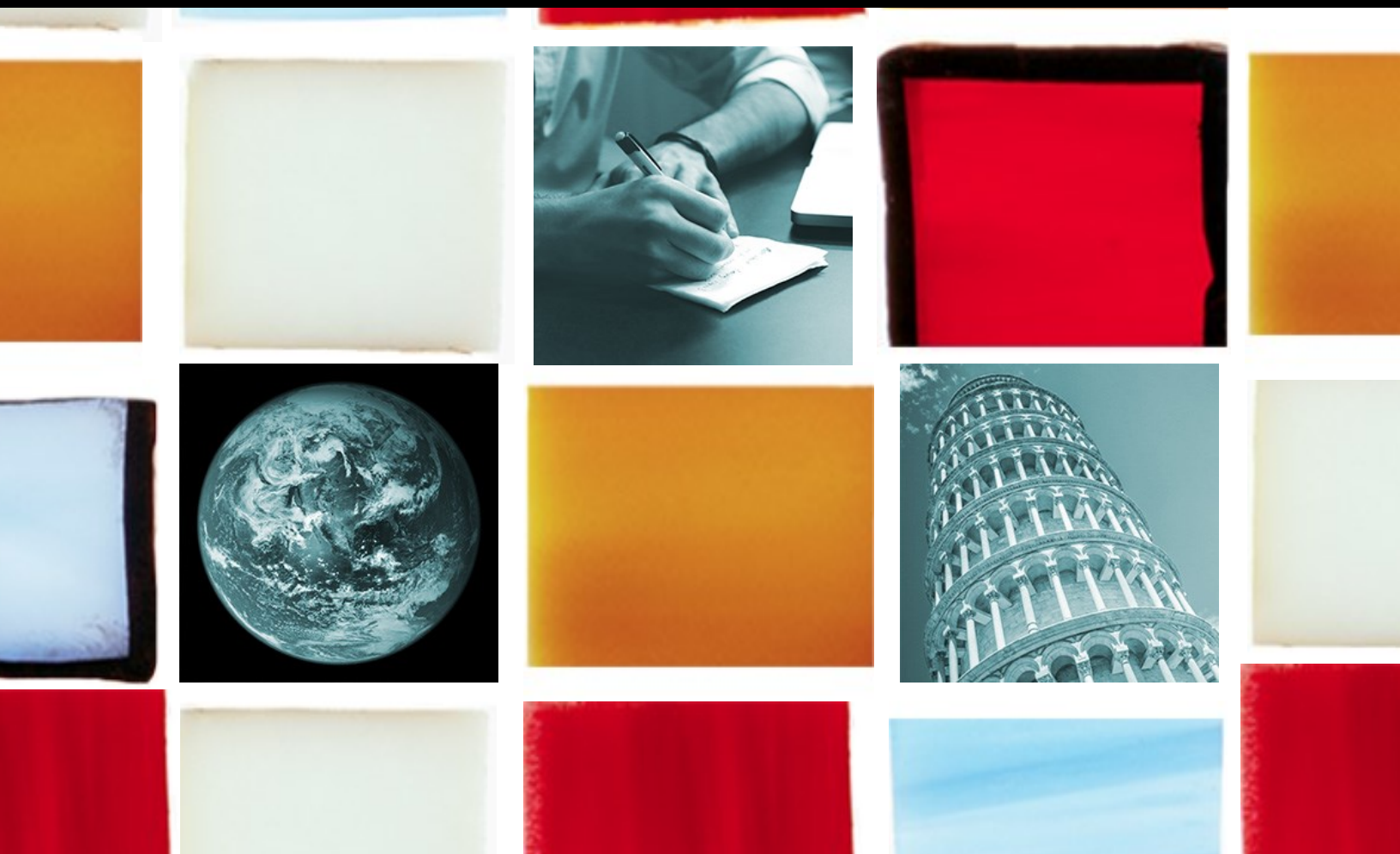


# ***IMPACT***

**THE JOURNAL OF THE CENTER FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY TEACHING & LEARNING**



**VOLUME 6, NUMBER 1, WINTER 2017**



College of General Studies

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# ABOUT US

ABOUT: *Impact: The Journal of the Center for Interdisciplinary Teaching & Learning* is a peer-reviewed, bi-annual online journal that publishes scholarly and creative non-fiction essays about the theory, practice and assessment of interdisciplinary education. *Impact* is produced by the Center for Interdisciplinary Teaching & Learning at the College of General Studies, Boston University ([www.bu.edu/cgs/citl](http://www.bu.edu/cgs/citl)). *Impact* accepts submissions throughout the year and publishes issues in February and July. Please submit your essays for consideration at <https://citl.submittable.com/submit>.

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## EDITORIAL STATEMENT

Dear Readers,

The authors who have written for this issue of *Impact* are grappling with their place in our world and in the classrooms where they teach. As a result, they have taken on some heady topics!

We hear from an anthropologist who philosophizes about the relationship between the proposed planetary epoch called the Anthropocene and its challenge to anthropology; a Romance Language professor who shows us how “spaced learning practices” encourage students to better understand the people whose language they study; and a faculty member who reflects on his journey on the zigzag path of teaching and learning. Each of these authors is reflective and honest about what he believes.

Whether they are paying homage to the “outliers” of nineteenth-century British literature who taught themselves and thereby altered pedagogy, charting a study of empathy, or picking their way through the latest tomes on interdisciplinary teaching, our reviewers are working furiously to help us make better sense of the universe we inhabit and how we can help others make sense of it. I thank them for their courage and hard work!

Best,

Megan Sullivan, Editor

## ABOUT THIS ISSUE'S AUTHORS

**Samantha Bernstein-Sierra** is a PhD candidate of urban education policy at the University of Southern California's Rossier School of Education. She received her bachelor's degree in history from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and her JD degree from Suffolk University Law School in 2009, after which she practiced special education law for several years in New York City. Samantha works with Dr. Adrianna Kezar, focusing her research on public/private tensions in higher education, faculty rights, and the future of the academic profession.

**Kate Holterhoff** is a Marion L. Brittain Postdoctoral Fellow at the Georgia Institute of Technology. Her research areas include nineteenth-century British literature, visual culture, digital humanities, and the history of science. She has published articles in *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* (forthcoming), *The Journal of Victorian Culture*, *The Journal of the History of Biology*, and *Victorian Network*.

**Christopher A. Howard** is lecturer in cultural anthropology at Chaminade University of Honolulu. He was previously visiting lecturer at Boston University and has worked at academic institutions in Japan and New Zealand. His research is primarily concerned with the changing relations among society, technology and environment; modernity and globalisation; social theory, phenomenology and philosophical anthropology. He recently published a monograph entitled: *Mobile Lifeworlds: an ethnography of tourism and pilgrimage in the Himalayas* (Routledge, 2016).

**Theo Savvas** is lecturer in English at the University of Bristol. He holds a Master of Arts in History from the University of Cambridge, a Master of Arts in Literature from Goldsmiths College, University of London, and a PhD in U.S. Literature from the University of Essex. He is the author of *American Postmodernist Fiction and the Past* (2011) and several articles on contemporary U.S. fiction.

**Philip Wander** is assistant professor of French and Italian at Hostos Community College in the South Bronx, a part of the City University of New York. He received his BA from SUNY Stony Brook, his MA from New York University and his PhD from UC Berkeley and L'École Normale Supérieure in Paris. He is currently teaching introductory courses in French and Italian, as well as a section in the Humanities. The details and niceties of language teaching are of great interest to him.

**Laurence Winters** received his BA from Boston University in philosophy and religion, his MA from McGill University in philosophy and anthropology, and his PhD from the New School University in philosophy and sociology. He is currently the director of Interdisciplinary Studies at Petrocelli College, Fairleigh Dickinson University, where he is working on the application of narrative methodology to interdisciplinary pedagogy and knowledge production.

**Angus Woodward** is the director of college writing programs at Our Lady of the Lake College in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He is also a fiction writer, whose books are *Down at the End of the River* (Margaret Media, 2008) and *Americanisation: Lessons in American Culture and Language* (Livingston Press, 2011).

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

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### Latest Announcements

Please refer to CITL's website for our latest announcements: <http://www.bu.edu/cgs/citl/>.

## IMPACT ESSAY COMPETITION

Every December, the editors of *Impact: The Journal of the Center for Interdisciplinary Teaching & Learning* invite submissions of scholarly and creative non-fiction essays between 1,000 and 5,000 words on any aspect of interdisciplinary teaching or research. The author of the winning essay will receive a \$250 award and publication in *Impact*.

Essays should be readable to a general, educated audience, and they should follow the documentation style most prevalent in the author's disciplinary field. Essays for this contest should be submitted by the first Monday in December to <http://CITL.submittable.com/submit>. See our general submission guidelines in Submittable.

CITL reserves the right to not publish a winner in any given year. Faculty and staff from the College of General Studies are not eligible to submit to this contest.

# ESSAYS

## “A Long Day’s Journey into the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning”

By Angus Woodward, Our Lady of the Lake College

I suppose there are teachers who begin their careers as scholars of teaching and learning, whose graduate programs focus not just on mastery of a discipline but also on the art and science of guiding others into mastery of that discipline. But don’t most of *evolve*, over the years, into scholars of teaching and learning?

It begins when we first look out into the sea of faces and think, “I wonder if they got that. Did it work?” Or we realize that our students look bored, and then realize that we would be bored, too. We might have these thoughts during the first month of the very first class we teach, or years later. Others might never have such thoughts.

And then we stop griping about our students, stop rolling our eyes when they ask questions we thought we had already answered, stop gritting our teeth when they misunderstand instructions that seemed perfectly clear to us. We abandon all complaints, public and private, about the differences between our generation and theirs. We come to understand that when we were students, we were atypical, that few (if any) of our classmates would become college faculty, and so we let go of the idea that all of our students should act just as we acted. Instead we become willing to take some responsibility for our students’ questions and misunderstandings, acknowledging that there may be better ways to get through to them.

And so we make adjustments to our syllabi, our handouts, our assignments, our quizzes or tests. We cast a more skeptical eye toward our textbooks, wishing they had more X or less Y, and if we have the power and/or freedom to do so, we look for better textbooks. Maybe we stop just *tweaking* things and start *changing* them. Maybe we create new assignments or use a different kind of test question.

What is happening to us? We may not be able to put our fingers on it just yet, but it could be that not only are we evolving, but our institution is also in transition. There may even be a paradigm shift afoot, and it may even extend throughout higher education. Lead is turning into gold, and we are among the atoms transforming.

John Tagg, in *The Learning Paradigm College* (2003), described the transformation that he thought should happen (and perhaps is happening) in higher education as a shift from an *instruction* paradigm to a *learning* paradigm. He encouraged us to abandon the instruction paradigm, which “substitutes a means for an end. It raises formal organizational processes (courses, transcripts) to the level of institutional mission” (18). Instruction-paradigm institutions also have a tendency to foster shallow approaches to learning, emphasizing extrinsic performance goals and nurturing isolated silos of practice. The learning paradigm, on the other hand, strives to foster deep approaches to learning, emphasizing intrinsic learning goals and nurturing active communities of practice. You can probably guess which paradigm emphasizes evaluation via test scores, course grades, and GPA and which emphasizes feedback via critiques and comments on student performances. In the instruction paradigm, students experience “intermittent engagement with random subjects” rather than being “engaged in a continuous project of learning” (225).

And so as our journey continues, we consider the changes we have made in our courses and wonder, “Is it working? Are these changes making a difference?”; we and our institutions and higher education itself are starting to value learning primarily and instruction secondarily. We probably feel like our adjustments have made a difference, but we also understand that we cannot just rely on our impressions and hunches. And so we decide to ask our students. We don’t want to wait for official course evaluations, with their broad questions not specific to our disciplines. In the middle or toward the end of a course, once or twice or more, we ask the students to write comments about our courses. We might remember a colleague a few years back who gave his business students a piece of paper with two incomplete sentences on it: “I like this class the most when \_\_\_\_\_” and “I like this class the least when \_\_\_\_\_,” and we might do the same thing. Or we have more specific questions, like “How helpful and productive has group work been?” Depending on our discipline and/or natural inclinations, we might be more data oriented: *Indicate your agreement with the following statement: “Working in small groups with classmates has been productive and helpful.” Strongly agree / agree / neutral / disagree /strongly disagree.* And if only 42% strongly agree or disagree, then we add a brief introduction to group work to our courses, giving ourselves a chance to explain the goals and ideal behaviors of collaboration. And if at the same point



## ESSAYS— CONTINUED

in the following semester 65% agree or strongly agree, we feel like we have made some progress. Maybe our other questions are about the handouts, the grading, the textbook, the exams, the homework, the projects, the emphasis on X or Y.

