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Out(side) of the Box and onto a Dusty Trail, Richard Leo Enos

SPECIAL SECTION: Administration, Ethics, and Spirituality

Even Administrators Have Souls, Paul Puccio

The Communally Focused Writing Center, Tom Truesdell

Renovating My Academic Administration, Elizabeth Vander Lei

Telling the Truth as WPA, Beth Daniell
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The purposes of AEPL, therefore, are to provide a common ground for theorists, researchers, and practitioners to explore ideas; to participate in relevant programs and projects; to integrate these efforts with others in related disciplines; to keep abreast of activities along these lines of inquiry; and to promote scholarship on and publication of these activities.

The *Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning, JAEPL*, also provides a forum to encourage research, theory, and classroom practices involving expanded concepts of language. It contributes to a sense of community in which scholars and educators from pre-school through the university exchange points of view and cutting-edge approaches to teaching and learning. *JAEPL* is especially interested in helping those teachers who experiment with new strategies for learning to share their practices and confirm their validity through publication in professional journals.

Topics of interest include but are not limited to:

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Contents

vii Editors’ Message

Essays

Douglas Hesse 1 Writing and Time, Time and the Essay
Writing requires time, thought, and most of all, discovery—despite a high-tech world that can’t be bothered with it.

Liz Rohan 11 The Rainbow Connection: Theorizing the Efficacy of Private Texts
Texts written privately often find new contexts, new uses, if writers become mindful of Bakhtin’s notion of “great time.”

Christy I. Wenger 24 Writing Yogis: Breathing Our Way to Mindfulness and Balance in Embodied Writing Pedagogy
Breathing exercises constitute a method for helping students to attain a state of mindfulness in their writing—and their lives.

Lavinia Hirsu 40 Reflections on Accidental Testimonies and Spectacular Witnesses
When unplanned-for testimonies occur in class, how do instructors turn a disruptive moment into a teachable one?

Heather Trahan 56 Queers, Cupid’s Arrow, and Contradictions in the Classroom: An Activity Theory Analysis
“Third generation” activity theory can help instructors support and also deal with gay romance in the classroom.

Shelly Sanders & B. Cole Bennett 70 Gatekept: Inviting Creative Community Literacy
Creative writing becomes a vehicle for community outreach in a Writing Center setting, bringing together town and gown.

Out of the Box

Richard Leo Enos 78 Outside the Box and onto a Dusty Trail
Archeological exploration has redefined research since this scholar became the Indiana Jones of rhetorical studies.

SPECIAL SECTION: Administration, Ethics, and Spirituality

Paul Puccio 80 Even Administrators Have Souls
Faculty have a critical role to play if they want administrators to be more than unilateral decision-makers.

Tom Truesdell 84 The Communally Focused Writing Center
Can writing center administrators prepare student tutors to help transform faculty-student relations? Should they?
Elizabeth Vander Lei 99 Renovating My Academic Administration
A department chair dons a hard hat and begins to see her position through the lens of spiritual rebirth and figured worlds—as a portrait of Calvin looks on.

BethDaniell 110 Telling the Truth as WPA
After reflecting upon students, a writing program administrator looks hard at two other challenging situations and questions the truthfulness of her approaches to each.

Book Reviews

Judy Halden-Sullivan 117 Paradigm Shifts


Connecting

Helen Walker 131 Trust, and Gaps
Carl Vandermeulen 132 Proverbs for Poetry Class
Louise Morgan 132 TJ, Whom I Like Very Much
Jill Moyer Sunday 133 History Lesson 101
Tony Mayo 135 Shawn

CONTRIBUTORS’ BIOS
EDITORS’ MESSAGE

“Mindfulness” served as our key term for the 2012 AEPL Conference in Estes Park, CO. This irony does not escape us in an election year when so much of the political discourse we’ve heard was influenced by anything but. Fortunately, we have Laurence Musgrove’s whimsical cartooning to keep us mindful of what we lose in shoot-'em-up, shut-'em-out debates where neither opponent actually listens, relying instead on an impoverished script. We wonder how this year would have proceeded, had our congress critters taken time out, as many of us did, to consider ways that mindfulness might change our professional and personal lives for the better.

