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In the Valley of the Giants: Cultivating Intentionality and Integration

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This study examines the cultivation of intentionality and integration in a foundation level General Education class: Communities and Societies. Three research tasks were set within the context of a grounded theoretical approach: codification of indicators for both intentionality and integration, and an examination of student learning logs. Intentionality was helpfully scaffolded by targeted questions for reflection while integration appeared more spontaneously, apparently as a result of the course design and delivery but also possibly as a result of the nature of free-styling journaling. Learning logs suggested students found full class discussions, continuous small groups, and journaling itself to be the most consistently useful in terms of their learning. One student described him/herself as a sleeping giant whose excitement for learning was re-awakened in this course. The suggestion is that more explicit cultivation of both intentionality and integration may help other sleeping giants (both students and faculty) to awaken.

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Abstract

This study examines the cultivation of intentionality and integration in a foundation level General Education class: Communities and Societies. Three research tasks were set within the context of a grounded theoretical approach: codification of indicators for both intentionality and integration, and an examination of student learning logs. Intentionality was helpfully scaffolded by targeted questions for reflection while integration appeared more spontaneously, apparently as a result of the course design and delivery but also possibly as a result of the nature of free-styling journaling. Learning logs suggested students found full class discussions, continuous small groups, and journaling itself to be the most consistently useful in terms of their learning. One student described him/herself as a sleeping giant whose excitement for learning was re-awakened in this course. The suggestion is that more explicit cultivation of both intentionality and integration may help other sleeping giants (both students and faculty) to awaken.

Keywords: intentionality, integration, deep learning, surface learning, student journals

Introduction

"This class awoke the sleeping giant!! At the start of this year I was still in a bit of a learning rut. I had forgotten how much fun learning can be.... This class woke up my brain again, woke the sleeping giant [funny face]. It got me into a routine of asking, critically reading and really thinking about things. As a result I think I am much more of a deep learner than a surface learner. I wonder about everything! When I read an article now 6 other topics I want to know more about zoom into my head. I write them down and I will look them up just because I am curious. As a result I am much happier and I enjoy coming up with new ideas to ponder."



from the journal of student Q

This research project investigated the cultivation of student intentionality and educational integration in a foundation level (first year) General Education course at Mount Royal University in Calgary, Canada. Through the examination of journals from students who gave informed consent to participate in the project, it became clear that both intentionality and integration can be cultivated by instructor prompts and course design.

Definitions of Intentionality and Integration

Intentional learning implies a greater degree of student self-awareness regarding the importance (or not) of what is being learned and the best methods of learning for the particular individual. A student who is intentional about their learning would have a clear sense of their goals and how to achieve them in a particular course, program, or for their university experience as a whole. Parenthetically, those goals may not conform to the more traditional academic's assumptions of what students are or ought to be aiming for. In addition, students may well be aware of a larger vision of what is possible after graduation, especially in the realms of further study and/or career opportunities, and may be adjusting their learning intentions to facilitate those later objectives.

Integrative learning implies the ability to apply learning outside the classroom in the broader arenas of other course work and life in general; to make connections between the academic theories or processes learned in one course to other courses and hopefully to their larger life in the "real world". Integrative learning might facilitate better academic performance as students become more facile with applying the different skills and competencies they are learning across their academic experience. Integrative learning might also foster life-long learning, which is often an outcome universities like to espouse.

Obviously, intentional and integrative learning are often linked. While some students may be more naturally intentional in their education, and others more naturally integrative in their learning, most can be encouraged to develop both of these predispositions and thus find, in their learning experience, greater success and satisfaction as they would define it themselves. "Becoming ... an intentional learner means developing self-awareness about the reason for study, the learning process itself, and how education is used. Intentional learners are integrative thinkers who can see connections..." (Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2002, p.21)

Much of the larger literature on intentionality and integration is pitched at the programmatic and institutional levels of discussion. The definitions of each which I devised (based on my own observations of students) appear to fit quite neatly with what others say (see Gale 2006, Huber and Hutchings 2004, the AAC&U and Carnegie Foundation's *Public Report on the Integrative Learning Project 2007*, and the AAC&U *Greater Expectations 2002*). There is also a notable contribution to the integrative approach to learning coming out of scholarly research set in classrooms in the recently published *Citizenship Across the Curriculum* (Smith, Nowacek, and Bernstein 2010). While there is much literature in the area of journaling generally (and specifically in relation to educational and cognitive theory), I found nothing specifically addressing intentionality and integration in this particular teaching/learning medium. Self-regulated learning, which is a broadening field, encompasses more than intentionality and integration; so the literature in that area was not directly applicable to my project.

The Context

Mount Royal University is a small (12,000 FTLEs), undergraduate, teaching focused university in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Our student population is largely from the region and is attracted to our school because of its student-centredness: small class sizes (maximum 35), individual relationships with professors, and services focused on maximizing the students' experience. Mount Royal is also the oldest post-secondary institution in the province, but only recently acquired university status through a governmental change in our mandate.

Our distinctive General Education (GNED) provision is a distinguishing feature of undergraduate education here. General Education comprises 12 courses or approximately thirty percent of the undergraduate course requirements for any bachelor's degree granted by Mount Royal University. The objective of GNED is to provide students with liberal education, with breadth and depth in their university experience, regardless of their major. At the foundation level, students are required to take at least one course from each of the four clusters: numeracy and scientific literacy; values, beliefs, and identity; community and society; and communication. The foundation courses are meant to introduce students to academic skills and methods, some different disciplines, and potentially to some commonalities across the Academy. The location of this study was in a Cluster 3 foundation course: Communities and Societies. General Education at Mount Royal is also a hybrid model, with disciplinary offerings at the post-foundation levels. At the second and third levels, the disciplinary offerings become GNED credits: for example, an introductory political science course (my home discipline) is a GNED Cluster 3, level 2 credit.

