2010

Editors' Note: Teaching Transformations 2010

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Abstract: This editors' note presents a synopsis of the articles published in the Spring 2010 issue of *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, including but not limited to contributions from the 2010 Annual Conference of the Center for the Improvement of Teaching at UMass Boston. Other faculty and student papers, including contributions from five UMass Boston students, are also included.

The present, Spring 2010, issue of *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* includes, but is not limited to, contributions from the 2010 Annual Conference on Teaching for Transformation, organized by the Center for the Improvement of Teaching, directed by Vivian Zamel at UMass Boston. The issue also includes five student papers from courses taught by Anna Beckwith, Lecturer at UMass Boston, as well as three contributions submitted to the journal during the past year.

As instructors regularly teaching the same course and often using the same text across semesters, we may have noticed the difference between our own initial readings and teachings of our texts, and subsequent readings and teachings of them, when familiar ways of interpreting and teaching the text in the classroom seem to emerge over time. As we teach, we may find ourselves adopting routine approaches to interpreting and teaching text. The freshness of the first reading or teaching of a text often has a taste and after-taste that the routinized/habitual reading and teaching of the same in later trials often lack. In their important contribution, "Constructing the Innocence of the First Textual Encounter,"

Mohammad H. (Behrooz) Tamdgidi is Associate Professor of sociology, teaching social theory at UMass Boston. Most recently he is the author of the Palgrave/Macmillan bestseller *Gurdjieff and Hypnosis: A Hermeneutic Study* (2009), and *Advancing Utopistics: The Three Component Parts and Errors of Marxism* (Paradigm Publishers 2007/2009). Tamdgidi's writings have appeared in *Review* (Journal of the Fernand Braudel Center), *Sociological Spectrum*, *Humanity & Society, Contemporary Sociology*, and several edited collections. **Vivian Zamel** is professor of English and Director of ESL Program and the Center for the Improvement of Teaching (CIT) at UMass Boston. Her teaching areas include English as a Second Language, Composition Theory & Practice, and Methodology of Teaching ESL. Zamel has co-edited with Ruth Spack *Enriching ESOL Pedagogy* (Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002), *Negotiating Academic Literacies* (Lawrence Erlbaum, 1998), and *Language Lessons: Stories for Teaching and Learning English* (University of Michigan Press, 2008). She has also co-authored with Eleanor Kutz and Suzie Q. Groden, *Teaching and Learning with Diverse Student Writers* (Heinemann/Boynotn Cook, 1993). Her articles and reviews have appeared in *TESOL Quarterly, College ESL, College Composition and Communication*, and *Journal of Basic Writing*. **Anna D. Beckwith** is a Lecturer (II) at UMass Boston. She has taught courses on "Youth and Society," "Sociology of Work," "Race and Ethnic Relations," "Family," "Sociology of Gender," "Elements of Sociological Theory," "Social Movements," "Social Policy," and most recently, her newly designed course, "Food and Society."

UMass Boston English Department faculty Alex Mueller, Cheryl Nixon and Rajini Srikanth creatively succeed in making their readers aware of the complexity of the first textual encounter and its significance in the learning (and teaching) process. Moreover, they propose three strategies (what they call, "the innocence of the material text," "the pedagogy of the restraint," and "the suspension of mastery") that will enable teachers and students to purposely "construct" and reinvent the innocence of the first textual encounter in order to balance the "uncertain and confident" encounters with the text while reaping its pedagogical and transformative benefits. As the co-authors aptly conclude, "innocence is an opening to question our texts, our world, and ourselves as students and teachers" (p. 3).

In her article entitled, "Examining a First Amendment Court Case to Teach Argument Analysis to Freshman Writers at an Art College," Angelika Festa, of Massachusetts College of Art and Design, draws on her experience of teaching and her students' viewpoints to re-encounter the legal arguments in a First Amendment case involving the Brooklyn Institute of the Arts and Sciences v. City of New York Rudolph W. Giuliani over the 1996 exhibition of the painting "The Holy Virgin Mary" by the artist Chris Ofili in the Institute. It is interesting to see the parallel between the "innocence" of the new encounter of Festa's students with the legal and artistic texts surrounding Ofilia's painting, for this experience proves to be not only one of learning about the legal case and the painting. The experiences also allows these students to learn about U.S. history on the one hand, and their own sense of artistic imagination and expression, on the other. From a textual encounter with a legal case about the exhibition of painting, students end up voicing their own identities and imaginations as expressed through their creative writings about the case. In Festa's words,