We do not have too many questions, but we have some questions, and we have begun to evaluate our own teaching. John Tagg subscribes to John Biggs' three levels of "thinking about teaching" (Tagg 19). "In the first, the focus is on what the student *is*" (Tagg 19), which Biggs characterizes as a "blame-the-student theory of teaching, based on student deficit. When students don't learn...it is due to something the students are lacking" (as quoted in Tagg 20). But at this point in our journey from one paradigm to another, we have abandoned Level One and reached Level Two, "where the focus is on what the teacher *does*" (Tagg 19). Level Two has its drawbacks; Biggs points out that it "is also a deficit model, the blame this time being on the teacher" (as quoted in Tagg 20). Nevertheless, we are on our way to Level Three, where we'll turn our attention to "what the student *does*" (Biggs, as quoted in Tagg 31).

We are influenced by our surroundings. If we are lucky, our administrators encourage us to learn more about teaching and learning. They do so by rewarding not just evidence of scholarship but also evidence of teaching effectiveness, such rewards coming in the form of points toward advancement in rank and/or toward tenure, technological support for innovative teaching strategies, funding for projects related to teaching and learning, and so on. Tagg distinguishes between two kinds of leaders in academia: structural and functional. He characterizes a structural leader as "someone who has a leadership role because of her position in the organizational structure," whereas "a functional leader is someone who assumes a leadership role because he wants to accomplish something, to achieve a purpose, and must elicit the participation of others in order to do so" (338). We may have the good fortune of working in an institution whose structural leaders—deans, provosts, vice presidents, etc.—are also functional leaders. Perhaps we are also surrounded by functional leaders without leadership titles; Tagg offers the example of "the faculty member who suggests starting a roundtable on teaching topics and talks it up with colleagues" (338).

And so maybe (for example) we work at a small private college that receives state funding dedicated to faculty members' "research, teaching, and/or public service" (*Endowed*, 2008). Our college might use the funds to offer modest grants to faculty who apply for support of academic projects, including those related to teaching and learning. Perhaps one of us proposes to do some reading in the scholarship of teaching and learning and write monthly blog posts for our college community about what we are learning and how we are applying it in our classes. Maybe the funding is granted, and we use it for a course release so that we will have the time to read and blog. Waiting outside of our dean's office one day the year before, we may have noticed a book on the end-table: *Engaging Ideas, The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom* by John C. Bean. We flipped through it for a few minutes and made a mental note to get it from the college library, knowing that the college library had a growing collection of books such as this. And so Bean's book is the first we turn to when we begin preparing for the blog. It might provide the impetus for reducing our reliance on lecture: "There are many ways to make lecturing more effective for a wider range of learners....The most successful lecturers change the pace several times during a class session by breaking the lecture into parts punctuated by student-centered activities in which the instructor gives students a problem to solve at their seats, switches to discussion for a few moments, assigns an in-class freewrite, and so forth" (170). A book like Bean's might also deepen our understanding of what is really meant by "critical thinking," which we, like everyone else, have claimed to emphasize in our courses. Bean summarizes J.G. Kurfiss, who provides eight principles for emphasizing critical thinking:

1. Critical thinking is a learnable skill; the instructor and peers are resources in developing critical thinking skills.
2. Problems, questions, or issues are the point of entry into the subject and a source of motivation for sustained inquiry.
3. Successful courses balance challenges to think critically with support tailored to students' developmental needs.
4. Courses are assignment centered rather than text and lecture centered. Goals, methods, and evaluation emphasize using content rather than simply acquiring it.
5. Students are required to formulate and justify their ideas in writing or other appropriate modes.
6. Students collaborate to learn and to stretch their thinking, for example, in pair problem solving and small group work.
7. Several courses, particularly those that teach problem-solving skills, nurture students' metacognitive abilities.
8. The developmental needs of students are acknowledged and used as information in the design of the course.

## ESSAYS— CONTINUED

Teachers in these courses make standards explicit and then help students learn how to achieve them (4).

We might not only blog about these stipulations, but also photocopy the page and pin it to the wall above our desks. We are moving to John Biggs' Level Three, where our focus is on what students do in a learning environment that we create for them. And in John Tagg's view, one of the keys to leaving "the atomized world of the Instruction Paradigm" (89) is creating a "hot cognitive economy" throughout an institution. Tagg borrows the term "cognitive economy" from David Perkins' 1992 monograph *Smart Schools: Better Thinking and Learning for Every Child*. Perkins characterized the typical elementary-school classroom as having a "cool" cognitive economy, "...one that does not motivate the energy needed for complex cognition of students but runs at an altogether lower level of cognitive demand" (as quoted in Tagg 94).

Table 8.1	
The Cognitive Economy of Colleges	
Hot	Cool
Goals	
Emphasizes intrinsic goals	Emphasizes extrinsic goals
Activity	
High level of cognitive activity; highest reward for high cost activities: deep approaches, complex cognition	Low level of cognitive activity; high reward for low-cost activities: surface approaches, retention
Information	
High ratio of feedback to evaluation	Low ratio of feedback to evaluation
Time Horizon of Learning	
Long time horizon; decisions bear consequences in the long term	Short time horizon; decisions bear consequences in the short term
Community	
Strong support community	Weak support community
Alignment	
Institutional behavior consistent, aligned with learning mission	Institutional behavior aligned with instruction mission or misaligned

Perkins chose economy as an analogy in order to analyze "the gains and costs students encounter" (as quoted in Tagg 94). A demanding task, for example, has costs for students in terms of "time and effort" (Tagg 94), but it also has benefits. Tagg extends this borrowed metaphor, applying it to entire institutions as learning environments. As we reduce our reliance on lecture and increase our emphasis on authentic critical thinking, evolving from mere cogs in Instruction Paradigm machines into scholars of teaching and learning, we help to warm up the cognitive economy around us. Put

## ESSAYS—CONTINUED

another way, we push our institutions from right to left in Tagg's concise comparison of hot and cool cognitive economies:

Only one of us has that particular experience at that particular college, most likely. The rest of us have other particular experiences, with one thing in common: we begin to read scholarly work outside of our own disciplines. Whether we teach mathematics, genetics, finance, or drawing, we discover that people are writing about teaching and learning in ways that apply to all of us. If not Bean's book, perhaps we discover the work of L. Dee Fink, whose research and writing focus on *significant learning*. We have all had students who were transformed by our classes, who blossomed in our presence or experienced epiphanies sometime between Labor Day and Thanksgiving (or Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday and Easter). But for most of us, those students have been the memorable exceptions, not the rule. Reading Fink's book, *Creating Significant Learning Experiences*, might make us think that all students in all courses could be so transformed by what and how they learn. In Fink's words, "...all significant learning offers one or more of the following values:

- *Enhancing an individual life*: developing an ability to enjoy good art and music, developing a thoughtful philosophy of life, and so on.
- *Enabling us to contribute to the many communities of which we will be a part*: family, local community, nation state, religion, special interest groups, the world.
- *Preparing us for the world of work*: developing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for being effective in one or more professional fields" (7).

Fink's Taxonomy of Significant Learning, made up of six equally important domains (foundational knowledge, application, integration, learning how to learn, caring, and the human dimension) that combine in significant learning, might appeal to us more than Bloom's famous hierarchical taxonomy.

At some point—perhaps sooner, perhaps later—we find colleagues on campus, in our own disciplines or others, who are on the same path. At large universities, we may only encounter colleagues from other disciplines on committees; at small colleges, we may share buildings or even offices with them. One way or another, we find ourselves talking to a colleague, close or distant, about our classes—not about how big they are or about ways to control our students' bothersome behavior, but about how we teach them and how they learn. We find out that they too poll their students about the effectiveness of their teaching strategies, or they are about to start doing so, or they used to. At certain kinds of institutions, large or small, we may attend formal or informal presentations made by such colleagues, and that may be how we meet them and others like them.

Somewhere along the line, someone says something that sticks in our minds, simmering there for days before boiling over. Maybe it is, "It's time to stop asking ourselves what we are doing in class tomorrow and time to start asking ourselves what *our students* are doing in class tomorrow" (and we might learn later that our colleague, the illustrious Glenn Blalock, was paraphrasing what John Tagg said about John Biggs' three levels of "thinking about teaching" [Tagg 31]). Or it could be the old chestnut about the sage on the stage becoming the guide on the side. Whatever it is, it inspires action—more and/or better polling/surveying of our students, deeper and/or broader changes to our courses, wider and/or narrower reading in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Additional galvanizing ideas might come from our reading in SOTL (an acronym whose meaning we learn somewhere along the way). L. Dee Fink, in *Creating Significant Learning Experiences*, identifies certain teaching strategies that enhance significant learning, among them service learning, problem-based learning, and team-based learning. We might read about these strategies and others in Fink's book or elsewhere and realize that one or more of the courses we teach would be well-suited to a certain strategy. We may, for example, realize that the course in which we frequently (but not very systematically) have students work in groups during class (which first 42% and then 65% of our students found productive, according to our informal surveys) could be improved if we adopted team-based learning. And so we might turn to work that focuses on a specific method, such as *Team-Based Learning: A Transformative Use of Small Groups in College Teaching* by Larry K. Michaelsen, Arletta Bauman Knight, and L. Dee Fink.

We might learn that team-based learning (TBL) goes well beyond the casual, occasional use of small student groups or even the more systematic use of groups in cooperative learning, that TBL "...calls for procedures that support the transformation of newly formed 'groups' into 'high-performance learning teams'" (8). Maybe we like the way it holds students accountable for reading assignments, for learning the basics from them on their own, and the way it uses

## ESSAYS— CONTINUED

collaborative tasks to extend and deepen learning. We might appreciate the relegation of lecture to a subordinate role, if not outright elimination. And we will realize that TBL could give our students added motivation: rather than just owing it to themselves and the instructor to succeed, they also owe it to their teammates. When we look at that photocopy on the wall of John C. Bean's summary of J. G. Kurfiss' principles of critical thinking, we realize that TBL fits the bill rather nicely. Later, when we read Tagg's book, we will see that TBL raises the temperature of the cognitive economy in our classrooms.

At a certain point, we may make a decision: not to use TBL at all or to take a plunge—either a large one—“converting” an entire course to TBL—or a small one: adapting just one instructional unit in the course to TBL.

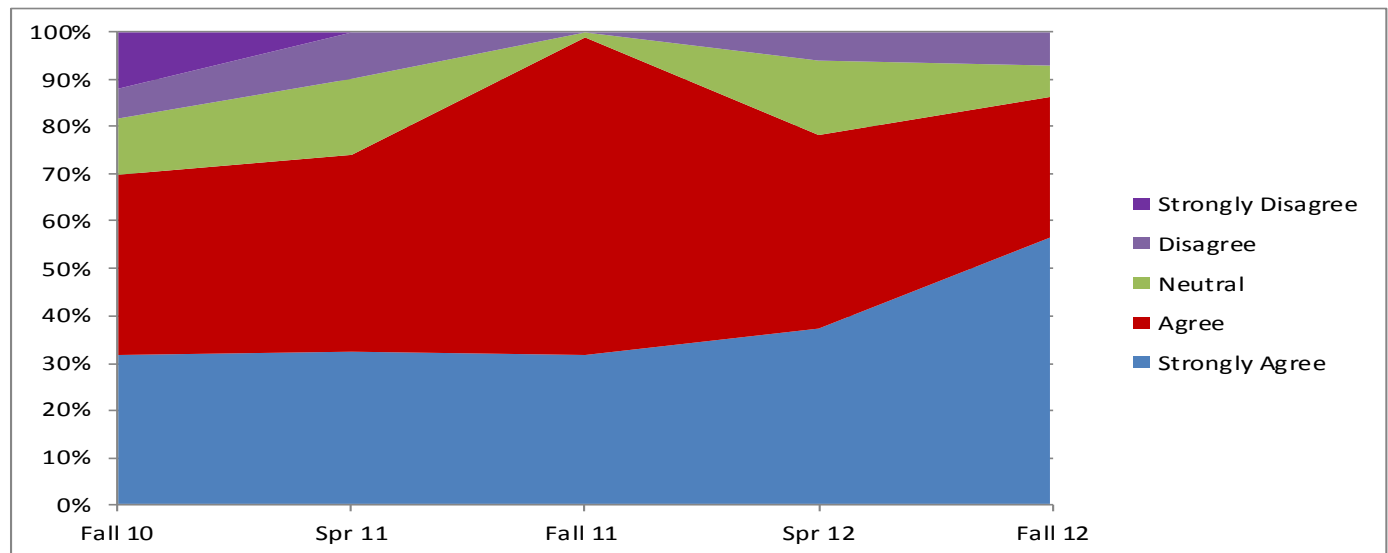
Let's say that in our particular situation we decide to take the big plunge. We spend a couple of months rethinking our whole approach to achieving course learning outcomes. During the first week of the new semester, we tell our students about the principles of TBL, how it works, and why we are using it. As the semester progresses, we listen to our students and make reasonable adjustments in response to any difficulties or unforeseen problems. We also make notes about how to better apply TBL the next semester.

