

personally. These essays are graded for control of focus, organization and, supported discussion.

Learning and Practicing the Fundamentals

While greater clarity and precision in evaluation criteria is critical, it is, in itself, not sufficient if students are to become skilled in integration. We therefore used activities and assignments to create “scaffolding” for their learning or, to stay with our juggling metaphor, opportunities to practice, falter, and learn from “the drops.” Some modifications reflected a strategic shift in emphasis to integration. Others introduced students sooner to sequenced practice in testing their disciplinary knowledge and exploring how to apply it.

Student Learning

What We Saw

Most of my understanding of this film came from watching the fishbowl panel groups.

I could not come to these conclusions without the help of my classmates through group discussions, fishbowl panels, and the typical Q&A with the instructors.

As we observed the nine student panels for *Sacred Space/Sacred Time/Silver Screen*, we were pleased that the revisions to the criteria and scoring had clarified our assessment task. But the real excitement came in the dramatic improvements in student performance.

All of the panels demonstrated a far greater disciplinary grounding and articulated more purposeful and connected integration than in previous learning communities. Most provided credible interpretations in terms of specific religions and frameworks of analysis from both disciplines; their supporting evidence ranged from sufficient to impressive. Most accurately defined philosophical terms and applied and cited the appropriate philosophical texts. Two of four groups discussing *Monsieur Ibrahim* and *Malcolm X* accurately identified specific Islamic principles like *salat*, *shahada*, *shirk*, and *zakat* and referred to the community of believers as the *ummah*, even though none of these was identified by name in either film. Also, groups began to identify subtle cues to bolster their arguments. One group argued that in permitting Momo to shoplift, M. Ibrahim was practicing *zakat*, or charity. Another, on the basis of their analysis of composition and editing in *Malcolm X*, argued that Malcolm’s second religious transformation stemmed from his recognition of *shirk*, or putting his mentor

Elijah Muhammad on the level of Allah. Similarly, the three panels responsible for Huo Jianqi's *Postmen in the Mountains* (1999) and Bae Yong-Kyun's *Why Has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East?* (1989), discussed by name specific Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist principles—*ren*, *li*, *Tao*, *wuwei*, and *satori*. One group used verses from *Tao Teh Ching*, an optional reading, to support its analysis.

All groups more consistently cited a range of cinematic evidence to support their readings, and two drew on their understanding of how films adhere to and/or violate narrative conventions. Of nine groups, only two did not identify *sufficient* cinematic vocabulary, a fact they ruefully noted in their self-reflections. Nevertheless, even these groups offered sensitive readings of films and supported those with evidence that went well beyond plot and narrative.

The panels also offered multiple perspectives on the films. Although the two panels for *Postmen in the Mountains* each focused on different traditions—Confucian and Taoist—both pointed out that their reading was merely one and not the only way to understand the film. One panel, having explained that the different subtitled translations in the two DVDs they had watched had significant implications for interpreting Taoism in the film, referenced the specifics of each translation in their discussion.

References

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