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Final Reflection

As mentioned several times throughout previous discussion posts, coming into this class I felt that literacy was more of an on/off switch—you were either literate or not. It was a simple notion, that literacy meant the ability to read, and did not account for any variables. However, literacy now is much more of a dynamic, living, and varied ability.

One of the most important ideas we learned in the class was that of multiple literacies. It's not whether you can read or write, it's whether you can understand technical English, political discussions, email standards, and so on. Literacy is a mastery (or at least functional) understanding of the characteristics of a given form of communication (the list above). And there isn't just one, but countless literacies. Are you literate? That question now requires a follow-up—are you literate in *X, Y, or Z*? Realizing that there is more to literacy has helped me consider my past and future writing and what I expect future students to know.

Before this class I knew I wanted to teach English, specifically writing, since that has been my career and passion my entire life. But now I realize that teaching isn't just about getting kids or college students to read or write, but to instill in them awareness about contexts, audiences, formats, rules, and expectations of a given method of writing. I know this will be invaluable when teaching creative writing or essay writing, as I now can articulate the

differences in genres and the specific skills and methodologies applicable to both without a reductionist approach of it's either right or wrong.

Argument as Dialogue took my thinking down an unexpected road. Where most of the class was spent understanding how various literacies interact, the role of technology in enabling or repressing literacy growth, and how global communication impacts local and global literacies, the book focused my thoughts on persuasion, discussion, and rhetoric.

I must admit, before reading the book I thought a debate was something you win or lose. Look at the US presidential debates, after all—they are very much geared around winning and losing. That's not to say I was highly opinionated and argumentative—I've always tried to avoid polarizing beliefs or thoughts on complex topics (like climate change, border issues, LGBT rights, and so on) in favor of forming opinions dynamically, changing or adopting views as I gain more information. But I never thought about teaching argument, rhetoric, and discussion as something so complex. I like how Clifton talks about framing debates and discussions not as something adversarial, but as an opportunity to understand the viewpoints of *all* the stakeholders in a given situation. It's important to know that, just because you feel right in your perspective, doesn't make someone who has a completely different experience any less right because their views don't align with yours. With the bullying example from the beginning of her book, most people would view what happened as either right or wrong. But she removes that method of thinking and helped me realize it isn't about who was right or wrong, but bringing the information from everyone together to help those affected (and those not directly affected) to promote understanding, which would foster change as appropriate as a necessary result.

Every student, every *person* should realize arguments and discussions aren't something we should win or lose. Everyone needs to know that events transcend their own experiences, and only through dialogue with the intention of understanding, will local, national, and global issues are properly framed and adequately addressed.

I'm excited to share my broadened understanding with future students. I've already begun talking about what we've covered with my family, and I know it will only help us navigate an increasingly polarized and competitive world in the short term (thanks to the election, for one) and long term, as I continue publishing and eventually move towards teaching.