

Instructions: Please read the following excerpt from an article written by an experienced middle and high school teacher named Herbert Kohl. After reading the excerpt, please respond to the writing prompt that follows the piece. You will have two (2) hours to complete all tasks (including reading and re-reading, drafting, writing, editing, and submitting/uploading your written response to the prompt).

[BEGIN READING]

Years ago, one of my fifth-grade students told me that his grandfather Wilfredo wouldn't learn to speak English. He said that no matter how hard you tried to teach him, he ignored whatever words you tried to teach and forced you to speak to him in Spanish. When I got to know his grandfather I asked, in Spanish, whether I could teach him English and he told me unambiguously that he did not want to learn. He was frightened, he said, that his grandchildren would never learn Spanish if he gave in like the rest of the adults and spoke English with the children. Then, he said, they would not know who they were. At the end of our conversation he repeated adamantly that nothing could make him learn to speak English, that families and cultures could not survive if the children lost their parents' language, and, finally, that learning what others wanted you to learn can sometimes destroy you.

I discussed Wilfredo's reflections with several friends, and they interpreted his remarks as a cover-up of either his own fear of trying to learn English or his failure to do so. These explanations, however, show a lack of respect for Wilfredo's ability to judge what is appropriate learning for himself and his grandchildren. By attributing failure to Wilfredo and refusing to acknowledge the loss his family would experience through not knowing Spanish, they turned a cultural problem into a personal psychological problem; they turned willful refusal to learn into failure to learn.

I've thought a lot about Wilfred's conscious refusal to learn English and have great sympathy for his decision. I grew up in a partially bilingual family and in a house shared by my parents, born in New York City, and grandparents, born in the Yiddish-speaking Polish part of the Jewish settlements in East Europe called the Pale, and know what it is like to face the problem of not-learning and the dissolution of culture. In addition I have encountered willful not-learning throughout my 30 years of teaching, and believe that such not-learning is often and disastrously mistaken for failure to learn or the inability to learn.

Learning how to not-learn is an intellectual and social challenge; sometimes you have to work very hard at it. It consists of an active, often ingenious willful rejection of even the most compassionate and well-designed teaching. It subverts attempts at remediation as much as it rejects learning in the first place. It was through insight into my own not-learning that I began to understand the inner world of students who chose to not-learn what I wanted to teach. Over the years I've come to side with them in their refusal to be molded by a hostile society and have come to look upon not-learning as positive and healthy in many situations.

Not-learning tends to take place when someone has to deal with unavoidable challenges to her or his personal and family loyalties, integrity, and identity. In such situations, there are forced choices and no

apparent middle ground. To agree to learn from a strange who does not respect your integrity causes a major loss of self. The only alternative is to not-learn and reject their world.

[END READING]

In 500-600 words, please address the following prompts in one, coherent, formal response:

- 1) Briefly summarize Herbert Kohl's purpose for writing, and his reasons for believing in his point of view. This should take up approximately 20% of your response.
- 2) After having read Herbert Kohl, and after considering your own experiences, beliefs, and educational goals, as well as the responsibilities of a public university like CCSU, respond to Kohl's essay. Beyond "agreeing" or "disagreeing" with Kohl's ideas on language, culture, learning, and "not-learning," what do you find useful, important, or troubling about the argument(s) that Kohl puts forth? Be specific in your response; do not try to respond to everything in the article, but do take up the issue or issues that you find important and relevant, and organize them into a focused, purposeful essay in which you lay forth your argument and support it with specific reasons and/or examples (from your life and/or from Kohl's article). Consider your audience to be the English faculty of CCSU, who are both experienced instructors, and also veterans of many conversations with students of different backgrounds. This should take up approximately 80% of your response.

Advice:

- 1) Read and re-read the article, making notes about words, sentences, and ideas that provoke a response within you.
- 2) Read and re-read the writing prompt(s)
- 3) Stay true to the writing prompt—going off topic, writing in an inappropriate style, ignoring your audience, or addressing interesting-but-irrelevant ideas will only make it harder for the faculty assessing your writing to see your ability to compose a focused, purposeful essay.
- 4) Read the assessment criteria carefully so that you fully understand the terms on which your writing is being judged.
- 5) Leave time for editing and revision at the end!