We assess. Not because our institution forces us to do so (because their accrediting agency forces them to do so), but because we have the sense that assessment, in John Tagg's words, “may or may not be useful for public relations or compliance with external requirements. But it is essential to build a hot cognitive economy” (328). Although we now understand that the informal survey we began using a few semesters prior is not an ideal assessment tool (because it was not designed with formal assessment in mind), it does provide a baseline, and we continue to administer it so that we can compare responses by students in non-TBL (pre-plunge) classes to those by students in TBL (post-plunge) classes.

We might know as little about presenting data as we do about collecting it, but we like the results we get over the next four semesters, and we like the way area graphs allow us to quickly grasp the results—the more blue (strongly agree) and red (agree) we see, the better. And so we present our results to our colleagues at a poster session sponsored by our college, pointing out to them that the “agree” and “strongly agree” are particularly salient in looking for trends and significant numbers. About our methods, we write this: *Since the fall 2010 semester, I have surveyed my students regarding five pedagogical concerns: use of readings, emphasis on ideas, grading, engagement, and group activities. Surveys, administered at the ends of semesters, were anonymous and completed when I was out of the room. The number of survey respondents has varied from 16 to 49, with an average of 29. For each question, students indicated their level of agreement with statements about the course on a five-point scale, with choices ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” Students also had the opportunity to write comments after each question.*

And this is what our results look like:

## ESSAYS— CONTINUED

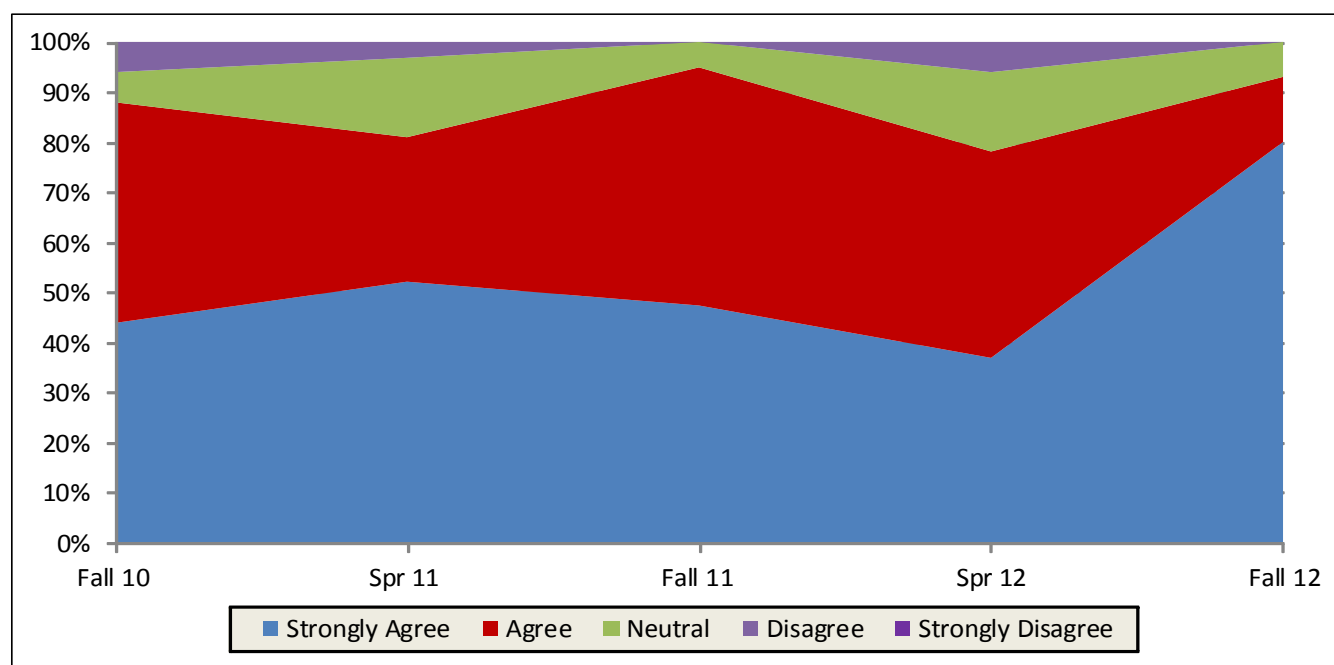


**Question 1: Readings:** Indicate your agreement with the following statement: “Mr. Woodward’s use of reading assignments contributed to my development of writing skills.”

Term/Year	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Fall 10 (non-TBL) (n=16)	5 (31%)	6 (38%)	2 (12%)	1 (6%)	2 (12%)
Spr 11 (TBL) (n=31)	10 (32%)	13 (42%)	5 (16%)	3 (10%)	0
Fall 11 (TBL) (n=21)	6 (29%)	13 (62%)	2 (10%)	0	0
Spring 12 (TBL) (n=49)	18 (37%)	20 (41%)	8 (16%)	3 (6%)	0
Fall 12 (TBL) (n=30)	17 (57%)	9 (30%)	2 (7%)	2 (7%)	0

Figure 1

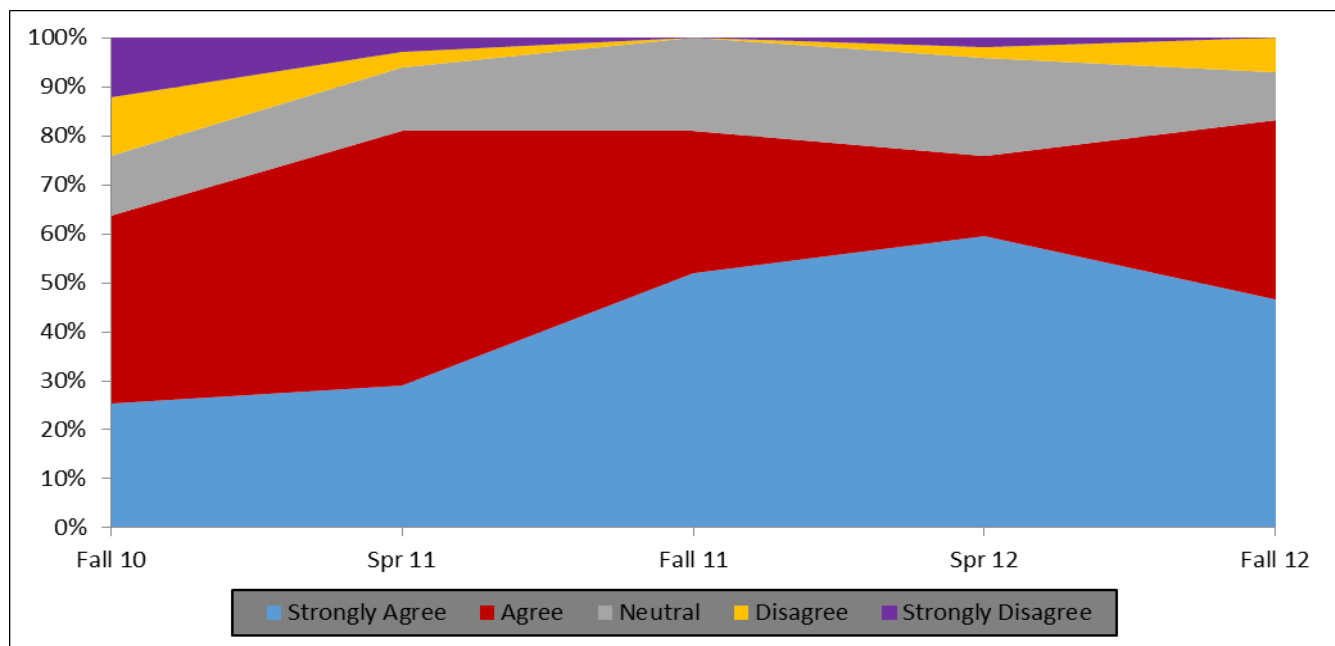
## ESSAYS— CONTINUED



<b>Question 2: Ideas:</b> Indicate your agreement with the following statement: "Mr. Woodward's emphasis on ideas (thesis and reasons) as the building blocks of essays contributed to my development of writing skills."					
<b>Term/Year</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>Fall 10 (non-TBL) (n=16)</b>	7 (44%)	7 (44%)	1 (6%)	1 (6%)	0
<b>Spr 11 (TBL) (n=31)</b>	16 (52%)	9 (29%)	5 (16%)	1 (3%)	0
<b>Fall 11 (TBL) (n=21)</b>	10 (48%)	10 (48%)	1 (5%)	0	0
<b>Spring 12 (TBL) (n=49)</b>	27 (55%)	19 (39%)	2 (4%)	1 (2%)	0
<b>Fall 12 (TBL) (n=30)</b>	14 (47%)	11 (37%)	3 (10%)	2 (7%)	0

Figure 2

## ESSAYS— CONTINUED

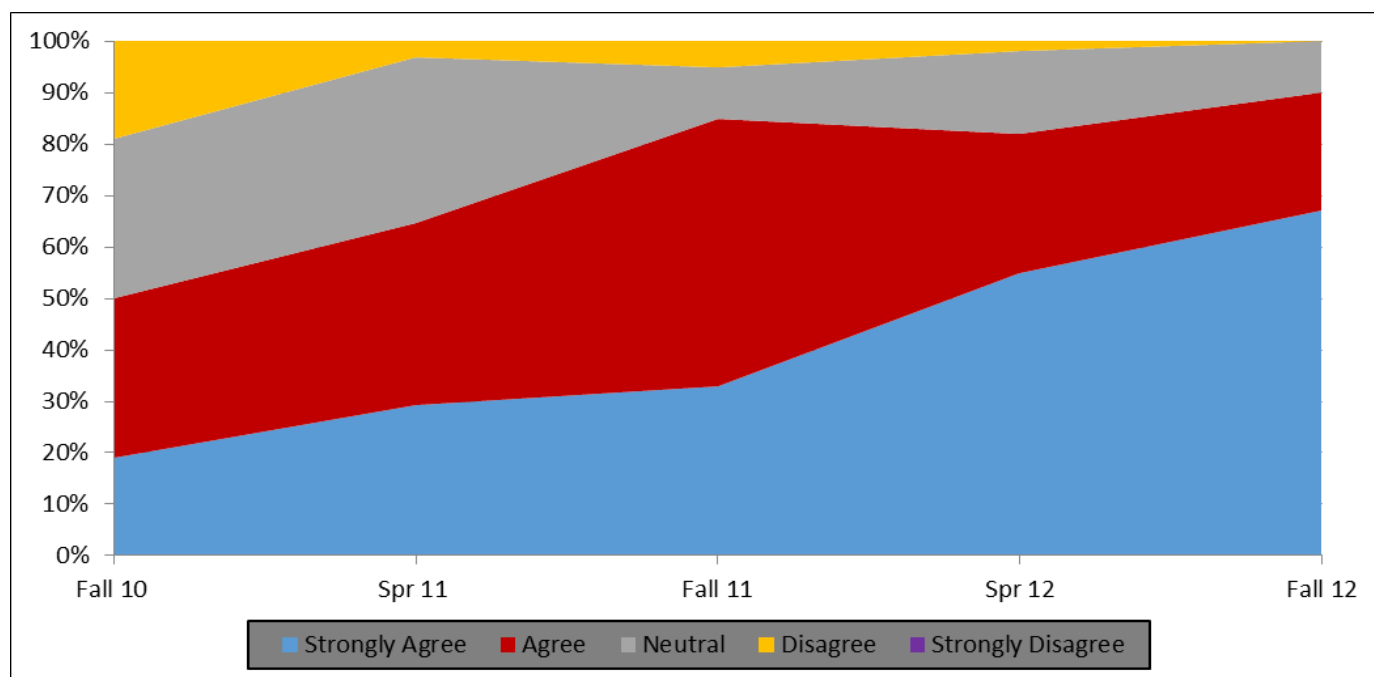


**Question 3: Grading:** Indicate your agreement with the following statement: "The basis for Mr. Woodward's grading of my papers is clear to me before and after I turn them in."

