant

[original question]
- anything that runs counter to the white male perspective is (and always has been) considered invalid
  - -> narrow body of knowledge
  - -> male-centered, no space (voice) for women
  - -> and there is no opportunity to challenge this dynamic
Class notes from Nov

• Student responses are longer, more analytical and more articulate

• Students do not require as much prompting and guided discussion questions from Dr. Wilburn

• Students reference details from the text when making analytical statements

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Hatch: there is a clear link between these things because of her repetition of the terms and how she uses them together, but I still don’t know what it is
Mitchell: its hard to get past the abstract nature of her language, its choppy to read and difficult to follow

Why do you call her drama abstract? What does abstract mean? What does this tell us about the author?
Homan: abstract is “considered apart from concrete existence” according to the dictionary, so if we consider her writing abstract then that tells us she is a non-traditional writer, that she goes against the grain and she makes her reader work harder to grasp the meaning of the text

What does that tell you about Kennedy’s literary profile?
Homan: that she’s unconventional, that she’s not afraid to challenge the norm and step outside the box
Ward: she does not want to come right out and tell the reader what she wants them to know

Why not just tell her audience what she wants them to know?
Fifield: the struggle of her reader to understand her language is symbolic of her own struggle to understand the things in life that seemed foreign to her as a woman of color in a predominately white society
Homan: she leaves the reader up to his or her own interpretation
Winslow: she is certainly more memorable for doing it this way, more attention grabbing

What is this text about then?
Beimler: the blood on the white dresses reminds me of Morrison and the innocence she conveyed with he image of white dresses, while the blood represents the death of youth, or innocence when it meets the real world

How?
Winslow: I honestly instantly thought of a girls menstrual cycle when I read the blooded white dresses imagery, and how a getting her period is initiation into womanhood

->in a religious context getting your period makes your impure, tainted, no longer untouched
Holroyd: these girls are in a school and dealing with their menstrual cycle, as if your period isn’t enough of a struggle, you also have to try to get an education under less-than-ideal conditions
Cullen: the pinnacles coming down reminded me of kids leaving the innocence of childhood behind and become adults
Ward: I saw a cycle occurring here where the girls are punished for bleeding and they only bleed more when they are punished

->if bleeding (for your monthly) is synonymous with being a woman, then simply being a woman is a punishable offence

Now can we begin to see what the text is about?
What about this class helped students develop their critical thinking, reading and writing skills?

Traditional understanding of the university classroom usually follows what is called a “banking system” of education. The banking system classroom looks like this:

An “engaged pedagogy,” however, helps students to cultivate an entrepreneurial spirit of discovery in their academic pursuits. Author and educator bell hooks says an engaged pedagogy is effective because it necessitates and educational experience that “[strives] not just for knowledge in books, but knowledge about how to live in the world.”
Why is this important?

How can we all benefit from an entrepreneurial spirit of discovery in the classroom?

Does UNH already foster such a spirit, as suggested by the excerpt from the Undergraduate course catalog?

How could we use the model of an engaged pedagogy to improve upon our standards for both students and faculty at UNH?