# Interdisciplinarity as Self and Subject:
# Metaphor and Transformation

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*Abstract*: This paper is based on our experience of team teaching an interdisciplinary course on multicultural families. We propose a theoretical model to demonstrate collaborative teaching that trasverses multiple disciplines. The model, presented as a heuristic metaphor and using geological imagery to capture the dynamic nature of interdisciplinary experience, emphasizes the liberatory and transformative interaction between self and subject. Components of the model are exposing the fault lines, mining the motherlode, sorting epistemological treasures, and forging new gifts. We demonstrate each stage of the model and show how students and teachers made new discoveries about interdisciplinarity at each stage.

> Interdisciplinary work . . . is not about confronting already constituted disciplines (none of which, in fact, is willing to let go). To do something interdisciplinary, it is not enough to use a "subject" (a theme) and gather around it two or three sciences. Interdisciplinarity consists of creating a "new" object that belongs to no one.
> ———Roland Barthes (qtd. in Clifford & Marcus 1990, p. 1)

One does not make or remake anything alone; one cannot ignore the relations one has. To know one's self and one's situation is to know one's company (or lack of it) is to know oneself with or against others.

———Toinette M. Eugene (1992, p. 91)

## Interdisciplinarity as Self and Subject

AS INTERDISCIPLINARY SCHOLARS AND PRACTIONERS, we perceive Barthes' and Eugene's insights to be reflective of two inseparable features of interdisciplinarity: the "work" of interdisciplinarity (Barthes) and the collaborative process that doing the work entails (Eugene). There is a dynamic interaction between the subject studied and the selves who engage the subject. The self changes in the process of "doing the work," and "the work" changes in the company of, "with or against others." This dynamic between self and subject culminates in the collaborative creation of a "new object that belongs to no one," yet better informs each self and subject involved in the teaching and learning process.

In this paper, we describe our understanding of interdisciplinarity as a learning process wherein the interaction between subject and selves transforms (a) the fields of inquiry and the methods of analysis through which the subject is studied; (b) the nature of intellectual exchange in the interdisciplinary process; and (c) the ontological significance of the subject for teacher and student alike. This framework for understanding interdisciplinarity is not an abstract model but rather a theoretical extrapolation of our collaborative experience as team teachers of a course entitled Interdisciplinary Study of Families: Facing the Challenges of the New Millennium. We present this understanding through heuristic metaphors, using geological imagery to capture the dynamic nature of interdisciplinary experience.

We adopted "family" as an introductory topic to interdisciplinarity because the notion of family is immediately accessible to the learner. As a connective core and the site for our interdisciplinary investigation, the study of families provides a profound context for examining the unique relationship between experiential and academic ways of knowing. With families as the subject of inquiry, we enacted a living laboratory by experimenting with our particular reconfiguration of diverse academic perspectives; pedagogical practices; and personal, cultural, and political orientations. Our purpose was to actualize a vision of interdisciplinarity as a collaborative process in order to discover the gifts of working beyond the capacities of our individual disciplines, epistemologies, and ontologies. We consciously integrated these ele-

ments: (a) the subject matter of multicultural families within societies and cultures, and (b) the practice of liberatory pedagogy wherein the content and context of learning become socially relevant to the lives of teachers and students alike.

## Creating an Interdisciplinary Teaching-Learning Context

We are three scholars, one womanist and two feminists, whose appointments and home disciplines are in the areas of Religious Studies and Black Studies, Foreign Languages and Literatures (Spanish), and Family Studies, respectively. We were also core faculty in Women's Studies, a program in the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies at Virginia Tech University. Our academic orientations are inextricably linked to our social positions as members of Black, Hispanic, and lesbian families, respectively: Stacey identifies herself as a Black, Christian, married woman, as yet without children; Laura identifies herself as a White, divorced, mother of two Hispanic sons; and Katherine identifies herself as a White, lesbian, mother of two sons. After years of interdisciplinary teaching as solo teachers in our home disciplines, we wanted to experience what we believed could be the full promise of interdisciplinarity: (a) the flexibility to delve into a topic in ways that allowed us to examine self and subject holistically; and (b) the realization of a community of knowers and learners who would freely be able to traverse boundaries across disciplines. We designed, taught, and evaluated the course, deliberately placing families that are on the margins of society at the center of analysis.