The introduction of Mount Royal's General Education (GNED) program as a foundation for all baccalaureate degrees offers many opportunities for investigating questions relating to the scholarship of teaching and learning. As an instructor responsible for the initial delivery of a first year course in GNED, 1304, Communities and Societies, I have consciously revisited my objectives both in regard to student learning outcomes and my own pedagogical choices to try to achieve those. As a result, I have come to question the more central academic and disciplinary objectives (driven by the disciplinary canons in terms of both content and methodologies) in relation to the processes related to student learning objectives (both in terms of necessary academic skills and intellectual orientation). Following Baxter Magolda (2009), my teaching efforts are now focused on encouraging "...graduates' ability to successfully use their academic knowledge in their post college work and personal lives." (p.143). Adoption and replication of the disciplinary canon seems less important than the formative potential of an education which assists young people in finding both their voice and their place in an increasingly complex and uncertain world. Broadly speaking, I am

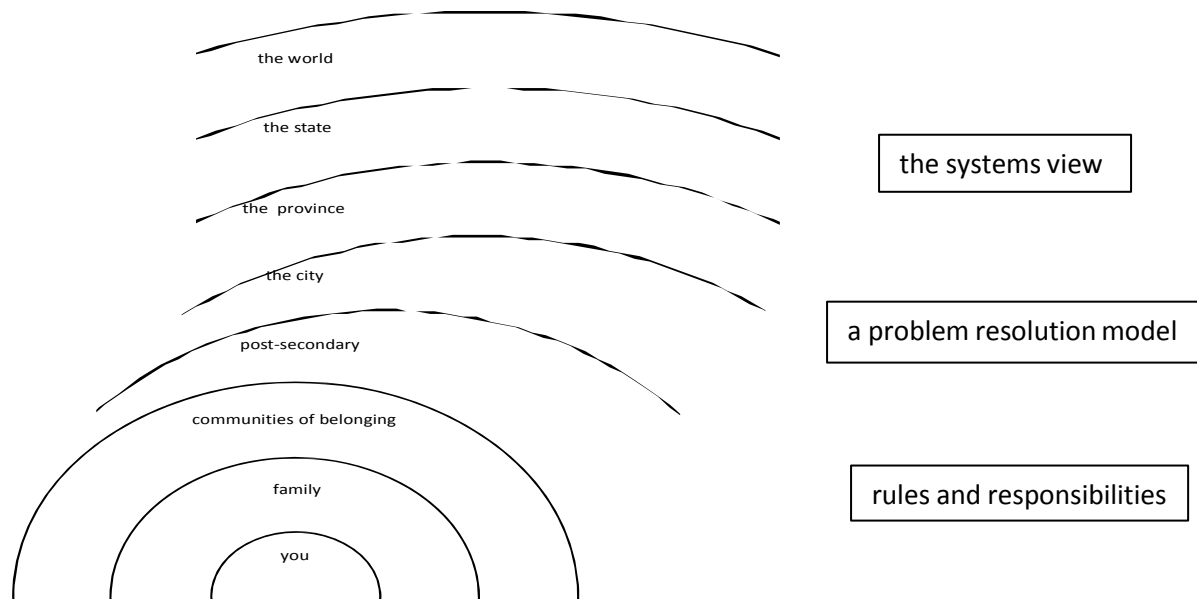
interested in how students can become more intentional learners in their baccalaureate experience here at Mount Royal and more integrative in their overall learning experience. It seems intuitive that the best place for laying the groundwork of that intentional learning would be in the General Education foundation courses. Additionally, cultivation of integrative learning may further encourage the virtue of life-long learning and the ability to draw connections between various aspects of one's life. Finally, there is much for students to teach us about how they learn and how they do not. For these reasons, and because I was deeply involved in the design of GNED 1304, I decided to examine intentionality and integration in this course. What the students taught me is that we can indeed cultivate integration and intentionality in both students and faculty, and hopefully increase success and satisfaction as individually defined.

GNED 1304: Communities and Societies

The first year course in which I launched this study, GNED 1304, Communities and Societies, has a deeply integrative structure in itself. Starting from the student viewpoint, we examine the concentric levels of communities and societies in which each individual is located: from family, through communities of belonging such as clubs and networks of friends, to our post-secondary institution (Mount Royal University), to our city (Calgary), our province (Alberta), our state (Canada), and our world. Three themes guided our exploration of these levels of communities and societies: rules and responsibilities, a problem resolution model, and the systems view.

The theme of rules and responsibilities focused the students' attention on the informal and formal rules which govern their particular communities and societies, and their own responsibilities in each of them. A simple problem resolution model (problem, goal, instruments, implementation, and evaluation) helped students to understand why rules are formulated in groups (to manage and resolve problems), and also gave them a tool which they might deploy in their own lives. The systems view (an input, processing, output, feedback model) was used to explain and examine some of the political constraints and opportunities for impact which exist in larger societal level. We also used the systems view to explain particular challenges we face in resolving global problems; the lack of global sovereign authority being a primary issue. Each of these themes was tied to at least two levels of community and/or society, but each was also explicitly noted as a useful lens through which to examine characteristics of any other level of community and society.

