

Kinder,

Over the next three days, find an hour to review all of the "degrading" notes you have. Refresh your understanding of the philosophy and machinery that currently surround you. You'll need it.

The following are case studies. Each is anonymous, and, in light of our study of Tannen, I'll use the female pronoun in the description. Don't let that confuse you; the gender doesn't matter, just the feedback.

### **Case Study #1**

This student has improved her effort with formative steps and assignments, but she still struggles to comprehend exactly what is required; she often needs individual attention and help to understand directions and/or texts. Part of this difficulty stems from being sometimes distracted or unfocused in class.

Last week, when asked, she had not compiled justifications for progress reports. She was still looking at the list of comments when I collected those numbers.

She has also not started the classification and division essay, except to suggest a few ideas for subjects. She has been given consistent feedback all year, including this quarter, on weaknesses in writing; yet she has not shared a draft (or even part of a draft) of this major assignment, which is now due in less than 48 hours.

This is a limited student.

### **Case Study #2**

This student is obviously creative, and often speaks to that creative strength in reflections. But she is distracted in class, and has missed many formative steps and assignments. Much of this has to do with her involvement in the spring musical: During the few weeks leading up to opening night, she was often late and/or unprepared for learning in class.

This isn't that uncommon. The play dislocates many of you. But this does not give you a free pass when it comes to measurements of effective learning. In fact, it illustrates a key idea: You choose when your extracurriculars matter more than your curricular studies, and that is fine—in that it has its consequences, you should be aware of them, and you must accept them.

This student's lack of progress on the C&D essay—she had not started at all on Thursday of last week—plus her lack of focus in class, impairs any effectiveness she might otherwise—maybe obviously—be capable of.

This is a limited student.

### **Case Study #3**

This student takes advantage of every opportunity that comes her way, whether it's a brief conference on the subject of her classification and division essay or a chance to discuss something online. She submits writing to the newspaper so that she can work with some of the more gifted seniors, and she keeps a careful journal that reflects on the learning of each week so far this quarter.

Her writing is adequate, with some difficulty arranging ideas in an effective way; what it may lack in overall effectiveness, however, it makes up for in continual revision. The same can be said of her performance on

ETA, QORAS, or MC assessments: While not nearly the most gifted student in these areas, she is easily one of the most assiduous. Improving matters far more than any natural or nascent gifts.

This is an effective student.

### **Overall...**

This sort of self-monitoring is about a *holistic* account of you as the student. Keep going back to the notes on Kohn and our classroom; everything you need to monitor yourself is there, and a careful reading of the website—and a regular, careful reading of that site is another indication of how effectively you are progressing—will fill in the rest of the information you need.

In brief, you cannot say you are effective if you are not doing everything asked of you. You cannot say you are even adequate. You must accept that there must be *proof* that you are learning effectively—hence the need for careful self-monitoring and metacognitive journaling.

Know also that I am watching you, taking notes, and preparing for the end of the quarter. I will continue to reach out to you—anything from more attention in class to requests for conferences outside of class—when you need the extra help. When this holistic picture of you must be converted into a score out of 100 points, realize that it *is* a constellation: a lot of data, linked together by your insight into the goals of this course and the goals you set for yourself, with the final word coming from your teacher.

What it *isn't* is arbitrary. It isn't guesswork. It is a clinical appraisal of how you're performing.

### **Final notes and an analogy**

The first thing to say is repeated from your Kohnian notes and overviews: This is not about holding a secret grade in abeyance until the end of the quarter. There's no game and no gamesmanship. This process is about taking honest stock of yourself as a student over a period of time.

What we've removed from the equation is the clunky, arbitrary calculus of the gradebook. Consider that if we left that in—if we calculated grades out of 100 points throughout the quarter—then these case studies would see much, much lower grades in the end than a limited (i.e., 70-79) approximation. Late essays, missing formative steps, a lack of contributions in class and online—what would that equal, except strings of zeros and seas of red ink?

Similarly, a student doing everything asked of her, a student learning tremendously and growing constantly, may not have "earned" a high grade, if each assignment was weighed and weighted and thrown into a gradebook. To tell a student embodying the idea of true learning that she isn't effective—to cut her down with a number—would be cruel and meaningless.

So, if you struggle with multiple-choice and timed writing, you have room to grow; if you force out a classification and division essay at the last second, despite having had weeks to go through the writing process, you can hardly say you're working effectively; and if you don't stay focused in class—sneaking in math homework, perhaps, or simply gossiping for stretches at a time—you are not learning as much as you could. You can't call yourself adequate.

What you want to avoid is the delusion of confirmation bias—of selecting only the details that prove to you that you are adequate, effective, or limited, while ignoring anything that suggests otherwise. It would be like watching *Schindler's List* and using the girl in red to prove that the film is in color, not black and white, or like

watching *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and using the jokes the characters tell in the beginning to prove that the film is a comedy.

You want to wage myopic arguments, and it's not just that doing this about your learning won't fool anyone—it won't, because you are obviously wrong—but that you will fail to learn much as a result. You'll cling to a delusion, ignore your struggles or your successes, and stagnate.

As another example, look at the essays you are handing in this week. They won't be graded, but you'll get feedback where possible and necessary. If yours is a mess, you'll know from me *and* your peers, just like you'll know if yours is effective. Don't make assumptions about how well you did; draw careful conclusions from lots and lots of data. Be honest, specific, and direct about yourself.

To put it another way: Do not blink in the face of your own limitations, failures, or strengths. Own them, because that is just about the only way for you to get any better at this stuff.

Good luck,

Mr. Eure