Our reasons for seeking such an interdisciplinary teaching-learning context were varied but complementary. The constraint Laura faces in seeking to do liberatory teaching is that such a goal runs counter to the stated objective of Foreign Languages and Literatures (FLL), which is to acquire technical knowledge of a language and culture. This knowledge is compartmentalized according to geographical area and chronological units. As a medieval/early modern specialist and a peninsularist, Laura is expected to teach only within these descriptors, and students' understanding of the discipline is shaped and informed by these boundaries. Although Laura finds that there are many resources available to teach about multicultural families, the tradition in her discipline divides the subject matter into monolithic units. Whereas her department would welcome a topical course on "the Hispanic family," such a topic could not involve the transformational interaction between self and subject that we envisioned. As Laura explains:

If I ever try to teach from a liberatory perspective in an FLL class, it

is like the students feel that I'm cheating them or being unfair for even having that expectation. The students rebel and say, "I'm trying to learn the language, and I don't even like the literature, so don't add this other thing onto it." I try to explain to students what a liberal arts education is, but they do not understand or embrace it. For my discipline and my students, literary method (i.e., looking at generative themes and patterns) is viewed as the primary vehicle for acquiring linguistic and cultural competencies. My students are resistant to my efforts to make literary texts relevant to the lived experiences of Hispanic people. They only find value in the technical aspects of language acquisition. Yet, at the same time, I know that there is a potential to do liberatory teaching in my discipline, departing from a body of literary works authored by Hispanic women, for instance, that could accomplish the kind of critique I want to expose my students to. I needed a venue for teaching this kind of literature that would make explicit and validate the technical aspects of language acquisition by embracing the context from which languages emerge because I want my students to know that language is not something to be extracted from another's culture and appropriated for one's own benefit, but rather to acknowledge another's humanity and culture, and to make the experience of others relevant to one's own life. However, because of the orientation of the students who take my classes, and, unfortunately, the banking system of higher education (see Freire Ch. 2, 1997), I cannot typically use Hispanic women's writings in my teaching.

Stacey experiences similar disciplinary constraints as a womanist and a Black Studies scholar. Both centrist views would mandate that the Black family cannot be taught in the company of any other family structure without compromising its integrity. The primary focus of Black Studies is to bring the Black community from the margins to the center of inquiry, given the invisibility of this community in academic inquiries historically (Asante 1988). Courses on Black families are essential to a Black Studies curriculum because the family has served as one of the most important institutions for African American people's identity formation (McAdoo 1997). Because Black Studies was created in order to correct distortions about Black people and their experiences, a centered approach to the Black family is needed. Yet such an approach threatens the very goal it pursues, that is, to show that Black families are an integral part of American society. As Stacey explains:

My dilemma in Black Studies is to negotiate the trade-offs between teaching about Black families as a topic worthy of study in its own right, and realizing the importance of situating Black family stories in the company of others whose realities have also been marginalized (e.g., Hispanics, lesbians). In light of the tensions resulting from this difficult negotiation, it becomes necessary for me to call on my interdisciplinary training. As a religious ethicist, I extract the ultimate concerns that Black people have named as sacred in their lives (faith, family, and freedom) and present those moral values as the lens through which we can better apprehend Black peoples' realities and lived experiences. I employ this ethical perspective instead of implementing a traditional Black Studies approach, one that immediately immerses students in a Black socio-political context (i.e., chattel slavery, civil rights movement, affirmative action, racial profiling). This is due to the fact that race, especially in regard to Black people, is a frightening and distressing topic that most students, especially White students, avoid or resist. As a result they miss doing the reflective work needed for the subject to change them.

While the ethical framework enhances the socio-political centrist perspective of Black Studies, the Black Studies perspective enhances the ethical exercise. For how can one understand freedom, family, or faith without understanding the specific practices that particularize these people's understanding of them? Black Studies provides a centered and contextual understanding of the universal values that ethics scrutinizes. But, the goals of these disciplinary perspectives cannot be fully realized, appreciated, and sustained if there is not a comparative context in which to study them. To know freedom, family, and faith is to know the diverse perspectives and realities that are held as sacred. It is for this reason that I entered into this interdisciplinary endeavor, not to detract from the disciplines of ethics and Black Studies but to more fully know Black families and to compare their sacred mores with those of other marginalized peoples. Teaching a class on multicultural families in a team-teaching context provided me the opportunity to lend my own disciplinary expertise and, by working together, discover a fuller account of social reality for us and for the students.