Thus the course itself directs students to make connections between the academic content we are covering and their own lives. Additionally, it introduces students to theories (the three themes) and the conscious application thereof to the real world. As an instructor, I was very explicit about those tasks and therefore, much of the integrative scaffolding was built into the course design and delivery itself. A visual representation of the course structure is below, noting the themes used to focus attention on each of the levels of communities and societies.



“Research has shown that the value of requiring students to keep a journal is an effective way of accomplishing key learning objectives.” (Stevens and Cooper, 2009, p.8). I was convinced that I wanted students to be free to express their thoughts in whatever way they felt best as we progressed through the term; a journal appeared to be able to fulfill that more imaginative and creative side of the reflective work I wanted to do with them, while also being a safe container for more standard academic content and processes.

The students were informed that their note-taking device for this class was to be a hand-written journal, which they were free to embellish in any way, and at any time, that they saw fit. We used the journals both to capture academic content and processes, but also to do some targeted reflective exercises where the students were given time to think and write about particular questions relating to the course and particularly to their intentions while participating in it. At various points in the term, and in the chronological order given below, students were asked to write reflective entries in their journal to the following five questions:

What do you bring to this learning experience? (week 2)

What grade do you expect to get from this course – why? (week 2)

Are you an introvert or extravert, and does that affect your learning? (week 5)

Are you a deep or a surface learner – why? (week 6)

Now that the class is ending, have you fulfilled your grade expectation? Why or why not? (week 10)

Of course, not every student was present to journal on each of these questions, but the responses were rich and varied. Introversions and extraversion were defined in the terms of where the individual gains energy (in solitary moments or communal ones) rather than any popular conception of the terms. The reflection on deep and surface approaches to learning, for example, yielded reflections which were surprisingly self-aware and are

discussed in the results below. This exercise followed a class discussion on those concepts in which the students were briefed on the meaning of the concepts (Biggs and Tang 2007); students then discussed how they, themselves, and faculty might view deep and surface approaches to learning, and whether there was any commonality in those views.

In addition, at the end of each class (i.e., weekly) the students were asked to fill out a learning log at the back of their journals, the objective of which was for them to assess which teaching and learning techniques worked best for them individually that evening. The purpose of this exercise was twofold: to help students start to identify what works and doesn't in terms of their learning style; and to facilitate greater understanding, on my part, of what works from their perspectives.

The particular class of GNED 1304 (Communities and Societies), which was my field of study, comprised 30 students registered at the start of the fall term in 2009, of which 28 remained enrolled by the end of that term (the term length is thirteen weeks). The study having been approved by the MRU Human Research Ethics Board, 25 of the students gave free and informed consent to have me copy their journals at the end of the term, have them de-identified, and use them as my data set (in relation both to intentionality/integration and the learning logs). The class was held in the evening (for 3 hours once a week), and certainly attracted some students engaged in full-time work or other daytime responsibilities. The students were of both sexes and ages ranged from 18 to approximately mid-40s, with most being in their early 20s. Many students had not yet declared a major field of study, but many others were in the second or third year of a particular program. Specific disciplines represented covered business, criminal justice, nursing, and more traditional academic disciplines within the arts and sciences. The 25 de-identified journals which comprised the data set were, in no particular order, lettered with the alphabet; therefore, students' comments will be attributed to their coded letter and are also reproduced exactly as written, warts and all.

Methodology

The Research Question

The research question explored in this study was: "What cultivates intentional and integrative learning in GNED 1304, Communities and Societies?" My hope was that the students' journals would reveal whether intentionality and integration were indeed being cultivated in this course. The theoretical impact would be found in teasing out the factors cultivating intentionality and integration. The importance of hearing the student voices themselves remains a driving focus of this research, rather than relying on the anecdotes and assumptions I and others carry into the teaching project; and, indeed, the student voices had more to offer than I had originally hoped. In selecting student voices from the data set, two criteria were used: trying to represent a cross-section of student voices, and the interesting or representative nature of the comments.

The Coding System

After photocopying the journals, a student research assistant removed those of students who had not given their consent and de-identified the remaining 25 journals by blacking out all names, particular personal identifiers (such as age or ethnic background), and any photographs which included the students themselves. The journals were then allocated letters of the alphabet as identifiers.

I then devised an initial coding system in relation to intentionality and integration, based on the definitions noted above. Broadly-based categories capturing intentionality included self-

awareness, what works, and affect; integration was indicated by commentary focused on connections to school and life. This initial coding system was tried with the 5 apparently thickest journal photocopies, the assumption being that thickness represented the most potential text against which to test the codification system. The coding indicators were then revised (principally by the inclusion of an “artifacts” category in integration to capture items inserted into journals by the students, something I had not anticipated). The final coding categories are below. Intentionality would be mainly indicated by self-awareness, what works for the individual, and affect regarding teaching methods and learning generally. Integration would be indicated principally by references to school, life, and with artifacts.

Intentionality and Integration

self-awareness	what works	affect	school	life	artifacts
learning type	learns more from	pleasure	this course	work	clippings
goals	works for me	criticism	other courses	family & relationships	photos
achievements	study habits	other emotion	skills transfer	social life	tickets, tags
			knowledge transfer	general	drawings

In fact, several iterations of data analysis uncovered some of the underlying connections between these indicators of both intentionality and integration; so it became impossible to treat them as discrete and independent factors indicating either intentionality or integration in a mutually exclusive way. The higher level categories became the focal points of the later data analysis and form the structure in which results will be discussed.

