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COFFEE HOUSE QUESTIONS
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Project Summary:
I once had an instructor who argued that the best learning occurred not within the four walls of a lecture theatre, but instead happened at the coffee house down the street. Her logic? She believed that as aspiring intellectuals, students were more willing to express their opinions in small groups and draw on personal knowledge and experience to contextualize and apply what they were learning. This project assumes that this type of learning is occurring where students discuss the questions posed in small and large group discussions and in the development of their other written work. As a result, “Coffee House Questions” aims to explore the development of one skill - critical thinking - in a foundation level General Education course.

Revised Research Question:
How are students using personal experience to advance their understanding of the material, what are students taking away from a foundation level General Education course and is it helping to develop their critical thinking skills?

Data Required to Answer your Research Question:
I intend to use all of the written work collected throughout the course. (Journal, Occasional Assignments, Reflection and Research papers and the exam.) From this material, I hope to be able to track the development of student thinking and determine whether the students are using personal experiences to advance their critical thinking skills.

Methods of Gathering Data:
Data will be collected using materials that are traditionally used in this class. (Journal, Occasional Assignments, Reflection and Research papers and the exam.) While I know that my data will come from these sources, I am not sure how I will go about evaluating this material or what the indicators of critical thinking will look like.

Anticipated Evidence:
I am hoping that I will be able to identify a shift in the way students address questions in the classroom over the course of the term. Hopefully the students will demonstrate a more complex and critical treatment of the material as the term progresses. Again, I am not sure what this evidence will look like.

Project Timeline:
By May 2010 - Request for ethics approval
June 2010 - Participate in the STLHE conference in Toronto with Miriam and Melanie
Fall 2010 - Data collection & hopefully present a work in progress at the ISSoTL Conference
Winter 2011 - Data analysis and preparation of material for publication
Spring 2011 - Present the basis for an article at one of the SoTL conferences

Literature Search Results:


Additional Information, Comments, Questions:
I think I am still searching for the right question, but have managed to narrow it a bit. The question that came out of the residency was a decade long project, so this was my attempt to rein it in a bit. Any comments would certainly be appreciated!