Katherine approached the team-teaching experience with a history of having taught a course on family diversity for many years; she co-edited

one of the major textbooks used in such a course (Demo, Allen, & Fine 2000). As a family studies scholar, she knew the limitations of teaching about family diversity from only one disciplinary perspective. This perspective is entrenched in a view of "The Family" as normative, e.g., "the modern nuclear family" (Glenn 1997, Skolnick 1997) and contains an underlying ideology of a universal prototype of family: adult partners who are primarily White, middle-class professionals, heterosexually married, having two or three children (Smith 1993). Any change from this theoretical norm is considered deviant to some extent, either completely excluded from study or merely added on as an afterthought (Allen & Demo 1995, Demos 1990). In research, such a family configuration becomes the benchmark around which other forms of family are compared, creating a false standard with little basis in empirical reality, so Katherine's disciplinary constraint is the essentializing of "family" as a monolithic entity. The reality is that a singular type could never characterize the historical diversity demonstrated over time (Coontz 1992, Mintz & Kellogg 1988). Families who differ from this norm, in terms of social stratification by race, class, sexual orientation, and structure (e.g., Black families, lesbian and gay families, single parent families), are conceptualized and researched as variations, at best, or deviations, at worst (Allen 1978). Such conceptualizations are historically and empirically inaccurate because they are inherently alienating to the people who live in such families (Allen 2000).

Critics of the "standard" view of families observe that because diverse families are typically flattened or otherwise presented in some monolithic way, family scholars must turn to original sources, such as literary texts and personal narratives, to teach a more realistic view of multicultural families (Dilworth-Anderson, Burton, & Johnson 1993). Katherine reflects her own need to turn to alternative sources and contexts in order to garner a fuller perspective of families:

> I wanted to challenge my own learning curve as a family scholar by working with other scholars with the theoretical, methodological, and ontological expertise in racially and culturally diverse family experiences. I could not do justice to my academic goal of teaching about multiple family diversities with the partial perspective I bring to the classroom, no matter how much retooling I seek on my own. I would have the opportunity to work with other scholars who employ the kinds of methods (e.g., literary criticism, metaethics) and theories (e.g., Afrocentrism, Womanism, and Mujerista theology)

that I had only read about. Such an opportunity would bring me closer to multiple-centered perspectives on people whose life experiences differ from my own. Although I use a reflexive teaching method of self-disclosure and require autobiographical reflection by my students, these life experiences are filtered only through my own situated perspective. I was curious about how my reflexive approach could be transformed by decentering my authority as the solo teacher in a class.

What prompts us to engage in interdisciplinarity is frustration with our disciplines' resistance to totally engage their subjects, on the one hand, and the unfulfilled promise of their ability to inform a partial aspect of the subject, on the other. The premise of disciplinary study is that one learns about the discipline as a whole through a discrete microcosm, so that a single unit is valid for studying the whole. Connected to this disciplinary understanding is the negative assumption that interdisciplinarians are generalists who know a little bit about a lot, or a lot about nothing (Kockelmans 1998). We contend, however, that disciplinarians who do interdisciplinary scholarship and teaching are augmenting the promise of their own discipline's knowledge about a subject by refusing those classical disciplines' strict definitions, parameters, and methods for studying a subject. Interdisciplinarity does not depart from one's investment in one's discipline. To the contrary, interdisciplinarity is an act of appropriation and reciprocity that takes the strengths of a discipline, recontextualizes them, and gives them back to better inform the knowledge base. Interdisciplinarians make incursions into other disciplines because it is impossible to fully resolve certain questions and problems within the constraints and boundaries of one discipline (Klein 1990, Newell 1998).

While we came to the classroom voluntarily and eager to embrace a more nontraditional perspective on a topic, our students came for the most part to fulfill the one requirement of their interdisciplinary studies major: an upper-level, variable topics course in interdisciplinarity. Our class consisted of 24 students (sophomores, juniors, and seniors), 21 interdisciplinary studies majors and 3 family studies majors. Of these, 15 were women and 9 were men. Three students identified as either Black or Hispanic, and the remaining students identified as White. We came to know our students through weekly interactions and soliciting their feedback throughout the course.

