

Reconstruction – the term sounds faintly industrial! I prefer to use the R-word “Rejuvenation” – for that is what the past 2+ years have been for me. Personally and professionally, CCT has been a defining part of my life. From my present vantage point: there was the growing up and the young adulthood part; the marriage, having and raising kids part; and now the part where I have the time to pursue ideas and interests that have always been there, biding their time.

I have one of those old black and white composition books that I started while “under a cloud” back in 1966. I had just flunked out of my freshman year in college; I was facing a year of junior college to bring up my grades (oh, the shame of going to a JC, in my elitist mind!); and my dander was well and truly up. Flunk me just because I don’t turn things in on time and don’t study enough?? Why I’ll show you! And that’s the essence of just the first page of this soul-searching journal. Filled with earnest musings and, as I thought at the time, intellectual conundrums (like “Does the head judge happiness better than the heart?”), the journal reflects a time when life was full of possibilities and there was plenty of time to work out what one’s life was going to be.

Let me hasten to say that I do not look back in regret that I did not choose the “life of the mind” at that point and aim for a career in academia (or any old career, really; I was one of those who lacked great stirring passions at age 18). The point is that everything turned out OK - and if I don’t have a doctorate at this stage of my life, I do have three incredible children who are now reaching their own young adulthoods. The letters after my name are MUM instead of PhD!

So this is the context and background I brought to CCT: ten years as a librarian, first in Australia and then in the United States. Following a short stint as a high school librarian, I found my niche in the community college, where the diversity and range of preparation, interests and abilities are enormous. Trying to do a good job in that environment eventually crystallized into my conviction that students needed more than the occasional reference to a book or set of keywords when they asked for help at the Reference Desk. Most of this is history now: how I determined that critical thinking needed to be part of library research; how I needed to find out more about critical thinking in order to encourage it in others; how I found the Critical & Creative Thinking Graduate Program at UMass Boston.

Fast forward almost three years later and I feel that not only has my initial objective been well and truly achieved, but so much more besides. I can feel the change in my mental prowess

(if such a heady phrase can be used); the reading alone has enriched and multiplied the connections and relationships that I can make now among ideas and areas of knowledge. In two plus years I have given myself the best of liberal educations! Far from finding meaning and applicability in a narrow disciplinary sense alone, the years in the CCT program became the education I was not ready for in my earlier years. Add to that the friendships I developed and the mentoring I received and it is no wonder that a major rejuvenation is the result!

I understand now that the CCT Program is no ordinary graduate program. The people who have gone through it are changed/enriched/emboldened – and grateful. If you read through the synthesis abstracts from previous students, the same sorts of “life-changing” testimonials fairly jump out at you. So, yes, I have changed, become more confident, and will always treasure these few years. With such a core change at the personal level, I am confident that I can go on to become an agent of change within my workplace and maybe even in the larger social sense. I hope that some of the flavor and energy generated by my journey will stand out as you peruse these pages. Thank you faculty and students of the Critical & Creative Thinking Graduate Program!

Jan Coe

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