… as [students] study to analyze and reason effectively when making arguments about art and freedom of expression, it becomes clear to me that they are also eager to enter the free space of their imagination and expression, where personal judgment and experience mingle with language, form, color, sound, and tactile materials to produce a work of art. (p.40)

In both studies above, teachers and students are directly involved in their joint encounters with the text, be it a novel, poem, or legal argumentation. "The Absent Professor: Rethinking Collaboration in Tutorial Sessions," co-authored by Arianne Baker, Kristi Girdharry, Meghan Hancock, Rebecca Katz, Meesh McCarthy, Jesse Priest, and Megan Turilli—all tutors at the Reading, Writing, and Study Strategies Center at UMass Boston—involves a different encounter with students over the text, not only of student writings, but of the syllabi, margin commentaries, and expectations of professors who are physically absent in the conversation, but very much present as far as the nature and goals of the assignment are concerned. Basing their paper on their actual tutorial experiences as well as a mock tutorial session at the CIT 2010 conference, the co-authors find that their tutoring can bear more fruit when the differing nature of feedback from the absent professor is flexibly taken into account in the tutorial encounter:

As we have shown, when the professor's comments or directions are more evaluative in nature, we may opt to set that instructor's presence aside momentarily to address our students' needs. Conversely, when we recognize that the absent professor's comments could serve as an anchor, tethering our student to her or his task, we may steer our

tutee back to the assignment or an instructor's comments to move him or her forward in the writing process. (p. 52)

In her "Visual Literacy for the Enhancement of Inclusive Teaching," Mary Ball Howkins, of Rhode Island College, uses examples from the realm of contemporary print advertising to develop her students' visual attention and analytical skills to decipher how media still continue to advance, in subtle ways, "Eurocentric aesthetics":

Students recognize this aesthetic hegemony with ease when given contrasting examples of Eurocentric and Afrocentric models of color … As I guide students from the familiar centering device to the more technical effects of lighting, depiction of stillness and motion, and the model's gaze, they develop greater confidence in their ability to encounter advertising critically and to recognize the prevailing aesthetic despite the rise of the cultural influence of African Americans and Hispanics, among other peoples of color in advertising culture. (p. 61)

In his essay, "When Literature Is Evangelical: Pedagogies of Passion," J. Ken Stuckey, of Bentley University, self-reflectively uses the examples of two of his teaching activities, a "Read-In and Write-In," and a "Bring a Friend to Class Day," in order to illustrate what it is like to teach and learn from the point of passion, and by his own example (i.e., how he himself was passionately introduced into the world of literature by his parents), rather than from a pragmatic assignment-fulfillment point of view. Through the activities of the former exercise, students suspend all activities except reading or writing during the entire session, and in complete silence; during the

activities of the latter exercise, they take on the role of an instructor while inviting and guiding a friend (or relative) to their classroom whose performance during the session will also be graded as part of the evaluation of the original student's learning. Stuckey concludes,

There is no way for a professor with limited access to their lives to provide those students with the same experience on the same scale that my parents gave me. But what I nonetheless try to offer them is an honest personal example of a person who has dedicated his life to books. (p. 69)

In his "Creating Networking Communities Beyond the Classroom," Apostolos Koutropoulos, of UMass Boston, takes up the challenge of involving students in a substantive, rather than merely formal, approach to learning by trying to encourage them to continue and build their classroom communities beyond each classroom, or each semester, and with other alumni, using new online tools. Using his new leadership role as President of the Graduate Instructional Designer Association (GIDA) at UMass Boston, he sought to find ways of building an online network community that would transcend time and space constraints that previously fragmented the continuity of conversations generated in each class and during each semester. Koutropoulos reports on not only the achievements, but also the challenges still facing the effort.

Marjorie Jones, of Lesley University, takes up next the challenge of teaching cultural diversity in the post-Obama era. In her, "Framing Cultural Diversity Courses Post U.S. 2008 Presidential Elections," Jones argues that "the tenor of the nation related in the literature—the historical, pre-election and post-election period—and students' identification of themes and issues

such as tolerance, respect for each others' perspectives, culture and open-mindedness, that are essential to the curriculum in order to increase knowledge, provide a forum for mutual exchange which can improve racial understanding" (p. 79).

Suzanne M. Buglione and Jennifer Safford-Farquharson, respectively of Worcester State College and CommunityBuild, use their co-authored paper titled, "The Difference Between You and Me: Faculty Identities at Play in the Classroom," to innovatively engage in and share their conversations about how classroom learning is shaped by faculty and student identities and identity dynamics. A self-identified "middle-aged white woman," and a "young black woman" of multi-racial background, respectively, the authors succeed in sharing their experiences of teaching and co-teaching their courses at Worcester State University and Anna Maria College in Massachusetts.

