“Only Connect: The goals of a Liberal Education” by William Cronon

Grade/Subject: Adult

Ideas, Values: Community, Education, Freedom, Literacy, Wisdom

Pre-Seminar Content

Launch Activity:

Display the following definition of the Liberal Arts (from Robert Maynard Hutchins’ “The Great Conversation”):

“The method of liberal education is the liberal arts, and the result of liberal education is discipline in those arts. The liberal artist learns to read, write, speak, listen, understand, and think.... As we all live in the tradition, whether we know it or not, so we are all liberal artists, whether we know it or not. We all practice the liberal arts, well or badly, all the time every day. As we should understand the tradition as well as we can in order to understand ourselves, so we should be as good liberal artists as we can in order to become as fully human as we can.”

Discuss with all participants the implications of Hutchins’ definition for contemporary teachers and students.
Inspectional Read:
Distribute the text and have participants inspect it without reading it. Based on the evidence, what sort of text do they think this is? Now have them read the first and last paragraphs: how would they revise their estimation of this text based on this new evidence? Have them choose a partner and read the text once aloud, taking turns paragraph by paragraph. As they read, have them highlight any unfamiliar words or phrases.

Background Information:
Share as appropriate: William Cronon is a scholar who is very interested in the place of human beings in nature and the proper role of education in preparing young people to take their place in the larger world. This essay appeared in American Scholar in the late 1990s.

Vocabulary:
Discuss as a whole group any unfamiliar words or phrases (from the Inspectional Read) until all participants are comfortable with the surface meaning of the text.

Analytical Read:
Have participants reread Cronon’s ten characteristics of a liberally educated individual (pages 76-78) and rank-order them from one to ten, one being the most important in the opinion of the reader down to number ten as the least important. Each participant should bring his or her ranking along with the text to the seminar.

Pre-Seminar Process
Define and state purpose for Paideia Seminar.
Describe the responsibilities of facilitator and participants.
Have participants set a Personal Goal.
Cronon lists ten goals of a liberal education. As a human being (not solely as an educator), which of the ten do you consider most essential? (round-robin response)

What makes that characteristic essential? (spontaneous discussion)

Cronon writes that “skilled readers know how to read far more than just words. They are moved by what they see in a great art museum and what they hear in a concert hall….All of these are ways in which the eyes and the ears are attuned to the wonders that make up the human and natural worlds.” Do you agree with Cronon’s definition of reading? Why or why not?

Can you see a relationship between two or more of Cronon’s ten characteristics? How would you describe that relationship?

Under objective # 10, Cronon writes that “a liberal education is about gaining the power and the wisdom, the generosity and the freedom to connect.” What do you think he means by “connect”? Do you agree with him?

What would be one of the characteristics on your list of “the qualities of … human beings that we would like [our] curriculum to produce”? Explain why you value that characteristic.
Have the participants work together as a whole group to compile a list of characteristics of a truly well-educated human being. Facilitate group discussion such that similar characteristics are combined and the whole list doesn’t run to more than a dozen characteristics.

What are the goals of American public schooling? After reading and discussing “Only Connect” by Willian Cronon, write an Introduction to the list of characteristics developed by you and the other participants. Address the question and argue why these characteristics are so important. Use the original text as your model.

(Argumentation/Analysis)

Note: the eventual essay (Introduction and List of Characteristics) will become a seminar text for use with your own faculty or other colleagues.
Brainstorm:
Have all participants choose from the master list of characteristics generated in the Transition to Writing those characteristics they wish to feature in their own essays…and then consider how they want to organize them in a final, personal list.

Structure the Writing:
Have participants use Cronon’s original essay as a model OR outline a structure of their own for this introduction.

First Draft:
Give about 30 minutes for all participants to compose a first draft of their Introduction.

Collaborative Revision:
Have participants work in pairs to read their first drafts aloud to each other with emphasis on reader as creator and editor. Listener says back one point heard clearly and asks one question for clarification. Switch roles. Stress the importance of a clear claim supported by ample evidence. Give time for full revisions resulting in a second draft.

Edit:
Once the second draft is complete, have participants work in groups of three-four and this time take turns reading each other’s second drafts slowly and silently, marking any spelling or grammar errors they find. (Have dictionaries and grammar handbooks available for reference.) Take this opportunity to clarify/reteach any specific grammar strategies you have identified your students needing. Give time for full revisions resulting in a third and final draft.

Publish:
Have participants use their final products (Introduction and List of Characteristics) as a faculty seminar text with their own colleagues or with another group of interested adults, such as parents.
This Paideia Lesson Plan was created by:

Name: Terry Roberts
Organization: National Paideia Center

Link to text: https://www.grinnell.edu/sites/default/files/documents/Cronon_Only_Connect.pdf