Term/Year	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Fall 10 (non-TBL) (n=16)	4 (25%)	6 (38%)	2 (12%)	2 (12%)	2 (12%)
Spr 11 (TBL) (n=31)	9 (29%)	16 (52%)	4 (13%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)
Fall 11 (TBL) (n=21)	11 (52%)	6 (29%)	4 (19%)	0	0
Spring 12 (TBL) (n=49)	29 (59%)	8 (16%)	10 (20%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
Fall 12 (TBL) (n=30)	14 (47%)	11 (37%)	3 (10%)	2 (7%)	0

Figure 3

## ESSAYS— CONTINUED



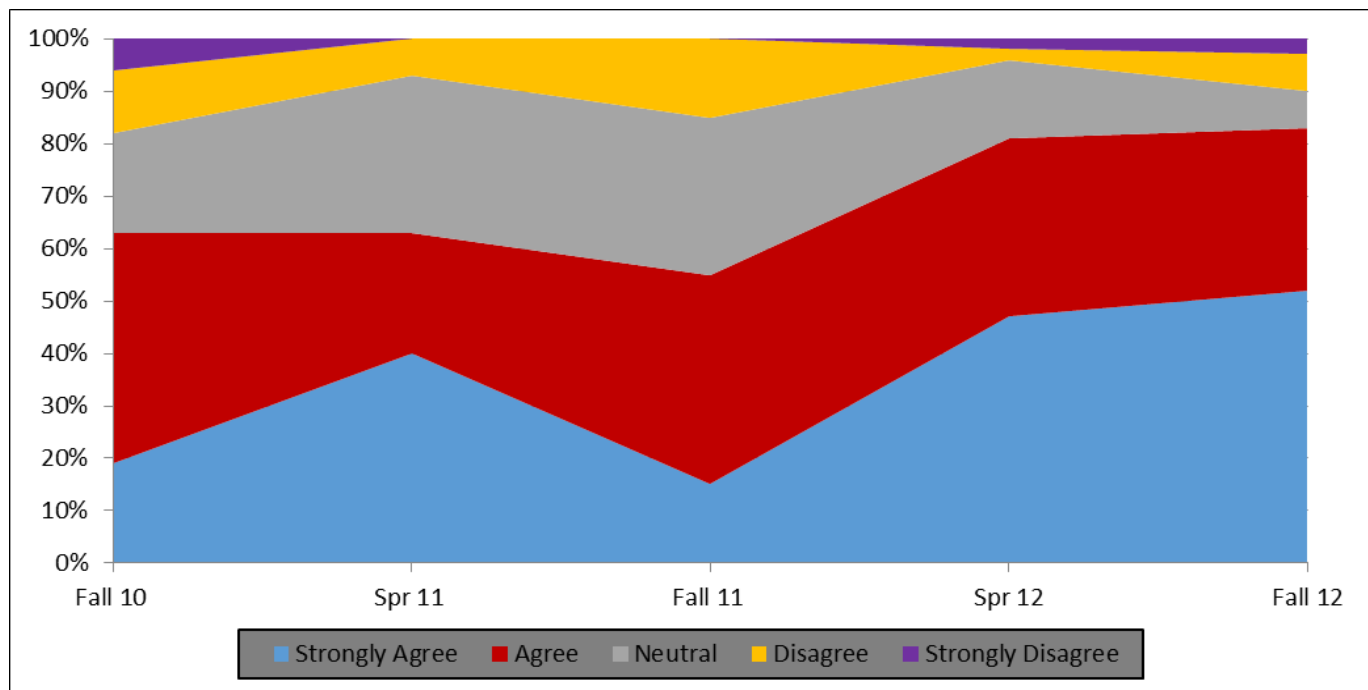
**Question 4: Engagement:** Indicate your agreement with the following statement: “The class is engaging (i.e., it requires my involvement and is stimulating).”

Term/Year	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Fall 10 (non-TBL) (n=16)	3 (19%)	5 (31%)	5 (31%)	3 (19%)	0
Spr 11 (TBL) (n=31)	9 (29%)	11 (35%)	10 (32%)	1 (3%)	0
Fall 11 (TBL) (n=21)	7 (33%)	11 (52%)	2 (10%)	1 (5%)	0
Spring 12 (TBL) (n=49)	27 (55%)	13 (27%)	8 (16%)	1 (2%)	0
Fall 12 (TBL) (n=30)	20 (67%)	7 (23%)	3 (10%)	0	0

Figure 4



## ESSAYS— CONTINUED



**Question 5: Group Activities:** Indicate your agreement with the following statement: "Working in small groups with classmates has been productive and helpful."

Term/Year	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Fall 10 (non-TBL) (n=16)	3 (19%)	7 (44%)	3 (19%)	2 (12%)	1 (6%)
Spr 11 (TBL) (n=30)	12 (40%)	7 (23%)	9 (30%)	2 (7%)	0
Fall 11 (TBL) (n=20)	3 (15%)	8 (40%)	6 (30%)	3 (15%)	0
Spring 12 (TBL) (n=49)	22 (47%)	16 (34%)	7 (15%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
Fall 12 (TBL) (n=29)	15 (52%)	9 (31%)	2 (7%)	2 (7%)	1 (3%)

Figure 5

## ESSAYS— CONTINUED

We appreciate the way our colleagues in the sciences know how to grasp the significance of graphs and tables almost at a glance, and we come to agree with those among them who venture to say that Question 4 (Engagement) is the most important one. In one corner of the poster we do our best to distill the experience into one (three-part) grand Conclusion: *In a first-year writing course such as WRIT 1311, team-based learning can:*

- *Help instructors work toward pedagogical goals (such as integrating reading or emphasizing ideas).*
- *Help students understand how they are evaluated.*
- *Make the course significantly more engaging.*

Eventually we learn—from Tagg, Fink, Michaelsen, Knight, and others—that assessing our students' learning is at least as important as evaluating our teaching (and that assessing learning is a way of evaluating teaching). If we have the power and/or freedom to do so, we revise learning outcomes for our courses so that they are not just lists of content topics to be "mastered." We reach a new or better understanding of those learning outcomes' connections to program and/or general education learning outcomes. We come to see what John Tagg has seen, that "Institutional assessment has been mixed up with issues of accountability, program assessment, and accreditation," and that we should "...ask ourselves, with the utmost seriousness, these questions: What do we want our students to know about their own learning, about the state of their knowledge? What are the goals of knowledge and ability that we hold for them? And what do they need to know in order to achieve those goals?" (328). And so, depending on our level of responsibility, we may devise methods of assessing students' learning across multiple sections of a course or at a certain stage in their academic careers. We may even get involved, with like-minded colleagues, in revising the core curriculum and its assessment.

At some point we attend a conference attended by faculty from all over the geographic and academic map. It might be a conference on service learning, information literacy, or writing across the curriculum. We might present research results like those above, or we might just absorb ideas from multiple perspectives (of course we can do both). We may notice how refreshingly cooperative and collaborative everyone seems to feel, in stark contrast to the competitive atmosphere of some discipline-specific conferences. In any case, we will probably find that we have a lot in common with scholars and teachers in other disciplines, all of us perhaps at different stages but on the same journey from one paradigm to another.

Whatever path we take into the scholarship of teaching and learning, out of the petrified forest of the instruction paradigm and toward the fertile jungle of the learning paradigm, at some point we must understand that the journey never ends. First of all, "The Learning Paradigm college needs to be a learning organization in the double sense that it is an organization that produces learning and an organization that learns" (34). And for Tagg, a functioning learning-paradigm institution is truly a community of practice in which "We must test our ideas and beliefs together....revise and correct our vision, test it in practice, and negotiate the solutions our vision has created....It is an iterative process, involving much back-and-forth. Once you have a vision of the whole, you must continuously be willing to revise it, to renegotiate it" (287).

Somewhere along the way, we come to understand the importance of reflection in learning—why some say we learn very little if we do not reflect periodically. It could be that settling in behind the computer to begin an academic article presenting the results of our research causes us to reflect upon how we have gotten to that moment. And maybe we change our minds, and so instead of displaying our data in a conventional manner, we decide to write a reflective essay about SOTL, in which we can incidentally embed our data. Or maybe we don't change our minds. Either way, we have taken another step by writing not for a narrow discipline but for this boundless, welcoming field. It is not the last step we will take, but it is an important one.

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## ESSAYS— CONTINUED

### “Posthuman Anthropology? Facing up to planetary conviviality in the Anthropocene”

By Christopher A. Howard, Chaminade University of Honolulu

#### Introduction

*The question of the human being* has defined and oriented the anthropological project since its Enlightenment conception. ‘Christening’ a new geological epoch in the name of its principle subject should be a clear sign that the status of the ‘anthropos’ is once again timely. The Anthropocene, I suggest, issues a challenge for anthropology/anthropologists to not only rethink relationships between nature and culture, but also to move beyond these binaries all together. Critically engaging with posthuman and phenomenological perspectives, this paper argues for an expanded, more than human anthropology. While cultivating non-anthropocentric perspectives is important for facing the ecological dangers of our times, I will argue that thinking in terms of anthropocentric versus non-anthropocentric dichotomies is to engage in dualistic, human-centered thinking. Looking to Heidegger’s ‘destruction of metaphysics’ and Helmuth Plessner’s philosophical anthropology as precursors to the recent ‘posthuman turn’, I suggest a critical de- and re-centering of the human is what is needed in the Anthropocene age.



Artwork courtesy of Sam Melser

The need for rethinking the human being comes with growing evidence of the material consequences of anthropogenic activities. The impact of growing human populations and increasing levels of consumption threaten not only the sustainability and flourishing of non-human species and fragile ecosystems, but also humankind itself. Accordingly, at the dawn of twenty-first century, atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen (2003) proposed that we have left the Holocene and entered the Anthropocene – the ‘time of Man’. Geologists and climate scientists base the Anthropocene hypothesis on a number of human-driven processes that are likely to leave a lasting mark on the planet; lasting meaning likely to leave traces that will remain for tens of millions of years. These include rising oceans due to the emission of greenhouse gases; ocean acidification, which is changing the chemical makeup of the seas; urbanization, which is vastly increasing rates of sedimentation and erosion; habitat destruction and the introduction of invasive species, which are causing widespread extinctions; and environmental degradation related to nuclear and other forms of waste. Human activity, particularly since the Industrial Revolution, is seen to be altering the planet on a scale comparable with some of the major events of the pre-historic past and are now seen as permanent, even on a geological time-scale (Steffen et al. 2011; Zalasiewicz et al. 2010).

As of 2015 the Anthropocene has not been formally adopted and the concept remains contested within and beyond the scientific community. For some, it has come to be used in place of terms like ‘climate change’ or ‘global environmental change’. Social scientists are particularly interested in the ethico-political implications of the concept. As Dalby (2015) states: ‘How the Anthropocene is interpreted, and who gets to invoke which framing of the new human age, matters greatly both for the planet and for particular parts of humanity’. Geographer Nigel Clark (2011) argues that it is more

## ESSAYS— CONTINUED

human arrogance to suppose that earth surface processes and forms will change significantly because of anthropogenic forces. In Clark's view, this gives humankind far too much credit and places earthly events in an extremely limited, anthropocentric time frame. In a different vein, Bruno Latour suggests we are mistaken to think that human beings or even specific groups could be singularly responsible for producing the Anthropocene:

The Anthropocene, in spite of its name, is not a fantastic extension of anthropocentrism ... [r]ather, it is the human as a *unified agency*, as one virtual political entity, as a universal concept that has to be broken down into many different people with contradictory interests, opposing cosmoeses... (2013: 80-81 emphasis original).