Results

The students’ journals provided a rich source of data regarding both intentionality and integration, and often the two were inextricably intertwined. Most of the indicators regarding intentionality appeared in response to instructor prompts, while most of the indicators of integration seemed responsive to the nature of the course itself.

Self-Awareness

The greatest number of indicators, by far, in this data set was in the category of self-awareness relating to intentionality. This might be the result of the guided reflections based on the questions noted above, but nonetheless covered a variety of student responses, from noting parental and professional expectations through self-assessment of learning styles and goals. As might be expected, student responses to questions regarding introversion/extroversion, or deep/surface learning yielded responses of an either/or/both nature with explanatory commentary that was most enlightening to me as an instructor. While some academics might be less interested in their students’ introversion or extroversion, most would generally prefer if their students took a deeper approach to their studies. Evidence from the student journals suggests the reality is that there are a number of barriers between students and the desire to understand academic material for its own good: time, interest, and assessment techniques were specifically mentioned.

Several students noted the pressures they feel as a result of their work commitments. "I am a deep learner. Through my years of formal education I have found that I learn from big to small and like to know how all of the components of something work together to create the whole. Having said that I am also in my 5th year of 7 and have learned the usefulness and skills involved in being a surface learner. I have always worked while going to school... I spend between 40 and 50 hours a week at work. I also have a total of 4 classes this semester. The skills involved in surface learning have saved me more than once. If time permitted me, I believe that I would apply myself as a deep learner in everything." (I) The realities of work demands that this student be maximally efficient with time and adjust expectations accordingly. By nature, this is a deep learner; by circumstance, this is a surface learner who is pleased with the understanding of the difference and why they have to rely on the skill set associated with surface learning at this point in time.

Many students were equally aware of their different approaches to learning in different classes and for different reasons. Several students noted their different learning approach in their disciplinary major which is clearly of interest to them. Lack of interest in other subject areas appears to provoke surface approaches to learning. Integration seems to be an associated condition of deeper approaches to learning, and several students highlighted some of the ways in which we, as professors, actively discourage deeper learning through standard forms of assessment which reinforce the sufficiency of surface learning. If we only require students to faithfully reproduce what we have presented to them, we are encouraging a surface approach to learning. But to design and implement assessment techniques which are integrative is more difficult, both for us and for them.

I was surprised by the self-awareness that the students displayed in relation to their learning preferences and styles. But perhaps more surprising to them (and perhaps less so to me) was the differing tone of responses to grade expectations at the start and end of the term, and their understanding of why they had performed the way they did. "I honestly am expecting to fail this course due to my horrid attendance, lack of handing in assignments on time, failure to complete all I wanted to in this journal, and the like... Seeing as how I just waltzed into university expecting to coast along to 80s and 90s as I have done for most of my life, this is of extreme disappointment to myself... However this shock may have been necessary... Now I can only see myself going forwards, building off this." (C) This student's honest assessment of his performance in the course, and the consequences arriving therefrom, have shaken him into a new intentionality regarding the rest of his university experience (and he continues to hope to make it to graduate school). A number of students similarly noted their disappointment with themselves in terms of their performances in the course, with the vast majority noting the demanding nature of courses in their majors (and their prioritization of same) or their early expectations that, because this was an "easy" GNE course, it would require less work to acquire the coveted good grade. This kind of self-assessment at the end of the course may refocus student intentionality as they move forward in their academic studies; but additionally, it allows the student the opportunity to be personally accountable for what they achieved or didn't. In the short term, this may not contribute to student satisfaction, but at least the responsibility is being refocused in a more appropriate direction: the learners themselves.

Having said that, a good number of the students performed as they expected and were satisfied with their achievements, whether they expected a high or a mid-range final grade. "I think I can still achieve a min of 70% after the final... Procrastination is my nemesis, & I think I've made a slight breakthrough w/ it & I need to continue to keep doing so." (S) Several noted particular challenges they face, procrastination and time management being

two which were mentioned several times. These are issues not typically addressed in higher education, but which might fruitfully be avenues into greater intentionality for many students. It may be questioned as to whether students take this intentionality forward and integrate it into the rest of their academic endeavors; perhaps longitudinal studies of this nature might reveal some evidence in relation to that question.

What Works

Learning logs seemed to be an extremely effective tool for assisting students to identify what works and what doesn't for them, both in particular classes and in the course overall. A variety of teaching and learning techniques were deployed in class throughout the term and, at the end of each class, the students were asked to note what worked and what didn't for them, and why, after being prompted about which specific teaching and learning techniques we had utilized that evening. Individual responses varied week to week based both on personal preferences and the topics at hand, but every journal in the data set included a rich commentary.

Not surprisingly in hindsight, some students also felt vulnerable with the journaling tasks. From her learning log entry of 23 September, K wrote: "I enjoy having discussions with large groups, it helps me understand the concepts better as well as confirm or correct any notions I had about the material. Journaling—it is nice to reflect but I don't like talking about my feelings and I don't want that to affect my grade." Despite numerous reassurances about the manner in which the journals were being assessed, this student remained slightly uncomfortable with exposing her thoughts, yet safe enough to express that concern in the journal (which she knew I was going to read, of course).

While students may not have been conscious of the impact these learning logs may have on their intentionality, it remains a useful activity which could be made more explicitly so with more guidance on the instructor's part. Naturally, there is much variability in individual assessment of what works for them and what doesn't as there are individuals in the data set. Nonetheless, some conclusions can be drawn in relation to this particular group of students. When students were asked in the last class to reflect on the whole panoply of teaching and learning techniques we used over the term, class discussions were mentioned as most useful, followed by continuous small groups and journaling, and then videos. The repetition of class discussions and continuous small groups in both the aggregate number of mentions by all students over the course of the term as well as in the term summary suggest that, for this groups of students in any event, these techniques proved to be the most consistently useful in terms of student self-assessment of their learning.

