

Transformational Learning (and Teaching) in Popular Culture and Pedagogy

When I begin writing editorials, I immerse myself in the articles, going into a mode of research. The articles become data and I start analyzing the data, looking for similarities across the texts. For this special issue, beyond the broad strokes of teaching and learning with the Grateful Dead, I was curious to see what other themes might reveal themselves.

As I read, I found myself immersed in the Grateful Dead, from seeing an overview of the work (Brian Felix) to thinking about the depth of which teaching can lead to pivotal changes (Rebecca Adams) and epiphanies (Ryan Slessinger). I was transfixed by following along with going “on tour” with Adam’s class and the spontaneous pedagogy of Slessinger’s class, then thinking about how it all *plays* in teaching non-traditional students, such as with senior citizens in Robert Trudeau’s work. These articles, along with others about looking back on teaching (Rob Weiner) through pedagogical practice (Natalie Dollar), connecting the Grateful Dead to Nietzsche (Stanley Spector) by looking at the years of the Grateful Dead caucus at SWPACA (Nicholas Meriweather), and a book review (Christopher Coffman), bring the issue together. Across the articles, the authors ask rhetorical questions to engage and help us to consider what is home, how it can evolve over time and place, and how often rigid definitions of us/them, teacher/student can vary and be reinvented.

Through improvising and considering the term “play,” I am reminded of taking capoeira classes - a Brazilian martial art which developed from Africans enslaved in Brazil. The sparring in capoeira is practiced in a circle, and people are invited to come and *play*. The play takes place while music is played live, drums and song. It is an improvised dance, a performance.

I came to read these articles as part of the special double issue of *Dialogue* (9.1-9.2) and felt myself being pulled into the experience of the Grateful Dead and what they could mean for pedagogy, whether as someone considering themselves Deadheads or someone intrigued by teaching and learning. While I have spent almost twenty years teaching along the educational trajectory, I still get intrigued to discover a new way to engage with students and to foster learning. In this issue, it has been a joy to read about novel interactions with students that echo the importance of building trusting relationships and developing encouraging and supportive spaces for empowered learning (see CohenMiller et al., 2021; Freire, 2000).

In *Teaching and Learning with the Dead*, I have learned something new in reading these texts. Improvisation and playing with “conventional” pedagogical directions is one such epiphany. Echoed across these texts is an interplay between teacher and student, and how those roles, so often scripted as one thing or another, could be part of the flexibility and beautiful development of a class. It will interest readers to notice how throughout these works, many authors point to an academic world where freedom was provided (and encouraged) for designing and implementing courses playing with the system of conventional teaching and learning, to great results. When instructors had the agency to develop themselves and their work, their students also began to shine and grow in profound ways.

Such growth and epiphanies relate well to concepts of transformational learning. In adult education, transformational learning was notably articulated by Jack Mezirow (2000) as often resulting from a dramatic

learning experience for students leading to a change in worldview. Later transformational learning was extended by Patricia Cranton (1996) to include teachers. The articles in this issue point to a depth of learning and also teaching, new awareness, and potential transformational learning for both students and instructors. While transformative learning often happens outside formal learning environments (Taylor & Snyder, 2012), the articles show that there are ways to embed and create an environment where students thrive and are supported to grow and learn in ways unprescribed.

It is my pleasure to share our latest double issue, 9.1-9.2 of *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, a special double issue guest edited by Timothy Ray and Juliet DeLong. We would like to also thank the rest of our robust team to make *Dialogue* issues a fruitful endeavor including our authors, peer reviewers, Karina Vado as Managing Editor and Book Review Editor; Miriam Sciala as Managing Editor and Copy Editor; Douglas CohenMiller as Production Editor and Creative Director; Robert Gordyn and Arlyce Menzies as Copy Editors; Joseph Yapp, April Manabat, and Yelizaveta Kamiloa as Reference Editors. In *Teaching and Learning with the Dead*, readers will be immersed in the history and future ways in which the Grateful Dead can be incorporated into pedagogy and the ways these ideas can be applied in other contexts. We hope that you enjoy the flow of understanding and insights gathered in these texts and look forward to hearing from you.

Anna S. CohenMiller

Editor in Chief

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RECOMMENDED REFERENCE

APA

CohenMiller, A. S. (2022). Transformational learning (and teaching) in popular culture and pedagogy. *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, 9(1 & 2). <http://journaldialogue.org/issues/v9-issue-1-and-2/transformational-learning-and-teaching-in-popular-culture-and-pedagogy/>

MLA

CohenMiller, Anna S. Transformational learning (and teaching) in popular culture and pedagogy. *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, vol. 9, no. 1 & 2. 2022. <http://journaldialogue.org/issues/v9-issue-1-and-2/transformational-learning-and-teaching-in-popular-culture-and-pedagogy/>



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