For Latour, the Anthropocene signals the various struggles and frictions between different people who are all implicated – albeit unevenly – in global environmental change. Paradoxically, Latour and other protagonists of the Anthropocene simultaneously make the metaphysical claim that humankind be taken as a singular 'unified agency'. The 'Hegelian task' of the anthropos then is to achieve a complete grasp and mastery of itself. Yet as Latour suggests, human agency is not simply in the hands of individuals, but is distributed across dynamic networks comprised of human and non-human actors, objects and actants. Therefore, the Anthropocene cannot simply be taken as the product of a discrete, anthropocentric being since the *anthropos has never been only human* (see Pyyhtinen and Tamminen 2011).

Some find the Anthropocene concept dangerous since it equates humans and nature and suggests that nature itself is a thing of the past. Critical ecologist Andreas Weber, for example, views the Anthropocene as the ideological equivalent to globalization: 'the whole earth now is conflated with humans, and more precisely, with (Western) technological man' (Weber 2013: 69). On one hand, there is a valid argument that calling the present the 'age of the human' may indeed justify or explain human attempts to master the Earth, through reckless measures such as geo-engineering, for example (Hamilton 2013). On the other hand, the critical potential of the Anthropocene concept is that it may serve as a sobering wake up call to the accumulated human footprints on the planet and an ecopolitical summons. At best, Weber sees it as a transitional phase:

The emergence of the Anthropocene idea is a necessary step in leaving behind the old Enlightenment thinking of man versus nature. But it is only a step and must be developed further to a full new view of nature as a generating force inside of us (69).

The corrective step Weber suggests is one away from the modern humanist thinking of the Enlightenment to an upgraded version he calls 'Enlivenment'. Instead of the Anthropocene, he argues the present era be called the 'Zoocene', underscoring the Greek word *Zoë*, meaning life in its felt sense and including the whole animate Earth. Environmental discourse, including that of the Anthropocene, is always a discourse on humankind in general. As a critical project committed to understanding the manifold ways of being human, anthropology should have much to say to the Anthropocene predicament. To productively do so, however, the discipline must be willing to push its methodological boundaries, both de- and re-centering its principle subject in a complex, more than human world. Posthuman perspectives offer anthropology a way of addressing its traditional anthropocentric bias (see Kopnina 2012b; Kopnina 2012a) while advancing an ecopolitical anthropology suitable for the Anthropocene.



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## ESSAYS— CONTINUED

### Relational ecology for a posthuman world

Posthumanist theory can be described as a deconstructive project striving to overcome the anthropocentrism of modern humanism as developed during the European Enlightenment. Rooted in the Platonic and Judeo-Christian metaphysical traditions, the history of western thought has been concerned with ascertaining essences – basic, underlying principles, properties and categories that are unchangeable and essential to all beings. In Western civilization the substance-oriented worldview has been interpreted in different historical epochs in terms of *eidos* (Plato), *energia* (Aristotle), *ens creatum* by God (Christendom), *res cogitans/res extensa* (Descartes), and in the modern period as a *material resources* that can be known and hence mastered and controlled by calculative reason. Inspired by Nietzsche's genealogy of knowledge, Heidegger sought to deconstruct the binary logic and anthropocentrism running through these different phases. In many ways, his 'destruction of metaphysics' laid the groundwork for the posthuman agenda to think beyond the human (Rae 2014).

The danger, for Heidegger, is that dualistic metaphysics are 'forgetful of Being' and come to dominate all other modes of interpreting the world (Heidegger 1996). In capitalist modernity, Heidegger sees human relations with the world becoming increasingly distanced and instrumental as humanity becomes enframed (*Gestell*) by rational, technological thinking that seeks to control and exploit nature. Enframed in this way, the world appears as a giant storehouse of inert material resources – a 'standing reserve' (*Bestand*) – that is simply there to be manipulated by and for human beings (Heidegger 1977).

Even in much contemporary discourse on environmental sustainability we can observe dualistic frames which not only place 'humans' and 'nature' in separate categories, but assume that humankind has a sovereign right and duty to both appropriate and conserve the world. With perhaps the exception of the more radical branches of ecology (e.g. deep ecology, ecofeminism, green anarchy), there remains widespread human-centered belief that the Earth is there for human beings to either exploit or to save (Abram 2010).

The more or less obvious problem with humanism, as Latour puts it, is that '[h]umanists are concerned only about humans; the rest, for them, is mere materiality or cold objectivity' (2011: 159). If this is the case, then the post-structuralists are also guilty, as observed by Karen Barad in 2003: 'Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters. The only thing that does not seem to matter anymore is matter' (2003: 801). However, a survey of anthropological and wider social science literature over the past decade or so suggests that our material entanglements certainly do matter in the twenty-first century (e.g. Descola 2013; Ingold 2008; Latour 2007; Tsing 2014). Arguably, the return of materiality and the dissolution of 'nature' and 'culture' is not just a manifestation of conceptual exhaustion, but directly related to the environmental catastrophes, exploitation of resources and eco-technological evolution signaled by the Anthropocene.

By bringing together the natural and social sciences, the Anthropocene debate challenges us and anthropology to rethink the human's place and status in a more than human world. A posthuman world does not imply abandoning anthropology's principle subject, but rather resituating the human in a 'logic of relations' (Serres 2003). Eco-logically, this requires recognizing a shared world in which humans and non-humans, machines, objects and information are mutually constituting and dynamically inter-acting within systems of great complexity (Urry 2005). Posthuman and systems thinking thus advances towards a non-dualistic understanding of multiplicity and radical interdependency. This is not to say that all things are equal, but rather that entities should be differentiated within a unity.

This ontological relationism implies that it is not enough to rethink the positional *relationships* between traditional categories like nature and culture, subject and object, human and animal or human and technology. The reason for this is that reductive dualisms are already set up by singular concepts. For instance, to say that human beings use technologies is to miss the point; humankind is unthinkable without them. Phenomenological thinkers such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty sought to demonstrate that oppositional thinking is faulty because it misses the *between* that makes a relation possible. Emphasizing the reversibility of energies between bodies and worlds, humans and non-humans, humans and

## ESSAYS— CONTINUED

technologies, phenomenologists proceed from the relational understanding that human existence is always enacted co-existence.

Being-in-the-world means that we cannot be taken separately from the dynamic environments we inhabit and are enveloped by. As Lingis (2000: 29) observes, 'Our movements are not spontaneous initiatives launched against masses of inertia; we move in an environment of air currents, rustling trees, and animate bodies'. What the Anthropocene suggests is that these localized environments or lifeworlds are not isolated unto themselves, but part of a planetary conviviality across vast scales and webs of difference. For instance, like other animals, humans live in symbiosis with billions of anaerobic bacteria; seven hundred species in our mouths which neutralize pathogens and the toxins plants produce to ward off enemies, four hundred species in our intestines, without which we could digest and absorb food (Lingis 1998). Findings from the Human Microbiome Project, completed in the summer of 2012, estimated that a diverse population of 100 trillion bacteria reside in a healthy human adult. This means that many of the cells that constitute a human body are in fact bacteria, not human cells (Adney Thomas 2014). Some of these bacteria possess genes that encode for beneficial compounds that the body cannot make on its own and thus contribute positively to the body's microbiome environment. Also striking is that only ten percent of the DNA which encodes the human is specifically human (Haraway 2008). Human beings not only co-evolve with a host of companion species in changing physical environments, but also with technology (see Lysemose 2012; Sloterdijk 2004).

Expanding the anthropological purview to encompass a more than human world is not just a matter of fashionable theory, but has major ecological and political implications. If we take the logic of relations seriously, our understanding shifts from a world of separate entities to one of interdependent processes. Proceeding from the responsive body is one way into such thinking by allowing for integrating 'Others' as co-original extensions of self (Waldenfels 2011: 53). While displacing the human from the center of reality seems to be just what is needed in the Anthropocene era, to conclude I will show why anthropocentrism in a strict sense cannot be 'overcome'. Given this ontological limitation, I suggest that it is more critically realistic and epistemologically sound to re-frame the human in light of the above discussion.



Artwork courtesy of Sam Melser

### Overcoming or recognizing anthropocentrism in the Anthropocene?

The simplest explanation for anthropocentrism is biological: like other species, human beings are 'centric' by nature. As Serres (1994: 56) observes, organisms, including humans, live not so much *in themselves* or *for themselves* as *at themselves*, following specific and local codes that are proper to an interior. Bats, wasps and humans each have different forms of existence, but what is common to all is a self-centered radius of operations that manifests a 'will' to persevere in their particular being, as captured by Spinoza's concept of *conatus*. In a basic sense then, humans are *anthropo-(self)-oriented by nature*. Yet unlike any other organism, the human is also in the uncanny position of also being 'ex-centric' to itself according to what Plessner calls the 'law of natural artificiality'.

Helmuth Plessner (1892-1985), a German zoologist and philosophical anthropologist, suggested in the 1920s that the key difference between humans and other organic life forms is their position in relation to themselves and their environment. Humans are described as occupying a uniquely 'ex-centric position' in that they are able to distance or objectify their own physical existence and the world of praxis; something other animals cannot do. The consequence of what Plessner

## ESSAYS— CONTINUED

calls our 'double aspectivity' – both *being* a physical body (*Körper*) and *having* a body (*Leib*) – is that humans have a 'broken relation' with nature.

Ex-centric positionality, according to Plessner, explains the sense of disequilibrium or 'constitutive rootlessness' humans experience and strive to overcome through culture and technology; manifestations of what he calls the 'utopian standpoint'. Like other organic beings, humans do not experience their environments in a total and objective sense, but through corporeal schema that operate by the '*law of mediated immediacy*'. Pre-envisioning posthumanism, Plessner sees our inbuilt corporeal media as augmented by technologies, which in turn creates further distance between the human beings and nature. Yet this situation too can be reflected on and abstracted thanks to the eccentric position, leading Plessner to conclude that human beings are '*artificial by nature*' (see Grene 1966; Mul 2014; Plessner).

### Anthropocene futures

This brief article has advocated the posthuman perspective that a relational ecology can no longer be avoided in the struggle for coexistence in the Anthropocene. Politically, how this new signifier is invoked and given content may play a pivotal role in determining how the future of planetary conviviality – a life together – plays out. Facing up to the ecological crisis and its underlying anthropocentrism, an anthro-de-re-centred orientation calls for resituating the 'anthropos' in a relational nexus. In a shared world, the human is co-constituted not only by its own 'humanity', but also by 'human-and-non-human' and the socio-material dynamics of 'physicalities-cum-culturalities' and vice versa. Greening Kant, would a categorical imperative in the Anthropocene be: 'Live your life in such a way that it can be made universal in a globalized world in which there is no longer a clear distinction between nature and culture'. Can we live in such a way? What would it mean?

Daring as this may sound, such a decolonization of thought is necessary for responding to the challenges of planetary coexistence in the Anthropocene. Just as critical social science produces what Bourdieu (1990: 15) describes as a de-naturalization and de-fatalization, Ghassan Hage observes that anthropology 'works critically through a comparative act that constantly exposes us to the possibility of being other than what we are' (2012: 289-90). Traditionally, this has been through the lens of culture in a humanistic sense. What a posthuman anthropology sensitizes us to is that *we already are Other* than what we think we are. Yet paradoxically, recognizing our more than humanness from our eccentric position means we are nothing but human. Human nature is thus not an unchanging essence, but a *capacity for going beyond* (Rapport 2010). It is this capacity, what Plessner called the 'utopian standpoint', that will play a large part in deciding our Anthropocene futures.