AEPL keynote speaker, Doug Hesse, has explored how writing requires us to be alert to the fortuitous insights that time and timeliness—kairos—can give us. Hesse tells us that no technology can vie with the mindfulness of which we’re capable as writers, as teachers, as human beings. Be prepared for musical interludes and a hopefully mellow note from his trombone.

Liz Rohan continues the theme, theorizing how the impromptu, private texts we and our students scribble on the fly can gain real value, even if they never retain the “immediately communicative” qualities we try to give them. As a diarist, she explains that such writing, seen mindfully through Bakhtin’s concept of “great time,” adds up to “personal literacy inventories” which teach us who we were and who we’ve become, interwoven with the written worlds of others.

Moving from theory to technique, Christy Wenger shares with us the ways she brings students to mindfulness in her composition classroom—conjoining breath with invention, leading young writers to transformative effects. Certainly, the same rings true if we heed Lavinia Hirsu’s call to develop a pedagogy that responds to student testimonies we don’t always know how to witness, unexpected testimonies that force us to hear other’s perspectives mindfully. Heather Trahan’s essay goes on to teach us how the classroom application of activity theory can help us cope with the surprises that occur when we do remain mindful of students’ different perspectives, but our good intentions don’t put us on the path we want to take.

Are you interested, on the other hand, in seeing what could happen if our colleges and universities opened the doors to the community, inviting them in to reinvent themselves in writing? Shelly Sanders and B. Cole Bennett did that very thing and discovered wonderful new uses for writing center space that promise to reinvent their university’s creative writing program as well. Mindfulness about space and place helps us remember that everything we have is borrowed and ought to be shared in as many good ways as we can imagine.

Mindfulness can also prompt us to reinvent where we do research—and how we do
it. Richard Enos gives us an all-too-brief glimpse of what happened when he discovered that rhetorical scholarship combines quite agreeably with archaeology. His Out of the Box column will make you hanker after your own artifacts.

In this issue, too, we wanted to experiment with asking contributors to focus mindfully upon the ethics and spirituality they bring to leadership. Many of us have answered the call to serve in administrative positions, taking heart in what AEPL founder, James Moffett, said: “The spiritual approach to problems is to examine oneself along with the situation” (222). The four who contribute to this theme know they need self-examination to “enter another’s point of view” and find empathy—above all for those who choose to criticize, dispute, or even bully rather than work toward a common good (222). As Moffett would put it, stories such as the ones you will read can help us see more readily what administration really should be “because storying serves to induce understanding, to raise consciousness” (183).

For instance, Paul Puccio provides a surprising slant with his belief that we will have a direct impact upon shaping the kinds of leaders we want—and deserve—if we approach hierarchy with the intent to collaborate mindfully. While Puccio’s essay aptly frames our special section, Tom Truesdell follows him up with his claim that student tutors, in their own way, can become change agents, if their directors help them see their potential as advocates for and negotiators of new relationships with faculty. Truesdell stands what it means to administrate on its head by questioning the assumptions we make about student-centered learning vis-à-vis communal learning.

Perhaps the most moving and powerful essays in this issue come from Elizabeth Vander Lei’s and Beth Daniell’s respective views on how administrators must sustain mindfulness in the midst of intensely challenging responsibilities. Vander Lei draws deep from her upbringing in a Dutch Reformed community, crafting an administrative philosophy that remains under constant renovation even while it stands firmly on the two pillars of “peaceableness” and love. Daniell takes instruction from her ongoing commitment to truth-telling in the relationships she develops with students and faculty—a commitment that never allows her to appease or flatter but demands that she always conduct herself in “ways that are clear and kind.”

We hope, as always, that you will then turn to our book review section, where Judith Halden-Sullivan has collected savvy critiques on four new, useful texts that will refresh your mid-year perspectives on teaching and learning. And as you also turn to the classroom stories and poetry that Helen Walker has gathered from our colleagues, we hope they will inspire you to submit a tale or reflection that comes from your own mindful response to the work that we all do together.

Enjoy this issue, and by all means, lend it to a friend or two. Be mindful that AEPL members such as you are the best means we have of growing our assembly!

Work Cited