

Melissa Mattingly
EAD 860
Unit 8B Writing Assignment

In preparing to tackle this final writing assignment, I find myself enthusiastic. While this may be the norm for most people, it is not my standard emotion when faced with writing a paper. I believe I am excited about this final paper because it gives me the opportunity to truly reflect on the entire course—a course that exposed me to a plethora of new concepts. In this paper, I plan to examine how these new concepts both confirm and challenge the ideas I brought to this course, focusing on the concepts of teaching (especially in the technology age), lifelong learning, globalization and the purpose of education.

To begin, I think it is important to provide some of my background as I entered EAD 860. When I began the course I was a Lifelong Graduate student who had taken one graduate course - EAD 870, Foundations of Postsecondary Education. I finished my undergraduate studies in May 2004 with a bachelor's degree in International Relations and Political Theory & Constitutional Democracy from the James Madison College at Michigan State University. I began working at MSU as the Admissions Counselor for the Honors College in September 2004. Around 2003 I became interested in pursuing a master's degree in Higher, Adult and Lifelong Education. I took EAD 870 in spring 2007 to explore whether I would be interested in the program.

While neither a challenge to nor confirmation of my prior beliefs, the sections of the course dealing with K-12 education, education policy and technology in education were particularly interesting for me. This course was my first exposure to such issues. Never before had I encountered a thinker like Hargreaves. Through Hargreaves, I realized my naiveté about the complicated dialogue surrounding “education in the age of insecurity”. While Hargreaves may be somewhat pessimistic about the current state of “teaching in the knowledge society”, I believe he lays out many constructive ideas on how to approach the problems K-12 education faces and we have reason to be hopeful. In one of his concluding statements, Hargreaves says, “[P]ublic education and its teachers must preserve and strengthen the relationships and the sense of citizenship that the knowledge economy threatens. It must deal with the human consequences of the knowledge economy, teaching beyond as well as for it and adding values to the agenda of reform that build community, develop social capital, and forge cosmopolitan identity” (202). Hargreaves says we can only accomplish this goal through “teachers’ recapturing their status and dignity as some of society’s leading intellectuals, not being mere technicians and instruments of other people’s agendas” (202). While these are just examples, unit resources from Viadero, Portalupi, et.al., and Delfino provide encouraging glimpses of strong professional teaching in action. On the aforementioned points, I agree with Hargreaves absolutely and will speak more to the issue of education’s purpose and a means to preparing teachers for this high purpose later.

Another arena where my prior ideas were neither contested nor confirmed but instead shown to be undeveloped is the conversation surrounding formal, informal and non-formal learning. Never in my previous educational experience had I been prompted to think critically about learning formats and styles. Bateson’s *Peripheral Visions* was particularly thought provoking and insightful. Reading her work allowed me to think about learning in a much more holistic way and the stories from her life helped illustrate much of the learning typology theory presented by writers such as Coombs and Malcolm, Hodgkinson and Colley. While I sometimes found some of the delineations between formal, informal and nonformal education to be tedious and unnecessary, Bateson helped me realize that some delineation is necessary but mainly for the purpose of acknowledging the importance of informal and nonformal learning. In reflecting on

the entirety of EAD 860, it is helpful to look back on one of the first unit viewing assignments, *Erin Brockovich* through the lens of Bateson. I can more clearly see Erin using her life experiences (lifelong learning) to maneuver through her new career. Erin's life (and all of ours) can be understood through some of Bateson's concluding words. "Beyond either relativism or the search for absolutes, learning can be practiced as a form of spirituality through a lifetime. We started from participant observation and the necessity for improvisation, asserting the need to act and interact with others without complete understanding, learning along the way, and we argued that improvisation can be both creative and responsible" (234).

While this class introduced me to a plethora of new concepts, I was excited to re-encounter a number of thinkers and ideas from my undergraduate studies. The concept of globalization loomed large in my international relations courses. With EAD 860, I was able to think again about the ideas of Friedman and Barber. These writers provided some of the more theoretical concepts in EAD 860 so I appreciated the fact that I had already encountered their thoughts. Re-reading these authors confirmed my thoughts on globalization: it is happening and it is an ongoing process that has been already occurring for centuries but has now accelerated. I also appreciated coming at the discussion of globalization from a different direction—that of education. Mark Smith's "Globalization and the Incorporation of Education" was particularly helpful. I completely agree that "We have witnessed a fundamental attack on the [...] more liberal ideas of education." Globalization, in making the world a more competitive job market for all, has led to a commodification of higher education, and to an extent high school education. While I will soon address my philosophical ideas on the purpose of higher education, including a strong advocacy for liberal education, the immediate consequences of globalization for education cannot be ignored. As Cogburn states in "Globalization, Knowledge, Education and Training in the Information Age", "Given the increasing economic globalisation and restructuring in the world political and economic systems, and the requirements for knowledge and information in that system, educational needs [...] have changed." Cogburn advocated a number of components of the education system that need to be newly incorporated or improved. I believe his ten proposed components are all necessary and have a great likelihood of improving educational systems worldwide. Additionally, I believe his proposals and ultimate goals can be best accomplished within a strong framework of liberal education. Gitlin speaks to this issue in "The Liberal Arts in an Age of Info-Glut" stating "Common concerns [...] persist throughout the vicissitudes of individual life, throughout our American restlessness, global instabilities, the multiple livelihoods that we must shape in an age of retraining, downsizing and resizing. We badly need continuities to counteract vertigo as we shift identities, career through careers and cultural changes" (B5). The liberal arts curriculum is that continuity and such a curriculum can be integrated with the education that Cogburn proposes. As Gitlin says, "Faculty members in the liberal arts need to say: 'We don't want to add to your information glut, we want to offer some ground from which to perceive the rest of what you will see'" (B5).

To conclude, I have many reasons to appreciate this class and I believe that is a wonderful sentiment with which to end a semester. Throughout this course, I have become strongly optimistic about my future learning. Bateson gave me the chance to see that I will be learning throughout my lifetime and provided a lens with which to critically reflect on that learning. In formally acknowledging this for the first time, I feel hopeful. I also look forward to the formal learning I am about to embark upon. I have been admitted to the HALE master's program for fall of 2008. Through the critical analysis I will undertake in the next two years, I will lay an even stronger foundation for the rest of my lifetime of nonformal and informal education.