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## ESSAYS— CONTINUED

### “The Ins and Outs of the Romance Language Classroom”

By Philip Wander, Hostos Community College of the South Bronx

Teachers are always looking for something to enhance their students' experience with, and retention of, the material they present. This something need not be revolutionary or demand a fundamental change to current practice. In fact, small, incremental changes often best enhance current practices. This essay presents a device not meant to replace any other; a teacher could start using it tomorrow without doing violence to her usual practice. Not meant to replace bad practice with good practice, more gradual than transformative change, what this essay proposes is part of the learning principle known as interleaving (Carey). Interleaving is about variety and recognizes that spaced learning practices simply work better than the repetitive learning that many of us are using in our classrooms. Short, provocative units of information, linked to existing cultural and intuitive networks, “spaced learning” (Roediger, McDaniel and Brown) is easier for students to relate to and retrieve and uses networks of information they bring with them to the classroom. The process does not judge what we determine as outside-class learning as better than inside-class learning, nor vice-versa. Still, the common practices used in an average Romance language classroom are heavily weighted towards the inside-*class* with much less regard for the outside-*class*. Homework, someone will protest, is a good example of a task performed outside the class; yet tasks such as homework are always linked to assessment and thus are inextricably bound to the inside-*class*. In the language classroom, we should strive to strike a balance between inside-class and outside-class, and not only in the interest of a supposed equilibrium. The place where the students learn the most is in the shuttling from one to the other. Only if what goes on in the classroom in some way relates to the “real” world outside, does reliable learning take place.

A class or defined period of learning can be a monolithic structure punctuated by brief journeys to the outside world. The rules of this structure can be stultifying. Rote memorization of vocabulary makes the most attentive among us slumber. Yes, repetition is the mother of memory, but even the most diligent student's attention can fade at the sight of another vocabulary list. Students chaff at repeated reiteration of blocks of information which they perceive as equivalent, even when the content is, in fact, quite different. A connection between content and the students, rather than content and more content, has to be established. To be successful, intrinsically generated activities that students make their own are the ones they retain; intrinsically generated activities have the additional benefit of connecting to students' personal interests. These interests are part of the capital they bring to the class, capital not to be wasted if the teacher wants to create a successful learning environment. Engaged students are like so many free radicals, each anxious to contribute its energy to the common enterprise. Grasping this energy and using it is a powerful tool in transcending the confines of the typical language classroom.

Quite by accident, this teacher, browsing several language-learning websites for ideas, discovered a seemingly inert device that gets one out of the classroom routine every time. This device exploits the class “prelude” (the time prior to when the teacher takes attendance), and involves putting a simple sentence in the target language on the board. Especially during the first few weeks of the semester, this sentence is comprised almost entirely of cognates, and the students are pleased to ascertain their ability to read complete sentences in a foreign language: an unlooked for gift. The following is the example of such a sentence:

*Mes amies organisent une fête pour célébrer le mariage d'Hélène et Georges.*

Teachers should make clear that these sentences have nothing to do with “official” class time; students won't be tested on them and are free to jot them down or not. Nevertheless, teachers should choose the sentences carefully. Some part of them should connect to the day's lesson, and students' perception of this is part of the pleasure they should take from them. In part, due to the implicit culture content of the sentences, a link between the foreign culture and the students' occurs. I call the freestanding sentences I put on the board “tableautines” for French classes and “lavagnarini” for Italian classes. In the sentence above there are several “messages” that tie in to French grammatical content. There is the “accent circumflex” which, by replacement with an “s” often yields a close cognate to English. Then the “d'Hélène” nicely illustrates elision with a silent “H”. Finally I point out the non-pronunciation of “ent” in the third person plural of a regular “-

## ESSAYS— CONTINUED

er” verb, and elaborate by remarking that four out of six persons are pronounced the same.

The cultural content of the sentence is obvious; marriage and celebration are readily assimilated and recognizable to students at an American college or university. Also, as one scholar states, all language teachers are teaching culture too: Although the inclusion of culture in the foreign language curriculum has become more prevalent in recent years, gaining in both popularity and respectability, there are still those who either ignore the concept or deny its validity. Ironically, while these holdouts are presumably ignoring culture in their classrooms, they teach it every day. There is no way to avoid teaching culture when teaching language ...From the first day of the beginning class, culture is at the forefront. (J. C. Valdes)

Teachers should cull their private store of sentences from newspapers, books, and magazines; this helps the sentences remain fresh and topical and ensures they target something which might actually interest the students in real outside *time*. There is an undeclared connivance between that day’s lesson and some facet of the sentence, but the link can be tenuous and is not declared by the teacher unless he/she is asked. Teachers are not obliged to translate the sentence, nor is it necessarily verbalized. In some classes the sentence goes unnoticed until class is over, but more often than not, one or several students will attempt a translation. Rarely, even in the last minute of the period, does someone not at least ask for hints about some gap in their translation. Before the end of the term, the students take full possession of this “outside” of the class locution, and often state its meaning without teacher intervention. In taking ownership of this “outside” classroom practice, they also become autonomous learners. Autonomous learners are, of course, defined by their autonomy:

Autonomy, or the capacity to take charge of one’s own learning, was seen as a natural product of the practice of self-directed learning, or learning in which the objectives, progress and evaluation of learning are determined by the learners themselves. (Benson)

Judgment of performance becomes autonomous and personal as well. Students, at least insofar as the sentences are concerned, become their own teachers. They are linking short-term memory goals to long-term memory content. They shuttle between inside class content and outside class assets.

This device constitutes a springboard for learning and discussion that appears spontaneous and expansive, natural and independent: a breath of fresh air that piques their interest and invites familiarity. So far no one has ventured to bring one of their own sentences for posting, but it is only a matter of time. Pattern and recognition of outline are signs of students’ progressive proprietorship of the phrases and are key ingredients to learning a language:

The ability to learn a second language may depend less on linguistic skills and more on the ability to recognize patterns, according to new research. (Frost)

Recognition is a step towards mastery and ownership, a revelatory moment in which students solve the “puzzle.” If the class being taught is successful, the whole class will experience those moments often and will want to experience them more; it is extremely pleasurable when our predictions ring true.

And the process is democratic. What I have called here the “outside” class content does not create disparity between the members of the community: it is free and accessible to all. The difference between the have nots and the haves (those who always answer, comprehend, and participate), is suspended; the sentences belong to the whole community. Egalitarian and accessible, students’ responses to these sentences are not part of assessed academic achievement and are not tied to a grade. They constitute an exercise that encourages free interaction with the language and is not judged.

The heavy use of cognates posits a kind of universal language that students can exploit. Especially in introductory classes populated by adults, failing to make use of the linguistic structures already present in students’ consciousness would be unsound practice. The often expressed idea that languages should be taught as if to a child is simply wrong. Much of a language’s structure is common to many others, and the recognition of pattern, blueprint, and relationship between a student’s native language and the one being acquired is a substantial part of the capital that adult students bring to their

## ESSAYS— CONTINUED

learning. The teacher should not exclude whatever is useful for the task at hand in the classroom; rather, teachers should bring out what students bring in.

Cognates and underlying common structure allow immediate entry to the new language and culture. The great, though passive, vocabulary and syntax of the student's native language is the doorway through which the greatest number of recognitions will take place. Cognates, cognition, prediction and recognition all relate to the awareness and intuition supplied by the students. As long as the teacher can create the channels whereby this latent knowledge finds expression, the trap of faculty-centric instruction is circumvented. We all know that learning has to be an exchange; the days of the theory that students are so many empty vessels waiting to be filled with our carefully chosen content are over. Students have to actively participate in class to benefit from it. It is the teacher's job to make them discover their resources and risk them in the give and take of the class. It is a collective enterprise, and everyone, the teacher included, must take risks to create skills and value. The sentences on the board are invitations to participate:

*La batteria è carica (charged), è possibile usare il cordless.*

Their participation in the “lavagnarini” and “tableautines,” in fact, percolates through every aspect of class, because these lavagnarinis or tableautines train students to anticipate meaning rather than to look for it in rules or memorized vocabulary. Confronting a sentence that they don't understand forces them to predict its meaning, which engages the whole network of their learning skills.

As I have been arguing in this essay, small changes to our teaching — such as the way we approach the closing minutes of class — can make a big difference.

...when you are forced to make a prediction or give an answer to a question about which you do not have sufficient information, you are compelled to search around for *any* possible information you might have that could relate to the subject matter and help you to make a plausible prediction.<sup>6</sup>

By the end of the semester, students take full possession of the sentences and put them to use. Sometimes they contain grammatical structures that the students have not yet encountered, sometimes there is unfamiliar vocabulary. Through the habit of teasing out meaning and extracting sense, students discover subject matter that piques their interest and validates their investment. By this time, they are adept at making rough translations and are more intrigued by the cultural context. This context carries the class outside of the classroom.

There are many other tools used to expand the outside classroom and make it work in foreign language instruction. The random sentences put on the board before each class are a powerful initiation. They direct students' thinking to the practical applications of their learning and the possibility of concrete travel *in* the language, but *outside* the classroom.

Actual travel abroad is the natural extension of the use of “tableautines” or “lavagnarini,” both constitute a kind of excursion to the host country in a way that the textbook cannot. Shuttling from the outside *class* to the inside *class* mimics real travel, and prepares the student cognitively for the real thing. Whether it be travel abroad, field trips, or technology outside the classroom, all get the student *out* from behind the desk, *out* of the classroom, and *out* of the constraints imposed by the physical class. Students gladly embrace the liberating effect of simply changing venue, and embrace the outside classroom as the inside of a greater reality. Buying a cup of coffee, or finding the bathroom in another language brings a whole new level of concentration. In the best of all possible worlds we would always opt for travel abroad or submersion.

In an ideal world our classrooms would be small enclaves of immersion; the urgency of living a language makes all the difference for students who might be simply fulfilling a college requirement and do not wish to pursue the language further. Once students live in a language, or are immersed in it in an immersive classroom, they perceive that the world can be made of the language they are learning. They learn they can live in that language, instead of simply fulfilling an academic obligation. Language is culture challenging them as students and as global citizens. They find the idea of world travel intriguing and delight in the sweeping awareness of at least a piece of the world outside of their neighborhood, their

## ESSAYS—CONTINUED

school, their major, and their classroom. They gain a more globally elaborated picture of international actuality and their part in it. Language learning can be a game-changer for those sheltered students who experience a foreign language for the first time. Full immersion is the best fit for certain language learners, although not for all. Unfortunately it is beyond the reach of the majority of students. Through incremental changes, we can take steps towards an immersive classroom. As James M. Lang observes in his series of articles on time management, “Closing the gap between actual foreign travel and language instruction should always be on the mind of the language instructor.”

Real sentences from authentic contemporary sources help with this goal. Students should also be encouraged to establish a pen pal with a native speaker who is simultaneously learning the student’s language—a bona fide win-win exchange. Sometimes the student will find his own correspondent, or there are many internet sites which will establish the link for the student. There are even postings rating the relative quality of the various sites, though faculty might want to encourage students to be judicious in their choice of websites.

Each class and course we teach should be an adventure and a journey for our students. A syllabus spells out the itinerary that we mean to follow, but it is only a roadmap. How we get there is entirely up to us. The train schedule says we will arrive in Paris in one hour and fifteen minutes; we have much time to look out the window and observe. Ultimately, although language teachers know there is no substitute for travel in the target language’s country, more of us are finding ways to make our classes *travel*. In this time of dwindling enrollment, we are of course anxious to get students into our language classes; getting them out might be the best way.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

**Hammond, Meghan Marie, and Sue J. Kim, eds. *Rethinking Empathy Through Literature*. New York: Routledge, 2014. 259 pp. Hardcover ISBN 978-0-415-73623-7.**

By Theo Savvas, University of Bristol

Emerson famously reported Goethe as declaring, “I have never heard of any crime which I might not have committed” (Emerson, 227). With this, Goethe was suggesting that he could think himself into the position of any criminal, a claim susceptible to all manner of interpretations – an honest admission of human frailty, perhaps, or an explanation of how he managed to render so sophisticated a character as Mephistopheles. But, at the root of all suggestions would be the fact that the comment represents a profound statement of what we would now call empathy. Taken literally Goethe’s claim is provocative because, as the introduction to *Rethinking Empathy through Literature* makes clear, “empathy” is not easily distinguished from its predecessor “sympathy.” “Sympathy” had been a touchstone of writing of the eighteenth century and was defined most usefully by Samuel Johnson as “fellow feeling,” a definition which for most would now pertain to empathy. Johnson’s phrase seems, indeed, not far removed from the recent definitions of empathy offered by thinkers such as Martha Nussbaum (“the ability to see the world from another’s viewpoint”) and Steven Pinker (“the ability to put oneself into the position of some other person, animal, or object, and imagine that sensation of being in that situation”) (7–8). In this understanding, sympathy is not synonymous with pity. However, with the rise of the nineteenth-century “social problem novel,” “feeling with” morphed into “feeling for”; the coining in 1909 by the psychologist Edward Titchener of “empathy” (from the German *Einfühlungsvermögen*) offered the possibility of a necessary, if often idiosyncratically employed, distinction to be made. Nevertheless, the nineteenth century understanding of sympathy tinted our understanding of empathy in the latter half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty first: empathy tends automatically to be taken as a virtuous affective quality. *Rethinking Empathy through Literature* is important because it continues a recent line of work – by scholars such as Lisa Zunshine, and Suzanne Keen – which seeks to trouble such a mechanistic understanding of the term. Indeed, the book, which is split into four sections, might with some justification have been given the title of the third of those sections: “Difficult Empathy.”

