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Liberal Arts Reflection  
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I came across the definition of “liberal arts” as the following: “Academic disciplines, such as languages, literature, history, philosophy, mathematics, and science, that provide information of general cultural concern” (Pickett). The most interesting part of that definition to me is the ending; “provide information of general cultural concern.” So, with that in hand I have to go back in time to some of the classes I’ve taken and analyze if the last part of that statement has been true at Manchester College. I also want to critically examine if this type of education has been beneficial to me, not only as an individual but with my career choice as well.

One of the first classes I took at Manchester College was Physical Science. Not only did this class allow me to strengthen my science background it also made connections for me to our world today. We discussed such things as the amount of oil the United States uses each year, how much oil is available, and the consequences to our economy and the environment our demand for oil takes on our country. With our current political situation this has allowed me to be a more informed consumer and to think critically about the happenings we are involved in. Although I did not always agree with the professor’s opinion I appreciated his passion for the subject.

Another class I was in was Race, Ethnicity, and Gender Relations. The readings were stimulating and the conversations in class eye opening. What I thought to be true and what I believed was challenged and I think I have grown because of it. I have had to look differently not only at myself but others as well. Because of the structure of the class and the way in which it was facilitated by the professor I believed this particular class to be divisive among racial and

sexual orientation lines. I feel there was never any closure or answers to our discussions and some students left the classroom angry and possibly hurt. While I thought the subject matter needed to be discussed and explored I have concerns about the wounds that were opened and not given the chance to heal.

I have not always agreed with what was being taught in the classroom and I have sometimes been bothered by the personal biases that were so blatantly obvious and taught as the only truth. I was willing to be in the classroom and ready to listen to all of the different sides of an issue. I was ready and willing to learn. Unfortunately, some professors use their positions as their own personal soap boxes, leave “teaching” behind, and do their best to indoctrinate their students into their beliefs. The best example that comes to mind is the American National Politics class I took one summer. We spent 2 days reading and discussing the Cold War between the United States and Russia. The textbook mentioned Boris Yeltsin, and Mikhail Gorbachev and their contributions to ending the Cold War. The Professor mentioned these two great men of history and promptly ended his lecture and the discussion. I asked why Ronald Reagan, the American President during the end of the Cold War, was not mentioned in either the textbook or his lecture. His response was that there are those who believe that the end of the Cold War was brought about by societal pressure and Ronald Reagan was not needed to force that change. This is, of course, a pure political point of view. I said nothing to disagree with him because I wanted a good grade in the class. What I was thinking was that this same line of reasoning could possibly be carried over to another great man, Martin Luther King. Wasn't he involved in a social movement? Maybe the Civil Rights Movement did not really need him to facilitate the end of racial segregation and discrimination. I believe it was another case of not hearing the rest

of the story and a professor's personal political views getting in the way of a meaningful and complete dialogue.

One other class I would like to mention is Experiencing the Arts. I don't know of one student who says they actually look forward to or enjoy this class. And with all that I had heard about it I didn't look forward to it either, but I have to say I did like it. My only regret is that because of the amount of material covered and my own academic load I did not have the time to immerse myself into the content and absorb all of what was offered. Many years from now, when I have retired from the teaching profession I plan to return to Manchester College and retake Experiencing the Arts. I do feel that I have a base of knowledge that I can build upon and hopefully help my own students appreciate and grown to love the arts.

Even with the negatives I have encountered I do believe my liberal arts education has had significance in preparing me for my career as a teacher. I have been challenged to think about issues I might have not considered before. The diversity of my students has been on my mind since attending Manchester College. I know the geographical area that I would like to get a teaching job in and I know that in that area there is a large population of Hispanic citizens. It has been placed on my heart that I need to learn Spanish. I need to know how to communicate with those students and their families. They should not have to come to me and already know English, but I need to go to them knowing how to speak their language. I don't know that I would have acquired that awareness if I had attended a different college.

Manchester College is about differences coming together. I have been made aware of those around me and the values their differences hold. I think I will take that to my classroom and cherish each student that I have. Even more importantly, I will accept those differences and make them a valuable part of my classroom. With this new knowledge I believe I will be a better

teacher than one who has not had the opportunities afforded to me by my liberal arts education. Our world is now a global world and we need to be prepared to teach our children to be part of the global community. My liberal arts education at Manchester College has given me the first steps to be on my way to be that kind of teacher.

## Works Cited

Pickett, Joseph P. et al., eds. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language.  
Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000. <http://www.bartleby.com>.