

Notes from the Classroom

Written by Cody Bema

Thursday, 11 February 2010 21:56 - Last Updated Thursday, 11 February 2010 22:35

I am a teacher of English in one of the most illustrious schools in the Kern High School District. During my three year stint at this particular institution of learning, I have encountered three realities in education: 1.) the role of the teacher is to be a healer of social maladies injected into the students' collective psyche-the elixir at our disposal is the blending of critical thought and passionate discourse; 2.) the true products of the educational experience must be new and thus revolutionary and must not maintain the socio-political status quo; and 3.) all hope in education lies with the students and not with the teachers, administrators, and board members, as the latter seems to usually be manipulated by some sort of extrinsic motivator, specifically the acquisition or retaining of power.

I observe this tragic phenomenon and become saddened by not only the state of our education system, but at the state of our humanity. In its purest form, the educational experience is a microcosm of the human experience, as it externalizes what is within all of humanity, putting it on the examining table for all to see, deconstruct, and be inspired by the eternity that has been placed within all of us. The result of this practice is a deeper understanding of what it truly means to be human, of who we truly are. Being educated should be a humanizing experience for everyone involved; in other words, students, teachers, administrators, board members, and politicians should leave the experience empathetic to everyone else struggling with the human condition. Instead, the educational experience has become dehumanizing, as the political decision-makers at the top reign down from their ethereal mount mandates that propagate a single conception of the world, the master narrative told to us by wealthy, white men who are deaf to the individual voices of those on the margins of society, and the administrators and teachers can only capitulate to these infallible directives. The biggest loser in this gothic horror tale are the students, who are pelted daily with information that they feel no actual connection to besides it being something their teacher told them to memorize so they can duplicate said information on a quiz later that week.

As an instructor, I am confronted by a perpetual existential crisis where I am asked by my superiors to ignore my students' humanity, their need to understand who they are as human beings and to toe the company line, to inculcate them with expectations of how to act and what to think. Everyday I play an active role in my kids' psychological and spiritual dismantling and perspective reconstruction. When a student deviates from the state standards based lesson plan to ask a personal question about a personal issue or just a general concept with which they may be overwhelmed or even worse they are "disruptive" or "out of control," I am to bring them back, forcefully if necessary, from where they were, immersed in their own lives-the arena in which all their struggles take place, to where they need to be, the world of shallow facts and meaningless names that have been deemed important by some person in a land far, far away.

When I look into the eyes of each of my students, I see infinite potential, infinite curiosity, the infinite capacity to create something new that would inspire the rest of humanity to look within its collective self and to find and embrace its human spirit, the metaphysical entity that is our true identity and our intimate connection to the rest of humanity as well as to the Divine. This human

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spirit is a precious resource that must remain unsullied by the disease ridden hands of society. For those of us who are older, we have already sacrificed our spirit, our identity for the purpose of fulfilling social expectations. On the other hand, our youth, although occasionally injured by social injustice and personal traumas, still retain their virtuosity, their ability to find their true selves, their drive to express themselves in ways that are new and innovative, enriching society with this creativity. As a teacher, it is my job to quash that spirit and to force my students into an existence that is unnatural and destructive to their true identities. However, as a human being, it is my obligation to encourage my students in their struggle to discover who they truly are and to express themselves in new, exciting, and enriching ways.