Affect

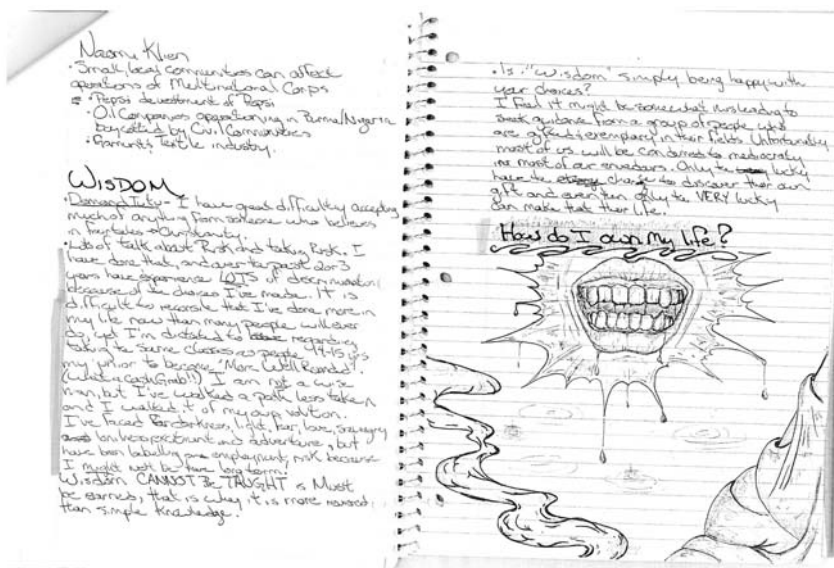
Students seemed easily to express what they loved about their learning, and several were comfortable enough to engage in direct criticism of course material or others' points of view, indicating a degree of confidence that might not have been expected at this level. Several students noted their disagreement with (and dislike of) a guest lecturer who presented a challenging picture of the homeless in Calgary and our general response to them. Some students felt insulted and "made to feel guilty" (O), while others appreciated the challenge and enjoyed the different perspective (suggesting some of their peers may be mired in a certain kind of ignorance, generational or privileged). Students also criticized various perspectives expressed in articles and films, often connecting their disagreement with their real life experience.

Two responses to the same film illustrate concerns unlikely to be expressed verbally. At the end of the term, we used Andrew Zuckerman's *The Wisdom Film* (a DVD included with his

Wisdom Book, 2008) to reflect on the wisdom of global elders and the global society of which we are all a part. The first student expresses some ambivalent feelings: entertainment and interest in talking with elders generally, but some criticism of some of the ideas expressed in the film as either naïve, clichéd, or both. The second student reflects on life experience and finds it difficult to situate himself with students much younger and less experienced than himself.

"We are watching the movie based on the "Wisdom Book" right now and I'm finding it strangely entertaining. Talking to elderly or 'wise' people has always been interesting to me... During the Environment section of the movie I do not think the speakers understand that what they are saying is impossible. They say "making small changes in lifestyle will make a big difference in the world", but it won't help.... The wisdom film seemed to be a cliché of all the things you are supposed to do in life or should do. The large variety of speakers from artists to politicians to chefs helped to illustrate the point of the movie's general idea which I think was always be critical and keep thinking." (F) This student admits interest in talking to elders or 'wise' people, something to which many young people would not care to admit (SO not cool!). In addition to that admission, he goes on to criticize some of the platitudes expressed by these elders in the film, particularly in relation to environmentalism which is a hot topic here in oil-producing Alberta. It is interesting to note that this is a student studying geology (see his entry under self-awareness in results); it's safe to assume he desires a career in the petroleum industry.

"Lots of talk of Risk and taking Risk. I have done that, and over the last 2 or 3 years have experienced LOTS of discrimination because of the choices I've made. It is difficult to reconcile that I've done more in my life now than many people will ever do, yet I'm dictated to regarding taking the same classes as people 14-15 years my junior to become "More Well Rounded". (What a cash grab!!)"



journal entry from L

(L)

This student clearly finds it challenging to relate to a class of peers who are significantly younger and less experienced than himself. While unable to criticize them directly, he complains about being forced to take these foundation courses in order to become more well rounded in his education, a point he feels is redundant given his life experiences to

date. The photograph above is of the page of his journal entry on this subject, with the wisdom film being referred to on the left page. On the right, however, is a most intriguing drawing of an open and salivating mouth, with the line above it: 'How do I own my life?' My suspicion is that he knows very well exactly how he owns his life; he has been extremely intentional in his life choices to date by his own admission, and is continuing that intentionality in terms of his education despite the frustrations he feels in that regard. An earlier journal entry notes "I've always been able to achieve the goals I've set for myself, this time I want a degree." Nonetheless, he appears to carry some resentment when not validated in his choices or for his experience.

The degree of critical thinking expressed by both these students may have been more safely expressed in journal entries than it could have been more openly in class discussions. On the other hand, many students expressed their enthusiastic love for learning, for their majors, for university in general, and even for particular topics or skills covered in the course. It was inspiring to read these more joyous expressions of the student perspective.

