

Darren Robinson
Dr. B. C. Roy
English / CSULA
15 June 2017

My experience with CSULA - maturing within education.

Education is a wonderful tool that benefits the entirety of humanity. Not only does it afford the furtherance of your understanding, also, it opens up much more of the world as student. The footprint of my knowledge has swelled; my understanding of my subjects, the world as a whole, and myself has increased extraordinarily with this small bit of time invested in me by the university.

I can remember first wanting to learn as much as I could as a small boy. Education and school was a fun place to be. My teachers were warm and kind and the world was a safe place. Children, all children, are sacred, every culture, race and continent holds this close to their hearts. Most people in prison have committed crimes in their teens or as young adults, (the statistics prove this). Somewhere within these formative years a disconnect happened. Not only do individuals forget the bond of their family, love, commitment and acceptance but the community forgets it as well.

This is exactly where I lost my way and my direction. The foundation of a child's psyche a fragile, unstable and wrought with potholes challenged during natural development, by itself. Throw in alcoholism, drug addiction, physical abuse and just the general feeling of not belonging to anything or anyone and the unformed brain *never* fully develops. We are stuck in that impulsive (stupid?) age where everyone else's ideas seem unreasonable and our own dumb ideas abound. Logic and reasoning are not even ideas at this point, much less developed. Rejection is the thematic backdrop and history of a lot of teenagers in America. In turn, teenagers turn their backs on pretty much everything and the chasm only widens between being a successful adult or just a troubled kid sent to prison. Just for the record, there are no positive role models in the typical prison; constructive criticism is patterned on the tough-guy stereotypes, and the spiral of destruction keeps itself rolling and winding. Undermining myself has been my profession since the onset of being a teenager, and I have excelled at this.

Now here I sit enveloped in the grief that I wasted my whole life fighting against myself. My contribution to the world that I love and miss is nothing more than wasted days and nights. Behold, some college classes come in and I enroll, complete, and actually thrive in! Can it be? Am I someone that my family can look up to? Can I actually inspire someone to stay in school? Will the narrative of my life finally have marks on the positive side of the ledger? I can only hope for the opportunity to prove that I am not defined by my crimes alone or my acts as an immature 19 year old.

At the onset, our yard's population (a unique contrast to the typical prison yard) talked about these new classes, about the idea of extending our education. I was both excited and a little intimidated attending a university and doing the course work. Here it is the "real world" (from which I have been essentially thrown away, exiled, and banished from) invites me to prove my worth. Big ideas, big step, big responsibility, can I do it? Can I perform at such a high level? It has been a long time since attending any formal education. What can be more formal than college? What can be more intimidating than college? I wondered if I was even capable of doing the work, or out-gunned before we could even begin. Therefore, I started the journey of higher education, with trepidation knowing I have patience and persistence. Understanding fundamentally, that there is an exceptionally large responsibility to the community, the university, my fellow students (now and following) and myself to make this not just a good idea, but also a compassionate and a great idea. The seed that grows into a body of success and accomplishment is something everyone involved can be proud to have started and finished.

I have acquired profound learning tools while attending CSULA classes. The practice of "close reading" has opened up a completely new worlds for me. This technique has unlocked the texts of the great writers further than I ever could have imagined. Moreover, being an avid reader, I want to know these texts as best as I can. The classes, lectures, and all of the writing revisions has created within me a new sense of discovery of knowing the timelessness of writing. Defining my writer's point of view, voice, genre, historical significance, tone, themes, settings and even the use of similes and metaphors brings me closer to the intended audience. It is like a "Rosetta Stone" for me.

In our first (meaning the very first prison in California to have a Bachelor's class) CSULA class, I was an

untrained timid writer/reader at best. I had no idea on how to formulate my thoughts, much less put them to a paper. I try to be a simple man, but prison has molded and twisted parts of my personality into being very cryptic and secretive, purely out of self-preservation mode. Being an effective writer and a good communicator is what I am striving to realize. These skills are the tools that I can use to give back to the “community” that I took from. Transferring this new (depth of) knowledge to my writing, it has significantly improved my voice and gravitas. Just the act of revising has demonstrated that improving in writing is an effort worth striving for. “*Remember essays are never finished, only abandoned when we run out of time: revise, revise, revise!*” is the quote by Dr. Roy that I will always hold for proof that writing, like anything else takes diligence. Nothing is an overnight success, at least not in my life.

I owe Dr. Roy and CSULA a huge debt of gratitude for helping me to learn with direction and guidance. I have wondered if every professor has the enthusiasm of the CSULA faculty. Are all of my classes going to be so powerful? I can only hope.

I will avail myself to learning as much as I can within these classes and try to be a good student. I do not know how to repay this gratitude to you all for taking the chance with me (yet). Nevertheless, I promise I will figure it out and learn how to pass it on, to pay it forward. This expanded footprint of knowledge that I am gaining will definitely be used to further humanity as a whole. Thank you Dr. Roy, thank you CSULA. I am already a better person than when this adventure started.