

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Critical Collaboration

by Neil Meyer



JULIE MEHRETU, "ATLANTIC WALL". SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, NEW YORK COMMISSIONED BY DEUTSCHE BANK AG IN CONSULTATION WITH THE SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM FOUNDATION FOR THE DEUTSCHE GUGGENHEIM, BERLIN

The contributors featured in this issue of *Radical Teacher* range across geographical locations, identities, institutions. But despite (or perhaps rather, through) that heterogeneity, they often recur to certain pressing, central themes that matter to *Radical Teacher* and our readers: educational justice, community outreach, dismantling systems of oppression within and beyond educational institutions, among others. The essays in this issue investigate ways to disrupt the status quo and to create more egalitarian worlds.

In this issue, all of our contributors in some ways are crossing boundaries: geographical, disciplinary, institutional, and others. These crossings sometimes happen in course materials or in advocacy within institutions, or activism with the public at large. But these crossings are never solitary acts. Five of our seven essays have two or more authors, and all of them outline practices and strategies to do meaningful, progressive education in ways that can only be accomplished when we work together. This might be dismantling the power structures that separate student and professor within the university bureaucracy or changing the nature of those institutions itself; it might be union activism that brings pedagogy to the public. But this work never happens alone and can only be strengthened and supported when meaningful collaboration happens together.

"The Contexts, Paradoxes, and Rewards of Multidisciplinary Teaching" by France Winddance Twine, Lisa Parks, and Kim Yasuda opens this issue of *Radical Teacher* because in many ways it can serve as a throughline to the themes and ideas found in the other essays. In it, the authors reflect on a collaboratively taught graduate-level course, "Race, Immigration, and White Supremacy in California." The course "approached California, France, and South Korea as paradigmatic sites in considering how post-colonial legacies and white supremacy shaped migration, citizenship, belonging, and the racialization of national and state borders and imaginaries." The faculty involved ranged across disciplines and traditional boundaries of knowledge and knowledge making, boundaries that the authors sought to disrupt and subvert in their teaching. Rather than idealize this multidisciplinary, collaborative experience, the authors use it as an opportunity to theorize how knowledge is made in such spaces, how to extend that knowledge making outside of the traditional college classroom, and what institutional biases and structures prevent such work from happening.

The authors describe intellectual work among themselves and their students that defied traditional academic boundaries, and created work outside of the academic context that was able to speak to a larger audience. But the authors also recognize "institutional segregation that drives deep divisions between the arts, humanities, and social sciences can be found in other public learning communities" and "(t)hese disciplinary divisions informed and shaped the expectations of the students enrolled in the course who had been socialized by different disciplinary traditions." The authors ask us to take these challenges (and "paradoxes") into account as other educators seek to create learning communities that subvert the rigid expectations of the university structure.

In "Navigating Borders During the Pandemic: A Collaborative Multi-sited Approach," the courses described by Paloma E. Villegas and Francisco J. Villegas embody the authors' goals to teach the "materiality of borders" by crossing academic and national borders of their own. The siblings and scholars used the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic and the move to online teaching as an opportunity to connect their students at institutions in California and Michigan, respectively. Both are "border states," but each symbolically and politically represent different ways of engaging with U.S. ideas of national borders. The authors write, "while we highlight that borders are enactments of violence, we highlight that they are also human constructs and we center the hope of projects to imagine and materialize their erosion." Their collaborative work within and across their courses included creating interactive maps that engaged with the notion of migration and borders, analyzed media representations of migration, and cross-course interviews with students from the different schools. The essay offers deep texture regarding how these assignments took shape that will be valuable to other educators.

More than that, the authors give us insight into both what they and their students experienced and learned through this collaborative process, through the challenges of using technology in the classroom and the fractures and inequalities exacerbated by COVID-19 for both students and instructors. In the end, collaboration--despite its many challenges and frictions--can open the minds of students and instructors.

"Racism in Argentine Higher Education: Proposals for an Inclusive Foreign Language Teacher Training" by Candelaria Ferrara and Daniela Peez Klein states "The way we find racism in teacher training programs is twofold. First is omission, a certain blindness to difference, so that difference is never in focus. Second is the way in which everyone feels and behaves and assumes that the lack of plurality was natural. This lack of racial diversity in higher education still prevails and foreign language educational institutions are no exception." Although the authors write specifically about Argentina, the racist norms they outline (as seen in the above quotation) will resonate with U.S. and other readers.