This course provided the students with their first introduction to the concept of interdisciplinarity and integrative studies. A few students assumed

that interdisciplinarity is what Barthes challenges: a subject that gathered around it "two or three sciences." None of the students possessed a language to approach the conceptualization of interdisciplinarity. What served as their motivation in selecting this particular course, as opposed to three other interdisciplinary courses offered the same semester, was clear when we asked on the first day of class, "Why did you take this course?" Students stated that they chose this course because "everybody knows something about families." In their statements, the students confirmed our sense that family would be an ideal introduction to interdisciplinarity. Thus students and teachers alike began the course intrigued by, and invested in, the topic of family.

## An Interdisciplinary Model of Transformative Learning

We all came to the classroom invested in the transformative learning possibilities that this topic and this context would provide. We intuited that we were embarking on a journey where both teacher and student could facilitate disciplinary and experiential knowledge in a communal setting (see Du Bois 1983, Fonow & Cook 1991, Fowler 1981, Gilligan 1982, Newell & Green 1998, Simon 1992). Along this journey we carved out four sites that mark shifts in this process. We now theorize each site in what we call an interdisciplinary model of transformative learning as we show how our journey led us towards a method that induced students and teachers to make new discoveries about themselves and the subject of families.

### Exposing the Fault Lines

The first stage in this interdisciplinary model exposes the fault lines in normative thinking. A fault line occurs when cognitive dissonance is caused by a conflict between one's knowledge of a subject and one's social position in relation to that subject. Upon entering an interdisciplinary context, there is a convergence of the academic and the experiential that produces an unsettling in traditional ways of knowing. This discontinuity is caused by the ways in which interdisciplinarity shifts and dislodges previously learned ways of knowing. The traditional way that knowledge is formed smoothes over these differential processes so as to make what is normative appear natural. Interdisciplinarity exposes the fault lines in knowledge construction, causing the very foundation upon which knowledge is based to collapse. The teacher enters the traditional classroom to display knowledge and the student to consume it. Within our interdisciplinary collaborative context, however, knowledge was shown to be partial and was constantly exposed to the students as an object that cannot be wholly displayed or consumed. Knowledge could no

longer be embraced as an absolute object, but rather experienced as an elu-
sive process. This new unfolding process threatens one's trust in acquiring
knowledge and impacts one's relation to the subject matter, to self, and to
others within the learning context.

This exposure of the partiality of knowledge occurs long before the
first day of class when we anticipated some of the fault lines resulting from
interdisciplinary collaborative teaching. For the disciplinary scholar teach-
ing alone, confidence, security, and well-being lie in the illusion of mastery
of the subject matter and in the knowledge of one's discipline. In a team-
taught, interdisciplinary context, both epistemological and ontological secu-
rity (Giddens 1991) are challenged at their core. Because no one can claim
full possession of the subject matter, there is no sure footing for a disciplin-
ary scholar in an interdisciplinary context.

To accommodate the potential fault lines arising from giving up at
least the semblance of absolute control over the subject matter and the class-
room, we spent time in the months before class began in critical dialogue
with one another, discussing our disciplinary training, methodological ap-
proaches, and cultural and political orientations. For example, Stacey and
Laura assumed that because Katherine's primary discipline was family stud-
ies, she would have some privileged, expert knowledge about families that
they lacked. Laura, as a literary and cultural studies expert, was expected to
have authority over that domain. In turn, Stacey would be the authority on
the ethical theorizing of race and religion. Looking at our topic from disci-
plinary orientations, we rationalized that Stacey would be the authority on
Black families, Laura would be the authority on Hispanic culture, and
Katherine would be the authority on lesbian and gay families. Such partition-
ing of knowledge served only to build walls around and thus safeguard our
respective disciplinary orientations and areas of expertise. Rather than em-
bracing the possible positive outcomes of our collaboration through the bridg-
ing of our fields of study, we began by voicing our suspicions about how the
others of us would infringe upon or compromise our subject or ourselves.
Thus, we entrenched ourselves into the fault lines that divided us.

