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360° Final Reflection/Self-evaluation

I’ve grown a lot from this 360° not only in regards to course material but also in relation to learning how to be a better student in the classroom. I’ve learned about learning, which I find is something that too often gets forgotten in college campuses. I find that I became a better writer, reader and listener this semester. I felt constantly challenged not only by our readings but also by my peers. Our discussions challenged my ideas and I revisited and revised my previous stances on certain issues over and over again. I stepped outside of my comfort zone at some points, and at others remained in a tight cocoon.

In thinking about this semester, my first thought immediately moves to the impact that seeing my peers’ work on Serendip had on me. I was very struck by the depth of their thinking and how they challenged me to see issues from different angles. I enjoyed being able to read their posts often, even if this meant not doing all of my reading. At the beginning of the semester this was especially case, since engaging with my classmates online became a priority for me, even if I didn’t respond. I learned a lot from their writing, both posts and papers, which is something that I’ve been trying to improve this semester. I noticed how the write, present arguments, and cite sources as way to add variety to my own writing. I paid particular attention to how they wrote introductions and conclusions, since that is something that I have always struggled with. Another aspect of my writing that was influenced by my peers is the combination of real life experiences with readings and more “academic” work. I worked on finding a balance between the two since I think that they’re both in important in writing a good paper. I was particularly aware of this change in writing in our Voice and Silence class.

For my Vision memos I was more concerned with trying to convey how I was personally grappling with some of the issues that arose for me from being at the Cannery, issues ranging from envisioning programs that serve the prisoners’ needs to asking how assigning a single identity affected our interaction. I did this through papers in order to combine all of the new knowledge we had acquired through the first part of the course with our experiences in the Cannery. The Cannery was a place where I didn’t speak much in large groups, but rather listened. I think that there was something in me that wanted to make sure that the women felt heard, and I know that I became a much better listener because of it. In large groups, I listened to how people bounced off of each other’s ideas, and spoke about issues that literally left me speechless. I’m specifically talking about the conversation we had in which the women expressed their fear of leaving the Cannery. I picked up on that conversation the next time we went with a woman there, and we spoke about some of the issues that the uncertainty leaves. I think I became particularly close with two of the women, both closer to my age. I thought about them a lot, and wondered alongside other Bryn Mawr students what made our lives different from theirs. That’s a question that I’ve been dealing with since the middle of the semester and that I’ve found no answer for yet. I tried to grapple with these thoughts through my memos. The art piece was more a space for me to breathe. I acknowledge that I took it as an opportunity to take a break from the intensity of being in jail and of the semester in general and didn’t engage with it in a critical way. I found our discussions much more stimulating and often reflected on these in my journal or in my memos.

I grew and struggled a lot in our silence class because it was a place in which I really looked inwards into personal life complexities in a way that I hadn’t before in a classroom setting. I addressed my fear of being a “token minority” various times in class, I wrote papers about living a double life in which my family is unfamiliar with the kind of work I do at Bryn Mawr. It was a place where the academic and the personal met for me. I really enjoyed reading the novels, and critically engaged with all of them. Reading about Rigoberta Menchu was especially important, as I take any opportunity to learn more about the history/contributions of Latinos as much as I can. I read all of the three novels very careful, even if it meant taking my time. I’m remembering here how I finished Eva’s man the next week, because I didn’t want to skim through it. I did it because I was personally invested in all three of the novels and found them extremely fascinating. Some of the other readings, however, were very difficult; sometimes I glossed over them other times I tried to re-read them. I did appreciate however, the close reading that we did with one of these texts, and tried to use it with other difficult texts (when I had the time). I was happy that we took the time to learn about learning. In my entire college (and high school), I’ve never had a class in which we specifically learned how to read in a different, critical way. I found that learning another reading strategy was really useful, especially because it helped me understand some of the more difficult texts that we had in class. Linda-Susan Beard’s visit was particularly transforming for me since she taught me to see silence as the opposite of oppression, a place to grow and recharge. I found our silence activities relaxing and rich, but whenever I sat down to write a paper I just couldn’t visualize silence as something good. I think her visit changed that for me.

Our Voice class is where I think I worked the hardest to improve my writing. I used our reading and discussion of Eve Tuck as an opportunity to deepen my understanding not only in order to discuss our readings but also for further analysis for my thesis. That’s why I decided to re-write that first paper at the end of the semester. I put a lot of time into thinking how my understanding of her work related to social science in general and really enjoyed re-writing that paper. I was also able to use the texts from this class, alongside my own experiences as a learner to write in a way that is both academic and personal. I recognize the value of academic papers, but want to make sure that my voice is not lost in trying to sound more “academic”. I tried to do that in this class. I spent more time editing my Voice papers than other papers; I recognized the value of going back and changing thoughts and wording, not just checking for grammatical mistakes. Working on my thesis probably also had an impact on how I saw editing differently. I spoke most in this class, since I felt very comfortable in our discussions and felt that my peers helped guide my thinking. I learned a lot from them, specifically in these discussions, hence why I so often had to stop myself from speaking to make sure others got to talk. Our first when we spoke about class dynamics really had an impact on me. From then on I tried to actually listen to what other people said instead of just formulating my own thoughts in my head. I carried this with me to other classes, and especially when we went into the prison. I was also very engaged in our history project because it gave me a chance to work towards doing something for Perry House which was definitely a priority for me. I acknowledge that in that two week period is where I slacked the most in regards to readings (for all three classes) if they didn’t relate in some way to organizing and/or researching for Perry House. However, I am very thankful that I was able to incorporate that part of my life into our 360, whether as my activist project or my history project for Jody’s class.

I see my greatest accomplishment this semester as having learned how to be a better student, especially as I prepare to finish my last semester at Bryn Mawr and think about going to graduate school in the future. Our 360 dynamics allowed me to grow by absorbing/creating knowledge, becoming a better student, and becoming a better person. I was vulnerable at times but that vulnerability really allowed me to deal with issues that I’ve been dealing with since I first came to Bryn Mawr. Crying in Anne’s class and writing about Eve Tuck for Jody’s class were transforming experiences. I’m a better student and person because of it. Overall, I think that my success in this 360 had a lot to do with the environment that we created.