Like our other contributors, Ferrara and Peez Klein state that one significant way out of this institutional racism in the language learning context is through collaboration. In the Twine et. al. essay, the authors created collaborative public art and scholarship. Here, the authors suggest language educators move past their own institutional boundaries, to be in "dialogue with the community, in making the walls of what used to be the ivory tower of educational institutions more permeable." They advocate for "solidarity service-learning," which may include public exchanges, activities, and publication that is situated within the communities being served by language educators.

To collaborate with students in a truly radical way requires investigating and disrupting some of the cherished norms of our systems of education. If Candelaria and Peez Klein describe dismantling the boundaries between language educators and the communities they work with, Bethany Ides in "On Complicity" offers a provocative dismantling of

one of the more sacrosanct tools of boundary-making in the academy: grading. Ides writes, "To be complicit within the ethos of a modern educational institution involves becoming accustomed to its terminology and the precepts according to which they derive their significance." This complicity asks us to treat as natural the systems that classrooms and institutions use to define and limit education. Ides cites the "methods of measurement" that we use in classrooms that have their origins in "accountancy, efficiency, risk-assessment, and quality control." Grading is one of the most obvious places that this discourse of assessment (with all of its norms and standards) affects educators and students the most.

Ides describes the theoretical reflections that led her to question the norms around grading and assessment, and the ways she incorporates that into her classroom discussion and practices. Her essay resists believing that she (or we) can find an outside to this system. She writes powerfully, "Every semester, I do not prevent grading from occurring. So far, I have only suggested to students some ways that it might be – temporarily, provisionally – circumvented." But in disrupting grading--with its norms, power dynamics, and biases--Ides also asks us to think about what kind of learning communities we form in the face of often-oppressive institutional norms and expectations.

If Ides provokes us to dismantle old power structures in our institutions, "Constructing College-Level Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Minors—Moving from Performative to Transformative DEI" offers us an example of how to use our college degree programs to transform learning institutions towards equity. This essay describes the process of developing two DEI minors (one national, one global in focus). The authors begin their essay with a sobering assessment of how DEI is often used on campuses to produce a "passive normalcy" where "performative DEI" represents a language of diversity, but little institutional support, investment, or change; "These actions make it appear as though there is a real commitment to DEI, when there is not." The two minors developed and described by the authors aim to produce "transformative DEI" that decenters white norms, makes meaningful space for marginalized student bodies, and builds change across whole institutions.

The change-making discussed in Chris Gilbert's "To Educate and Mobilize Voters: Digital Teacher Activism during the 2020 Elections" reflects the work educators in North Carolina did to effect political change at the state electoral level. Gilbert argues that "activism involves a broadening of teachers' pedagogical work beyond what is typically sanctioned by state institutions; In the context of this article, teacher activism consists of radical pedagogical practices, or forms of education and action occurring beyond the classroom to contest the neoliberal project and support public education." The intersection of pedagogy and political action is central to the values of *Radical Teacher* and Gilbert's essay offers examples of how, in the middle of a pandemic, educators found creative ways to reimagine

traditional forms of outreach and developed new tools for educating voters on the value of public education against attacks on it by Republican elected officials. The author specifically focuses on digital outreach around voter education and mobilization. Readers will be inspired, and hopefully, motivated, by examples of embattled public educators working on behalf of their profession and students' rights in the midst of a global pandemic.

Our issue ends with an essay written from a perspective not often seen in *Radical Teacher*. The authors of "Un/Commoning Pedagogies: Moving To/Gather in Difference" are members of the Un/Commoning Pedagogies Collective (UnCPC), which creates a "collaborative space in which radical anti-racist approaches to teaching and learning are explored, exchanged and elaborated through embodied modes." The body is a location of racist violence and oppression, and the authors describe the embodied work they do with students to undo that harm: "We insist that the body both holds an awareness of how racism works, and must be engaged in efforts toward more just, equitable, and joyous/joyful futures." Their classroom and studio practices work collectively, and so too does their writing. Portions of the essay are written in a collective voice, while other portions allow each contributor to look at a unique facet of their work.

Their essay also offers readers the opportunity to practice the reflective approaches of UnCPC's work. Their "grounding meditation" creates a space for readers and participants to center their bodies while asking the question, "What is pressing on you in regard to anti-racist practice and embodied teaching/learning?"

Their question offers a productive closing for this issue. Writing for *Radical Teacher* (and other similar spaces) takes time, dedication, revision, and reflection. It is a process both meditative and collective. Work often happens alone, in moments of quiet contemplation but is then shared with colleagues, friends, editors. Although such writing can sometimes feel isolating, it is ultimately a communal effort, and a chance for deep reflection to produce radical change in our classrooms and in the world. We thank both the authors featured in this issue for that labor and those of you reading, who have gathered with us to share in these transformative visions.

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