School

Students do appear to relate some academic information to their lives, often in rather poignant ways. One student made a journal entry in relation to another class he was taking. "Had my psych classes.... Finally doing a chapter that interesting its called coping with stress. Somewhat scary in a sense... I know I have an alcohol problem... have for a few years. Been free of painkillers for 215 days now. Was addicted, dependent on them for 6-7 years. But being in class and talking about how people turn to substances to relieve stress... and how alcohol is in a sense far more worse than drugs [unhappy face].... I know this will be an awesome anonymous way for myself to understand my actions and seek self help..." (W) This entry indicates both the student's integration of other course material and their intention to make some life changes based on what they have been learning at university, clearly demonstrating the intersection between learning in school and its application in life.

Several other students made connections with courses they were taking or courses they now want to take as a result of some introductory experience with a disciplinary field in this class. In relation to a section of GNED 1304 on the Canadian political system, one student indicated interest in learning more about the subject. "The above concepts are probably the first time I have ever learned anything to do with policy studies and truly understood it. Gives me hope that maybe I can manage to achieve a basic level of knowledge on the subject. I will look into taking PLSC 1101 now. Thank you for the vote of confidence!" (Q) Later in the journal the student notes revising their forward plan for the next two years to accommodate an introductory class in political science – a clear indicator of intentionality (as well as integration) and a potential new disciplinary direction.

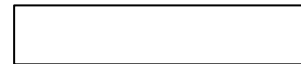
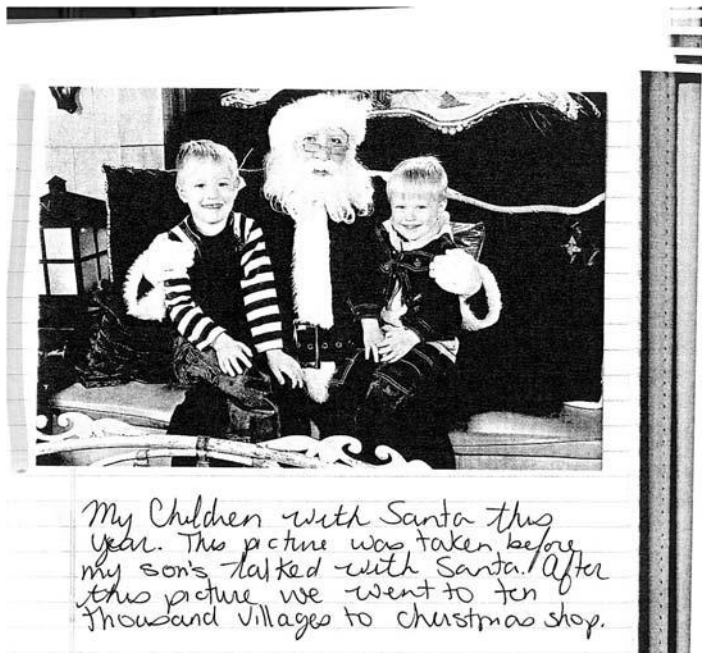
Life

In terms of variety of responses, students demonstrated a surprising ability to connect their academic learning in this course with their life experiences, and vice versa.

Referring again to the Wisdom film, one student felt this exercise was so valuable, that they noted: "Mom and [X]-- Christmas present – The Wisdom Book and a blank notebook... I think that for Christmas I want to get my mom this book along with a blank notebook. I would love to document her thoughts. I know that I do learn a lot from my parents but I feel like in my life if I have children it will be later in life and wonder if my children will have a chance to hear my parents words, not thru me but word for word. I am going to try this gift idea and see if I end up with my own book of wisdom." (I) The value of journaling is

expressed in this student's desire that her mother undertake a similar exercise, hopefully to leave the student with a 'wisdom book' of her own.

Another student pasted dozens of newspaper clippings in the journal, with comments on each relating to other classes they were enrolled in or simply issues they were interested in. A fascinating and rather amusing reflection from this particular individual: "I have started looking for fair trade products and my children are aware of the problem of sweat shops in our world. My son asked me where all the toys in the toy store come from and I told him the truth. Another shopper gave me a dirty look. If we don't acknowledge the problem, how can we change it. My son then asked Santa if his elves were paid fair wages for the toys they make and I was so proud of him! He took the information I gave him and applied it. Poor Santa, he looked confused." (E) There followed a beautiful photo of children with Santa; after the photo was taken, the student and kids went to Ten Thousand Villages to shop.

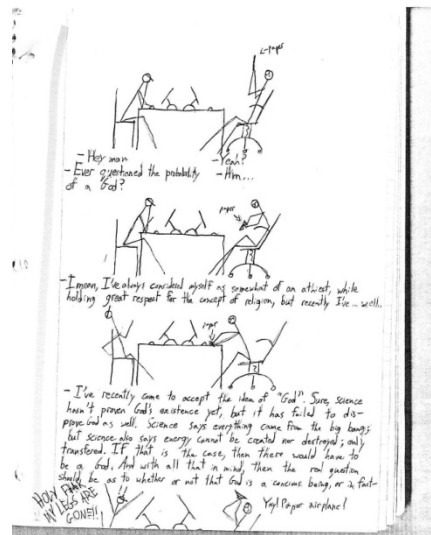


journal entry from E

Artifacts

While the odd doodling and drawing in the journals was expected, the inclusion of a variety of artifacts certainly was not. The sheer volume and range of artifacts was a real surprise; they were woven throughout the journals and applied to all the categories of intentionality and integration explored in this study. As already mentioned, several students clipped articles out of various media and commented thereon in their reflections, with specific attention to their schooling or life experiences (integration). Others included photographs of family, friends, their homes, and communities (integration). Clip art was also used by some, and there were three strong "scrapbookers" in the class who re-did their whole journals in elaborate scrap-booking styles (integration and intentionality). Finally, there were tickets and tags, clipped and hand-drawn cartoons, even hospital ID bracelets included in some journals (integration and intentionality). All in all, the inclusion of such a variety and quantity of artifacts which obviously meant something to these students was indicative of integration and intentionality in most interesting and unexpected forms.

