

Think Less, Acquire More

High school teachers and guidance counsellors seemed serious about university, talking about it as though it were a place filled with thoughtful people. “Higher education” was hoisted upon signs and placed into speeches. If you were among those chosen to go, you were supposed to feel blessed to be included. I was in awe of the university, was scared and was reverent.

When I applied to be *admitted* three years ago, present thoughts were filled with ideas about English language and literature at the university *level*, and teacher’s college. I often wondered what people did at university. I thought that if I was smart enough, I could *be* a high school English teacher.

The mystery was revealed shortly after my first year. This was not a place where many thoughtful people talked to one another, nor was it a place where the majority of the students took their studying seriously. I looked around and saw textbooks, highlighters and one too many Tim Horton’s outlets. I went to my first year science-context-credit class to find zombie students taking down notes and regurgitating them onto multiple choice exams. I still do not know if anyone in that room was thinking. There were still a few older professors who seemed to be thinking and some that definitely were, but they were being pushed out to make room for the new models.

Most of the professors I had encountered put bombs in the books and killed the authors. They referred to textbooks and anthologies, quoted modern studies, and made us do the same, with special formats and footnotes. This is what I was supposed to learn, how to interpret my way out of thinking, and how to follow instructions. I was starting to get it. I was being trained-up for something. Even in a department where language should be fore-grounded, skills still took the first spot.

After one year of studying had passed, I began to study Latin and ancient Greek along with English, only to be greeted from family and friends with phrases like, “What are you going to do with that? What kind of job will you get? What is that?” They were not questions; perhaps they were statements of fear and worry. So I began to worry, not about getting a job, but about why people were talking to me like that. I was walking through the corridor, when I glanced across at some logo with the words “Careers begin here” imprinted upon it, and I overheard a speech where the president called students “clients” and “customers”, and then it started to make sense. We were in some sort of training-up program and we were going to *get* skills, training, of course, and tools. People were worried that my toolbox was not going to have enough in it? I think that was it.

This was higher education, where there were not many conversations, and everything came down to what your professor had instructed you to do on your “course outline”. I still cannot believe

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that some university students hold their status over the rest of the world with any superiority.

I started imagining again what it might be like to be a teacher. Unfortunately, due to the amount of space available on campus, and the university's wish to keep expanding, many of my classes ended up in the "education" building. I started observing what my graduate education might look like or what it might be like to think about. I saw projects hanging on walls, students decorating bulletin boards, reassurance and self-esteem-building-exercises and I even sidled into the back of one of the education-lectures.

I found myself back in high school again. There were cut-out construction-paper leaves on the walls, bulletin boards with colourful pictures and half-baked food-for-thought sayings everywhere. Among this there must surely be some thought. I found things that were disguised as thought, theories, like "antiseptic bouncing". I do not want anyone doing that to anyone I know. I saw a bulleted list with the heading: "Development of Motivation" and a point reading "begin to generalize between right and wrong." This is what people are thinking about in graduate school. All it seemed I would need, besides the minimum requirements, is an overwrought sense of empathy, attention to everyone else's sensitivities, tolerance, construction paper, glue, a permanent smile, and I could be a teacher, too.

Perhaps the most amazing thing I have seen at the university to date is a question on the wall of one of the education rooms. It read: "Is there something about which you are still puzzled?" I hope there is, but I would not count on it, and for this, I have a great fear. So if for any reason you thought that you could not get into university, and that perhaps you were not able to meet the *admittable* standard, do not worry. Just regurgitate like you did in high school, apply the techniques, smile when the professor says something reassuring, and try to make everyone else feel good. With those techniques and some brightly coloured school supplies, you too can be my child's elementary or high school teacher.

Cameron Kroetsch