Given the importance in the field of *Empathy and the Novel* (2007), it is appropriate that the opening essay of the first part of this book – “Empathy and Reading” – is by Keen. Although Keen name checks her own book no fewer than seven times in the first five pages (a little more interventionism by the editors was needed on other occasions in the book, too), she does so not to rehearse “all the arguments” put forth there, but to engage with the specific matter of narrative empathy and altruism, and to consider the scholarly debate on the topic which has ensued in the ten years since her book was published (21, my italics). Broadly speaking, Keen rejected the claim that reading necessarily produces greater levels of empathy, and, importantly, she criticised the way in which narrative ethics tended to couch these claims in terms of canonicity, and literary style and quality. She was certainly right to do so. Nevertheless, she was also right to acknowledge there and in later work that most readers thought that there *ought* to be a connection between narrative empathy and empathy for living others (24). Her engagement with Pinker’s *The Better Angels of Our Nature* does not challenge the overall argument that we have witnessed and are witnessing a decline in violence (although that thesis is contestable, and depends upon one’s definition of violence), but rather highlights that Pinker does not posit a simple causal relationship between a rise in empathy and a decline in violence. The overall point to take from Keen’s piece here is that more empirical research on the relationship between reading novels and the production of our better (empathic) angels is required.

Keen’s essay sets the tone for the interdisciplinary nature of the other two pieces that make up Part 1 of the book: Susan Lanzoni’s on early twentieth-century poetry and psychology, and the collaborative effort between Lauren Fowler and Sally Bishop Shigley. The latter is an examination of the impact of Margaret Edison’s play *W:t* on pre-health care students, and might, then, be said to offer some of the empirical research that Keen calls for in her piece. The data provided by the tests conducted (facial electromyography, galvanic skin response and self-report) are inconclusive though, and this is betrayed in the hedged final-line summation: “students at the undergraduate level *have the capacity* to be moved and changed powerfully by witnessing the human experience through literature” (57, my italics). Fair enough, but the question raised by the work of Keen and others is surely not whether individuals have the capacity to be changed by a work of literature, but whether the work itself has the capacity to change individuals. Trying to cleave to

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the topic of the book seems also to marginalise the most significant finding which was that viewing the film of the play rather than reading the play produced the far greater responses.

The second part, on “Empathy, Form, and the Body,” expands our sense of what empathy is and what it can do. Where for John Melillo, discussing the way in which certain poetic practice disturbs the relationship between “noise” and “sound,” empathy is better understood as a mediation of affect rather than as an affect itself, for Eleonore De Filip, empathy provides the means for hearing the voices of the “speechless,” both human and non-human alike. De Filip is surely right to highlight that in these instances empathy can only be understood “as an intellectual and emotional gift,” but her argument ought to be considered alongside the final essay in the collection in which Sarah L. Berry demonstrates the ways in which attempts at empathy can backfire (101). For Berry, the employment of “subject-to-object” empathy in Rebecca Skloot’s popular *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (2010) ends up perpetuating stereotypes, so “re-enacting the power imbalance that [the author] attempts to bring to the readers’ attention [sic]” (229).

The dynamic of the relationship between the presentation of empathy in a novel and empathy produced in the reader is fascinating and complex and several of the essays here consider it. Nathan Shank convincingly, if counterintuitively, suggests that a satirical and ironic narrator, such as we find in Fielding’s *Tom Jones*, might not prevent empathic identification with that narrator by the reader, and Rebecca Mitchell and Erik Leake explore the challenge to readerly empathy posed by “unlikeable characters.” All are stimulating – and Mitchell’s is for me the stand out piece of the collection – but none really develops a take on how or why “difficult empathy” might be linked to the overall success of a novel. Certainly for Richard Wright, one of the subjects of Leake’s essay, the move away from the opportunity for easy empathy produced by his earlier book, *Uncle Tom’s Children* – replete with characters “even bankers’ daughters could read and weep over and feel good about,” as Wright himself later lamented – was crucial (Wright, 23).

The collection ranges widely, and while this produces certain infelicities and occasional lapses in focus, the geographic and temporal scope allows for the contingent nature of empathy to be brought out. The reader can learn from Catherine Harrison’s reading of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* how provocation of empathy in the reader provided a way into the social problems of nineteenth-century England, while being made aware by Suzanne Roszak and Karen Steigman, writing about *Giovanni’s Room* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, and Didion’s *The White Album*, respectively, that in cold war America empathy served as a tool “for social and emotional manipulation” and the promotion of ideological conformity (152). Meghan Marie Hammond exonerates Gertrude Stein of (mis)appropriating the voice of Toklas in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* in her piece, but her admission of the fact that empathy might be something to which one is (involuntarily) subjected crystallizes the most important message of the book as a whole: empathy is certainly difficult; it has the potential to be dangerous, too.

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## BOOK REVIEWS— CONTINUED

**Morgan, Robin K., Kimberly T. Olivares, and Jon Becker, eds. *Quick Hits for Adjunct Faculty and Lecturers: Successful Strategies from Award-Winning Teachers*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015. 114 pp. Paperback ISBN 978-0-253-01834-2.**

By Samantha Bernstein-Sierra, University of Southern California

*Quick Hits for Adjunct Faculty and Lecturers*, the seventh volume in the *Quick Hits* series, offers a strong practical foundation for good teaching through valuable insights compiled from experienced adjunct faculty and lecturers. Though intended for an audience of non-tenure track faculty, every type of faculty member can benefit from the lessons contained in this book, which are all refreshingly brief, relatable, and enjoyable.

The purpose of the book is to provide adjunct faculty and lecturers with tips and strategies, given that group's unique challenges both inside and outside of the classroom. Historically, adjunct faculty and lecturers have been a population of teachers who receive less professional development support from their institutions than their tenure-track counterparts. The intention of the book is to address this disparity by providing tips and strategies to ensure student learning, based on a largely active, interactive, and experiential approach to teaching, and taking into account the day-to-day challenges of this particular group of teachers.

Published by the Faculty Colloquium on Excellence in Teaching (FACET) at Indiana University, edited by Robin K. Morgan, Kimberly T. Olivares, and Jon Becker, and with over fifty contributing authors, this book offers a wide range of perspectives on teaching from authors with experience as part-time and full-time adjunct faculty, lecturers, and tenured and tenure-track faculty members.

The book comprises five chapters, which are divided into brief (half-page to two-page) articles. The first chapter, *Balancing Competing Demands*, offers strategies for working around the limitations inherent in adjunct teaching, including lack of choice or advanced notice for the courses taught, and the logistical difficulties of working at multiple institutions. Topics range from time management to maintaining work-life balance. The second chapter, *Addressing Student Issues*, focuses on the best practices faculty can employ to create a supportive environment for students and promote student engagement. Topics include addressing student disabilities, attendance, and ethical issues like plagiarism. *Adopting Best Practices* offers examples of pedagogical strategies teachers can use to facilitate student success in the classroom, such as engaging students in course content and materials, and building student self-reflection into course design. The fourth chapter, *Managing the Classroom*, deals primarily with course structure, planning, and organization across a variety of disciplines, grade levels, and formats (i.e., flipped classrooms and online courses). This chapter offers the most practical, ready-to-use strategies, which are often accompanied by sample documents. The final chapter, *Enhancing Professional Development*, offers tips for being proactive in seeking out professional development resources, as well as ways to implement them successfully in the classroom: to “*make changes thoughtfully*, incrementally, and with reflection during and after” (81). Articles in this chapter discuss faculty mentoring and peer review, publishing, and leveraging adjunct positions into tenure-track jobs.

The book's main strengths are the authors' conversational writing styles and consistently encouraging outlook. Less like an instruction manual, the candor with which the authors write resembles a supportive discussion among colleagues. Because the most likely audience for this book is non-tenure and new faculty members, many of whom who will have less developed circles of peers than tenure-track faculty, this book offers a quick alternative to a workshop or professional teaching conference.

The casual tone of the book is also apparent in the subject matter under discussion. Many of the articles deal with issues that teachers may often encounter, but seldom discuss with peers, such as managing stress and finding mentors to consult about sensitive issues. For example, Mitchell, Carrier, and Beauchamp explain the value of mentoring in addressing the emotional reactions that accompany teaching, such as self-doubt and fears about not being liked by students: “There are few places in academia where being real about emotionally vulnerable questions is safe or wise,” but



## BOOK REVIEWS— CONTINUED

“with the right mentor(s), it is possible to ... genuinely address insecurities that most all beginning instructors and adjuncts hold” (92).

The authors of this book write with an unmistakable optimism. Much of the scholarly work on adjunct faculty and lecturers in recent years emphasizes hardships—lower status, poor pay, and lack of resources (Kezar, 2004), which may lead to fleeting connections with students and poor student performance (Baldwin and Myrwrwinski, 2011; Benjamin, 2003; Kezar and Maxey, 2015). What sets this book so drastically apart from the literature is its emphasis on the *value* of adjunct faculty and lecturers to administrations, to faculty, and to students. The book assumes the importance of this group of teachers, and instead of fixating on barriers to good teaching, presents practical and constructive ways to circumvent these barriers to improve the teaching experience for faculty and their students.

What I found most refreshing about this book is its emphasis on the student experience. Many of the authors encourage self-reflection on the part of faculty when planning course content and organization. For example, Olivares warns against using severe language in course syllabi such as “ATTENDANCE IS MANDATORY!,” and asks that faculty consider the impact of such language on students’ motivation to learn. In that same chapter, White offers strategies for encouraging classroom discussion using anonymous polling, to overcome students’ hesitancy about offering their opinions. Anonymity offers protection from scrutiny, and by showing students the results of polls in real time, this tactic allows students to visualize diversity of thought from their peers. The incorporation of the student perspective speaks volumes about where the authors’ priorities reside when it comes to teaching.

One change that would have made the book more practically useful for readers is a more streamlined article structure. Several of the authors omitted aspects of their experiences that would have made them more relatable, and thus, adoptable by an audience of teachers. For example, in a discussion about redesigning a course to conform to a constructivist pedagogy, it would be helpful to know the grade level and/or subject matter(s) of the courses in which the author found success, so that readers could make an informed decision about whether constructivism might be successful in their own courses. Similarly, several authors omitted the outcomes of particular interventions, such as any measurable student improvement, better ratings on student evaluations, or lessons learned by the author. Such information would be invaluable for readers who plan to adopt new practices in their classrooms. Further streamlining the article structure would not take away from the informal tone of the authors’ writing that made the book so enjoyable, but merely ensure that every piece contained sufficient practical information for readers to decide whether a particular strategy is right for them. An alternative to outcomes or formal results, if none are available, might include references for further reading, or speculations about the type of environment in which an idea or tactic might be successful.

In conclusion, I would recommend this book for its intended audience of adjunct faculty and lecturers, as well as all post-secondary teachers, aspiring, new, or old, tenure-track or not. Though readers will not find every article applicable to their own teaching, because of the breadth of perspectives and experiences, I believe that every type of teacher can find valuable takeaways, and very likely, new tools to apply to their own teaching.