In his insightful and path-breaking article titled, "Toward a Non-Eurocentric Social Psychology: The Contribution of the Yogacara," James William Coleman, of the California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, advocates a cross-cultural and transdisciplinary re-envisioning of the field of Western social psychology taught and researched in our higher education curricula and beyond. In his view, incorporating especially the Buddhist psychological insights and contributions, especially in its most sophisticated school, Yogacara, not only helps to independently confirm some of the Western contributions to the field, but also provides additional vital insights neglected in the West. Coleman creatively compares and contrasts in detail some of the elements of the Yogacara teaching with those of the symbolic interactionist school in social psychology, in favor of developing non-Eurocentric social psychologies that can be much more effective in resolving both personal troubles and public issues facing humanity today.

The critique of the existing educational institutions and practices in the West finds further voice in "Service-Learning and Authenticity Achievement" where co-authors John W. Murphy (of University of Miami) and Dana Rasch (of U.S. Peace Corps) argue that as is, the educational enterprise in the U.S. is often bent on developing self-absorbed, inauthentic, and individualist student minds whose primary aspiration is to serve the labor-market devoid of passionate concern for the implications of their education and career for serving the greater public good. In this context, Murphy and Rasch specifically take issue with the nature of service-learning programs on many campuses today, noting that they often limit their goal to bringing about change in the students' individual consciousness rather than also in raising questions about the nature and contradictory/conflictual nature of the world and the social system they live in, during the Age of Globalization. Service learning thereby becomes one-sidedly an effort in providing solutions within the existing frameworks of the status quo, rather than one that practically challenges those frameworks.

In his "Academic Achievement of Turkish and American Students," Eyyup Esen, of the University of Kansas, conducts a small comparative study (both quantitative and qualitative) of Turkish and American high school graduates' academic achievement in college, finding that the standardized test scores are not as predictive of their performance in college as their high school grades and grade point averages.

Next, five student papers from the courses taught by Anna Beckwith at UMass Boston shed further light on the educational and personal issues and troubles students face in pursuit of their educational goals.

In "The Miseducation of Ms. M," Melanie Robinson explores in her paper written for her "Youth and Society" class, how dur-

ing her growing up as an African-American youth in higher education as an honor student she had to face the painful challenges of managing "imposed identities and internal expectations." "I wanted nothing more than to be educated, to be whole. Instead I received a first rate education on how to be fractured" (p. 141).

Tara Cianfrocca used her paper entitled, "Culturelessness and Culture Shock: An American-Asian Experience," to explore her experience as an American-Asian adopted by white American parents. Wholeheartedly loving her parents, she also relays and explores her constant feeling of abandonment: "Even after coming out of my adolescence and crescendoing into adulthood, however, I remain cultureless, being redefined daily for who and what I am. I am stuck in a constant state of redefinition of self. Who knows what I will be identified as tomorrow" (p. 150).

In his "From Construction to Social Work: Finding Value in Helping Others," Albert Marks, a student taking the course "Sociology of Work," reports on the transition of his personal, educational, and career goals from carpenter's work back to school and in favor of a possible career as a social worker. This transition has involved a transformation of his values primarily centered on material incentives to one of intrinsic values involving helping others and appreciating friends and family in a fast-paced culture and society that perpetually seem to "run out of time."

Irene Hartford, as student in the course "Sociology of Work," used her paper entitled, "My Work Utopia: Pursuing A Satisfactory Work Life Amid an Alienating World," in order to appreciate, while drawing on her work as a mother as well as twenty-year employee at Harvard University, the gains made in the U.S. in favor of the equality of women and men. She is mindful of the alienating nature of her experience at Harvard and of the fact that women "still work in sex segregated occu-

pations, are paid less than men even when we are doing the same types of job, and do the lion's share of the domestic work" (p. 163).

And finally, "The Loss of a Culture with an Accent: A Sociological Reflection on My Assimilation into the American Culture," by Dora Joseph and written in her "Youth and Society" class, explores the challenges of her life and educational experience in the U.S. as a black woman having a French identity with a British accent:

> Although at first it seemed like it only made matters worse, I realized that my adventures in America have allowed me to accept the fact that I was a French citizen who spoke French with a British accent. At the end of the day, I did not lose my French culture at all. I think the bits and pieces of the American, French, and British culture equated to a unique me I was happy and comfortable being. (p. 179)