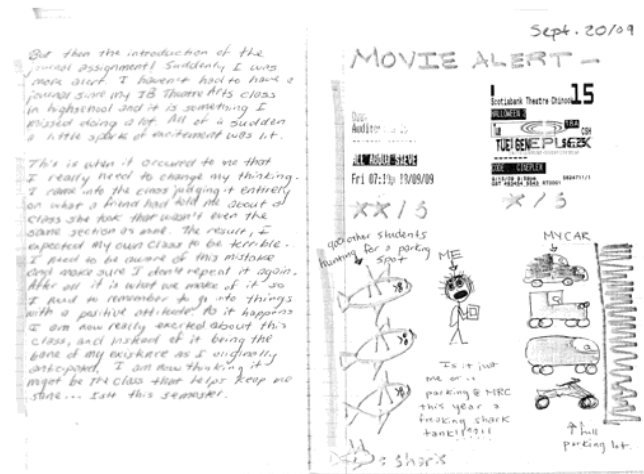
One student drew stickmen cartoons throughout his journal, noting things of interest as well as irritation to him both in relation to school and his larger life. In the cartoon below, one of the stick characters, presumably himself, is conversing with a buddy, asking whether he thinks there's a God or not. The student character explains how he used to be an atheist but he's coming around to recognizing that science can't either prove or disprove God's existence (with mention of such theories as the big bang, the conservation of energy, and the like: integration). Suddenly his characters fall off the page, and his friend, apparently uninterested in these deep thoughts, turns his attention to a paper airplane he's been making.



example of cartoon from J

Three students took the time and made the effort to reproduce their journals entirely in very beautiful scrapbooking styles. This required them to think intentionally about the material and its presentation in a new way and presumably to re-work the journals near the end of the class. In one case, the student extracted material from the course outline and assignments and embellished them with other design material in order to synthesize what we covered in a way meaningful for her. After receiving her journal back, she told me she wants to do similar exercises in other courses to reorganize the material in ways that she likes; she found it a very useful exercise (intentionality).

Below are two pages from Q's journal which was replete with photos, tickets, drawings, and artifacts of all kinds. It was near the start of the term, and the drawing on the right represents the sharks waiting for parking places at Mount Royal, as she nervously goes to her car to leave. Several students noted difficulties in parking which ate into the time they hoped to spend more freely or studying at the university. Real life experience, even in the parking lot, impinges upon students' best intentions (integration and intentionality).



Connections

The students in this course made many connections between the course material, their own lives, and their learning intentions as they moved through this academic experience. They demonstrated the ability to be both intentional and integrative; some with prompting, others more naturally. So what does this mean for teaching and learning?

Hearing the student voice is important both for them and for us. Students surprised me with the depth of their intentionality, their appreciation for their own situations, and their ability to adjust their expectations and goals. The variety of their individual circumstances also reinforces the imperative, which every teacher should take seriously, of letting go of our own assumptions about their circumstances, constraints, abilities, and motivation. It might also be the case that students themselves feel validated in some way by being given permission to speculate on and create their own academic pathway through greater cultivation of intentionality and integration, although this study did not touch on that question.

Students can become more intentional and/or integrative through scaffolded, reflective questions. The five reflective questions posed during the course of the term which encouraged intentionality gave students both the opportunity and the requirement to seriously consider their learning objectives and styles. Without those scaffolded questions, far fewer indicators of intentionality would have surfaced in the data set. The integrative nature of the course itself gave students ample opportunity to make connections between the academic content and other courses/the real world of experience. Nonetheless, it must be assumed that similar, directive questions regarding integration would yield a richer response regarding connections between students' academic and non-academic worlds. But it also remains my assumption that handwritten journals, with permission to embellish when and wherever, seemed to encourage indicators of integration. Not only can this kind of course cultivate integration in a subtle, yet powerful, way, but the tools we encourage students to deploy (even in the face of their resistance) can perform a similar function.

Class discussions, continuous small group activities, and journaling appeared to be the most consistently useful to student learning from their point of view. More

traditional teaching methods, such as the lecture and assigned readings, were less frequently mentioned by students themselves as useful to their learning than these three methods. In the text of the learning logs, students often mentioned the great benefit they felt was realized by hearing others' points of view, both in larger class discussions and continuous small group work. Most students appreciated the time and space to write in their journals; those who didn't openly acknowledged their challenges with writing or silence or both.

Why is this important?

What emerged from the data set was a clear indication that direct prompts from the instructor cultivated intentionality in the students' responses, as did the course design and delivery in relation to integration. I now suggest that direct prompts would likewise cultivate integration, and course design could more greatly cultivate intentionality; GNED 1304 could be re-focused in ways to further cultivate intentionality and integration.

Why is this important? Integration contributes to deep approaches to learning, as does intentionality. However, the corollary is not necessarily true; students who take a more surface approach to their learning may well be intentional, but need not be integrative in order to achieve their goals. Students appear well aware of their movement between deep and surface approaches to learning to achieve different goals in different courses across their academic careers. The cultivation of intentionality and integration pays off – students come to know themselves and their goals as learners and instructors can intentionally facilitate that in terms of both course design and integrative prompting.