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## BOOK REVIEWS— CONTINUED

**Cordner, Sheila. *Education in Nineteenth-Century British Literature: Exclusion as Innovation*. New York: Routledge, 2016. 160 pp. Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-4724-6747. Ebook ISBN: 978-1-3155-7884-2.**

By Kate Holterhoff, Georgia Institute of Technology

Only several books have been published on the history of education in nineteenth-century Britain. One thread of this inquiry has been the rise in disciplinarity in the Arts and Sciences following the Enlightenment. Amanda Anderson and Joseph Valente's edited volume *Disciplinarity at the fin de siècle* (Princeton UP, 2002) and more recently Jon Klancher's *Transfiguring the Arts and Sciences* (Cambridge UP, 2014) have underscored the importance of determining how and why educational institutions evolve. Other scholars have taken up the issue of how education impacted the biographies of particular individuals, such as Sara Atwood's *Ruskin's Educational Ideals* (Ashgate, 2011). Meanwhile, the more concerted studies of Victorian pedagogy, particularly as they relate to women and the lower classes, include Laura Green's *Educating Women* (Ohio UP, 2001), Christina De Bellaigue's *Educating Women* (Oxford UP, 2007), and Elizabeth Gargano's *Reading Victorian Schoolrooms* (Routledge, 2008), have all explored the Victorians' habits of learning. Sheila Cordner's book, *Education in Nineteenth-Century British Literature: Exclusion as Innovation* (Routledge, 2016), fits most comfortably in this last category, but its broad implications touch on all of these threads in unexpected and illuminating ways.

Professor Cordner of Boston University contributes to the corpus of scholarship concerning the rise of institutionalized education by studying the tradition of “educational outliers,” by which she means individuals who, owing to their social class or gender, were excluded from Oxford and Cambridge. Focusing on nineteenth-century novelists, *ENCBL* “tells the story of how these writers...imagined alternatives to educational systems” (1). According to Cordner, outliers share three major concerns. First, they aim to create universally accessible pedagogies; second, they satirize pedagogies of rote memorization; and third, they emphasize the cultivation of empathy (1). Cordner makes the case that individuals excluded from the academy owing to their gender and class adopted radical pedagogies in order to educate themselves. By rejecting Whiggish narratives about the age's essentially democratic and reformist spirit, with the rise of colleges for both women and working men, Cordner draws a nuanced picture of the past that suggests exclusion was more common than equality, and self-betterment was necessary and sometimes preferable to the Oxbridge culture of “cramming” for exams.

The scope of Cordner's monograph encompasses the nineteenth-century in its entirety. Arranged by author and major moments in education reform, the chapters of *ENCBL* move readers from the early nineteenth century, with Jane Austen, through the middle of the period, with Elizabeth Barrett Browning, to the *fin de siècle*, with George Gissing. Cordner argues that Austen's ironical fictions use plot and style to “unteach” readers the morally suspect lessons they learned through rote memorization. Next, she studies Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, explaining that while the eponymous heroine unteaches herself all of the lessons of femininity propounded by conduct manuals, the character Marian permits Browning to explore the educational experience of the working class by drawing parallels between factory labor and rote memorization. Cordner traces Thomas Hardy's deliberate rejection of Oxbridge in order to embrace his ideal of autodidacticism—an attitude that appears in his several self-educated characters such as Jude Fawley and Angel Clare. Next, Cordner explains how Gissing's fraught experience with education, his expulsion from Owens College and his tutoring work in Boston and Chicago, appears in his fictions by way of the promotion of an individualized and democratic pedagogy. The concluding chapter of *ENCBL* exposes the legacy of educational outliers in higher education today. Using Virginia Woolf's own identification on the margins of the academy, as well as a discussion of the first women's college writers, Cordner argues that the outliers continue to exist and still respond to the models established by some of the nineteenth-century's most prominent cultural voices.

Although Cordner focuses almost entirely on the realist mode, the decision to include Browning's “novel poem” unshackles her study of British fiction from a rigidly single-mode framework. Each chapter provides an in-depth summary of the education of these canonical authors—a perennially fascinating section of literary biography—at the same time it also provides structure and meaning to these histories within the context of educational outliers. For instance, Cordner exposes how Thomas Hardy's conscientious rejection of an Oxbridge education was intertwined with his decision to embrace the ideal promoted by publications like *The Popular Educator*, which encouraged audiences “not to focus on memorizing facts

## BOOK REVIEWS— CONTINUED

but to think critically about what they read” (64). Uniquely, *ENCBL* also incorporates two primary sources taken from the history of education as appendices. Firstly, an excerpt from *The Loiterer*, a periodical created by Jane Austen’s brothers while at university, recounts the youthful missteps of a now debt-ridden and remorseful rector. The second appendix is an excerpt from the popular science periodical *The Educator*, and specifically a physiology lesson about the body. In addition to their historical interest, these primary source examples add useful and concrete textual evidence to support Cordner’s overarching claims.

*ENCBL* looks hard at the paths individuals excluded from Oxbridge took to achieve their intellectual and professional goals. For instance, Cordner’s insight into the complex and important role of reading illuminates the topic of educational history in unexpected ways, and is at its freshest when clarifying how nineteenth-century students encountered the act of reading. Specialists interested in the role of educational institutions in nineteenth-century Britain, and the novelists and poets who struggled against them, will find much to interest them in Cordner’s book. Likewise, scholars focused on the biography and context surrounding some of the era’s most significant and enduring figures will take much from this study. *ENCBL* is a lucid exploration of pedagogy writ large, and yet this study shines when discussing the intersections between nineteenth-century culture and the arts. Scholars concerned with the history and dissemination of science will find Cordner’s research less appealing. Cordner seems to have purposely positioned the “knowledge of applied science,” as Thomas Henry Huxley termed it in “Science and Culture” (1880), on the margins (and often in the footnotes) of her research. Considering the fact that Matthew Arnold is a touchstone in *ENCBL*, perhaps the complaints of Huxley and his fellows against Oxbridge-trained classical scholars are best left alone. The role of applied science is simply too complex and nuanced to undertake beside the important issues of exams and cramming.

I learned much about the history of education from Cordner’s lucid and erudite monograph. In fact, I found myself frequently blindsided by her novel and compelling interpretations of well-known nineteenth-century texts. I suspect that *ENCBL* will come to exert a considerable influence on the field of education and disciplinary studies.

## BOOK REVIEWS— CONTINUED

**Augsburg, Tanya. *Becoming Interdisciplinary: An Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies*. 3rd ed. Dubuque: Kendall, 2016. xiii + 163 pp. ISBN: 978-0-75-751561-3.**

By Laurence Winters, Fairleigh–Dickinson University

MONSIEUR JOURDAIN: *Well, what do you know about that! These forty years now I've been speaking in prose without knowing it!*

Molière

With the third edition of *Becoming Interdisciplinary* Tanya Augsburg has undertaken a difficult—or maybe an impossible—task. First or second year students, no matter how well motivated, could hardly be expected to have been socialized into the disciplinary world so familiar to career academics. This task is admittedly no more difficult than the task of teaching an introductory course in interdisciplinary studies to students who hardly have a notion of academic disciplines, of their history, or of the academic debates that surround our specializations.

To make matters worse, in many interdisciplinary studies programs, students are attracted by particular specializations, flexibility of program design, or individual attention. They are not concerned with abstract justifications for a free-standing interdisciplinary discipline; nor are they interested in learning means to defend their choices and their professional skills before interviewers or even in an elevator or at a party.

Yet this is a very good textbook, and should be seriously considered by instructors who have taken up the daunting challenge of teaching courses in interdisciplinary studies.

The book is divided into two sections; the first constitutes a classical text with chapter-by-chapter learning outcomes, outlines, short selected readings, and review exercises. The second provides a number of rationales for Interdisciplinary Studies majors, responses to potential challenges and criticisms, as well as aids for job seekers. I shall discuss this section later in this review.

Most interesting and useful in the first section is Chapter 2, “What Is Interdisciplinarity? Some Essential Definitions.” This question is, after all, the one interdisciplinarians all hear regularly. While interdisciplinary approaches to scholarship and research are hardly new, so many of our colleagues, especially those vested in discipline-dominated academia, are unfamiliar with the long, complicated history of the intersections of interdisciplinary and disciplinary approaches to their subject-matter. (Graff, 2015) This brief chapter does an adequate job of fulfilling the “outcomes” outlined on the first page. It ends with an exercise asking the students to “memorize” the definitions. They might well ask, “Why should I?” and it is not clear in the text why they should. I would hope that we have advanced in our pedagogy past “because I said so.”

The following chapter introduces the idea of metaphor as a useful tool for explaining interdisciplinary studies. Augsburg argues on page 35, “when you make comparisons between two unlike things using metaphor, you encourage interdisciplinary thinking as you are presenting one thing in terms of another perspective.” In this, she is drawing heavily on the work of Julie Thompson Klein, one of the most important writers and scholars in the field. (Klein, 1996) Remarkable in this chapter is a reading from Asif Majid that identifies and discusses cross-cultural metaphors for knowledge integration and interdisciplinarity. The reader of this review will immediately recognize in Majid’s concerns the question of just how to go about integrating information from various sources into an interdisciplinary research report. (McDonald, et al. 2006) These notions may well serve pedagogical purposes and facilitate relatively simple integrative efforts; however, it is not at all clear how they would assist complex interdisciplinary research projects involving data derived from multiple methodologies within a diverse disciplinary team.

## BOOK REVIEWS— CONTINUED

Chapter 4 offers definitions of related terms that will be useful in the task Dr. Augsburg sets for the students in introductory classes in interdisciplinary studies—self-justification. While these definitions and the controversies surrounding them are both important and interesting for the committed students, others may wonder at the lack of settled lexical foundations. Most concerning to this reviewer are the efforts to separate what she calls the “transdisciplinarity” of the I2S initiatives from interdisciplinary studies. Gabriele Bammer (2013), for example, discusses detailed procedures for bringing information from diverse disciplinary scholars, differing methodologies, value systems, and cultural presuppositions into useful and focused coordination to the end of engaging efforts directed toward the solutions of “wicked problems.” Having distanced interdisciplinary studies from the most promising contemporary efforts to constitute an engaged “transdisciplinary” methodology, we might well ask just what is left beyond self-justification.

This chapter is followed by a brief “History of Interdisciplinary Studies.” This is an important exercise for the students’ understanding of their field of study. However, none of the sources cited are Classical scholars or medievalists, and the paragraphs tracing the pre-modern development of interdisciplinary thought raise more questions than they answer. Harvey Graff’s study cited above, inaccessible to most undergraduates, does a far better job of rooting interdisciplinarity in the history of the university and its more familiar disciplines.

The final chapter in section one returns to an approach that dominates the earlier versions of this text, as well as the other widely used introductory text by Allen Repko. (2013) Personal characteristics or value systems of interdisciplinarians and transdisciplinarians are listed and briefly discussed. While this may interest late adolescent students, once again it raises practical questions when we try to think through actual efforts to produce interdisciplinary knowledge and practice. Will conflicts never arise when all the members of a research or pedagogical team adhere to the stated value systems? What if they do? Value conflicts are common and perhaps even productive in real world problem solving projects. Maybe this is the most important issue here, how to resolve conflicts within research teams rather than stipulating putative systems of shared mind sets. (Repko, 2008)

Part 2 is a grab bag of brief readings, exercises, and defensive arguments. Chapter 7 begins with the often cited “debate” between Thomas Benson and William Newell about the value of interdisciplinary studies. (Repko, 2013) When punctuated with student activities and exercises, the chapter fills more than thirty pages.

The remaining chapters of the section cover a variety of student-oriented projects, such as the development of interdisciplinary portfolios, self-justifying debate language, and autobiographies. Most interesting are the “six word memoirs” and the “elevator pitch” in Chapter 11. Students would find these projects engaging and, perhaps, useful. Clearly instructors would pick and choose from the variety of workbook-style projects that make up the majority of this section. By themselves these pages make the text a good choice, allowing as they do the development of several sorts of context-specific introductory courses.

The reader of this review might well ask at this point whether this reviewer has adopted this book. Yes, I have, and I look forward to trying it out during the coming semester. And, indeed, I strongly recommend its adoption to any instructor facing the challenge of teaching such a course.

Finally, as a life-time college instructor and administrator, I have to wonder about the overall focus on self-justification. Interdisciplinary research has become common in both the natural and social sciences. This, by itself, should be enough to support the continuation and further development of interdisciplinary initiatives on both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Have we all not, like Molière’s M. Jourdain, been doing interdisciplinary work all our academic lives?

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