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A Response to Submitting to the Disciplines of Liberation

Holly Malm
University of Northern Iowa

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A Response to Submitting to the Disciplines of Liberation

Holly Malm

Ever since I was little, I imaged human beings as islands with a vast ocean separating us from others. We spend our whole lives trying to traverse this ocean, not by boat, but through messages in bottles that we can only pray reach our intended and that our intended speaks our language. When we find a way to communicate, the loneliness of our island solitude is momentarily broken.

Academia is a sea filled with millions of bottles, some ingeniously propelled, some written in languages complex and specific, and many float by in clipped text speak. Personal islands cluster into reef Departments, which clump within Colleges, all existing within the sea of the University. Despite the distances and differences, we are linked by a network of bottles bumping like wind chimes. We are connected by the words we send, so we must learn some universal way to communicate our vastly varied and specialized ideas.

Though this example may come across as a little childish, it aptly represents the concrete reality of a university community. It explains our propensity towards differentiation and individuality despite our desire to be understood and, ultimately, why we find it so difficult to communicate our ideas, our conceptions, and ourselves. As Gustave Flaubert so beautifully conveys in *Madame Bovary*, “as if the fullness of the soul did not sometimes overflow in the emptiest metaphors, since no one can ever give the exact measure of his needs, nor of his conceptions, nor of his sorrows; and since human speech is like a cracked tin kettle, on which we hammer out tunes to make bears dance when we long to move the stars.” Though Flaubert uses metaphor in a different way than Dr. Koch, Flaubert seeks to communicate through the imagery of thought Dr. Koch expounds upon in his article.

As a member of the English department, I will admit my prejudiced inclination towards words, but in spite of this, I do not believe that anyone can exaggerate their importance. College Writing and Research instills the basic skills of communication along with many other Liberal Arts Core courses. As Dr. Koch states, “This LAC discipline transforms the student’s matrix of understanding and matrix FOR understanding,” (Koch 4). The Liberal Arts Core, if taken seriously and purposefully, changes a student’s way of thinking. Throughout LAC a student is given more words and images to expand their perception and to enhance their ability to communicate. A quote from Van Doren that Dr. Koch includes illustrates the foundational concept of LAC. “Education will be saved only when it is agreed that men must know the same things – which doesn’t mean that they will believe the same things” (95). To become a responsible citizen, a student must know the common images and ideas to communicate their own needs and values within society.



With the economy still a quagmire for many, underlining the universal positive externalities of education becomes a critical part of justifying funding that sustain us.

As Dr. Koch explains, we are so often unaware of our personal definitions of the words we use. The importance of both CWR and LAC lies in the shared knowledge taught to students before they branch off into their specialized fields, where common words take on very specific meanings. Without this shared knowledge, we find it much more difficult to understand the messages of others, bottled or otherwise.