In the case of this study, it was hoped that the data would indicate three things:

- whether this course cultivates intentionality and integration;
- suggestions for further curricular development; and
- opportunities for instructor growth.

In terms of the first objective, GNED 1304 unquestioningly cultivates student intentionality and integration, but the data also indicates opportunities for strengthening that cultivation in both directions. Not only might the course itself be refocused to more directly encourage student intentionality, but directive questions for targeted reflection on integration would also be useful.

In terms of curricular development, the findings of this study may be applied to other foundational or disciplinary courses where instructors (or students!) desire to increase both intentionality and integration.

As an instructor, I have found new ways of teaching this particular course based on what my students said about it and their learning experience; I have become more intentional and more integrative in my teaching. I feel confident in saying I will never be the same kind of instructor as I was before this experience; I hope to be better. I can no longer enter a classroom filled with assumptions about the intentions and abilities of my students, nor can I conveniently aggregate those individuals into "this class". The rich variety of their circumstances and abilities, so clearly articulated in their own voices, leaves me both astonished and forever changed. I know that interventions regarding intentionality and integration in both scaffolding and course design do indeed cultivate those dispositions in students. Finally, perhaps other instructors who occasionally wonder about the academic enterprise may find some encouragement in these suggestions for ways to improve our teaching and thus our students' learning. We, too, might benefit from becoming both more intentional and more integrative in our vocation and practice as teachers.

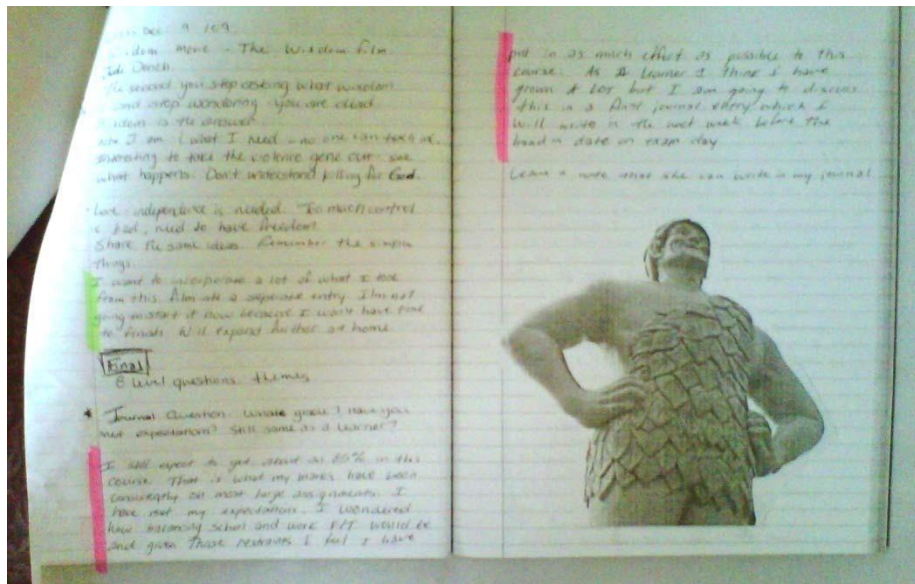
This study represents the first step in an ongoing series of SoTL investigations within GNED foundation courses at Mount Royal University, some of which are being executed in single courses, while others are being undertaken across the four clusters (numeracy and scientific literacy; values, beliefs, and identity; community and society; communication). The potential for improving both our own teaching and our students' learning is vast.

Parker Palmer exposed the divided life of the academic in *The Courage to Teach* (1998). "How, and why, does academic culture discourage us from living connected lives? ...On the surface, the answer seems obvious: we are distanced by a grading system that separates teachers from students, by departments that fragment fields of knowledge, by competition that makes students and teachers alike wary of their peers, and by a bureaucracy that puts faculty and administration at odds." (p.36) Although wholesale reform of the academic enterprise is unlikely even if desirable (a view not generally held in any event), a reconsideration of teaching and learning objectives is not unwarranted. Many instructors in higher educational institutions come to wonder what they are really doing and why.

But it is not only some faculty who become disillusioned with the abstract and often isolated nature of the ivory tower enterprise. Students too wonder how they can make this academic knowledge come to life or simply be of some value beyond that espoused in the hallowed halls. "The divided life of students was not a temporary characteristic of the 1960s and 1970s; it is a perennial crisis common to all generations.... Under the surface they still hope, but gradually they lose the vision of a life in which work and ideals are united, where purpose and values are part of the way they earn their daily bread." (Zajonc, 2010, p.55). Intentionality and integration can be explicitly cultivated in the Academy and may be instruments through which both students and faculty alike can draw greater connections between their academic pursuits and their real worlds.

The metaphor of the sleeping giants (students) in the valley or at the beginning of their university journey (foundation courses) resonates profoundly with the typical academic approach to higher education, and indicates suggestions for changes to those more traditional approaches. Rather than shouting down encouragement from the lofty peaks of our mountainous disciplines, perhaps we could intentionally come down into the valley and encourage students to awaken to the joyous possibilities of becoming more clear about the intentions of their journey, choosing their own routes up the mountain, and making more connections with their lives and their futures beyond the summit. In that way, these awakened giants may follow in our footsteps, or find new and exciting routes which they not only show to us but carry into the larger world beyond.

All of this leads me, and perhaps others, to wonder what other giants, whether students or faculty, might also awaken if intentionality and integration were cultivated?



journal pages from Q
immediately preceding the
opening quotation on p.1

Acknowledgement

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