Such a process replicated itself exponentially. As we taught the class,
we became sensitized to the ways in which we perceived our separateness
based on a series of hierarchies: tenured or non-tenured, senior or junior,
Black or White, partnered or single, and heterosexual or lesbian. However,
we also became aware that the dichotomous relationships we seemed to em-
body both in our subjects and ourselves were leveling as a result of adhering
to our collaborative process. To help the process, we began to deliberately

deconstruct any privileges that were ascribed to us, and we agreed to treat one another consciously as peers. We promised not to privilege one over the other because she was a full professor, or from a more prestigious discipline, or from a more "socially acceptable" social location. We deconstructed the boundaries of social address with practices such as taking turns in preparing lectures and class activities, explicitly verbalizing our contractual agreements with one another, and agreeing to co-authorship of any publications that might emerge from the collaboration.

When the class began, students, too, acted out their suspicions. They described feeling out of control and on unsteady ground in this interdisciplinary context. The trust they had invested in the typical learning process was problematized by our presentation of knowledge as partial and contested. Students balked at our interdisciplinary, team-teaching approach and the social positions we embodied because of the challenge to the familiar. We noticed other ruptures were occurring: All the students feared deconstructing belief systems about families they had been taught to hold as sacred. Family studies majors distrusted the ability of the interdisciplinary students to treat their subject matter with respect. Black students distrusted the racial tolerance of White students engaging the subject of Black families. White students distrusted Stacey's academic authority as a Black teacher, Laura's personal authority to teach about Hispanic families as a White woman, and Katherine's moral ability to teach about families as a lesbian. They all questioned the multicultural treatment that the three teachers gave to an analysis of families. In these ways, fault lines were exposed for teachers and students alike.

An illustration of how the fault lines were exposed for students occurred as a result of an exercise we developed for the first day of class. We wanted students to test their own truth claims by applying a critical analysis to their assumptions about families against the backdrop of their own and others' experiential realities. We asked them to define "families," and they recited the benchmark representation of the heteropatriarchal family (man/husband and woman/wife with 2.5 children produced from this union). Yet, few of their experiential realities meshed with this prototype, introducing them to their first in a series of many experiences of cognitive dissonance (i.e., fault lines) that the class would entail. They discovered that their reality did not fit into the norm, thus setting them on the course of shattering their confidence in the presuppositions of "The Family." Students began to embrace a hermeneutics of suspicion by combining a critical consciousness with personal reflections (Freire 1997, Levine 1996). This exercise provided stu-

dents an opportunity to validate what they already understood to be true at an intuitive and experiential level. We did not ask students to consume an object that we, the teachers, handed to them; instead, we asked them to be active agents, bringing the entirety of who they are and what they know to the pursuit of learning. By exposing the fault lines, students could relinquish the notion that knowledge is seamless and experience a new sense of trust in their own ability to discern contradictions. Our interdisciplinary pedagogy turned the process of acquiring knowledge back onto the students—asking them to trust themselves, each other, their teachers, and multiple perspectives on the subject matter.

From our perspective, in order to advance exposing the fault lines from cognitive dissonance to critical, deconstructive analysis, we engaged our disciplines in an interdisciplinary process. Rather than allowing the methods of our respective disciplines to inform the subject matter, we allowed the problem of the subject to inform the methods that we used. For example, Stacey brought to bear her disciplinary perspective in religious ethics, which is to investigate the correlation between people's actions and beliefs and their ultimate concerns so that we might deconstruct myths about American families. She constructed a "power analysis" assignment to provide students with the opportunity to experience cognitive dissonance by comparing the benchmark family to their own. In doing so, she relied on an essential question asked by religious ethicists—why do people do what they do? As a Black Studies scholar, she also brought a perspective centered on Black families. Just as in the first activity on deconstructing the benchmark family, in this activity, students were able to demystify the American utopian ideals of equality and equity regardless of their cultural or political location. In the power analysis activity, Stacey wrote on the board the main demarcations of social stratification: gender, race, class, and sexual orientation. She then asked students which groups had power and which lacked power: Without hesitation and within moments, students were able to identify that men were in power and women were not, and to name that difference as sexism; that Whites had more power than people of color and that was called racism, and so on. Experiencing the fault lines in what they were taught to believe about how power is delineated in our society also allowed them to understand why we were studying families from a multicultural perspective.

Katherine used her disciplinary orientation, in another example, to continue to deconstruct commonly held myths about family. She constructed a "family policy quiz," asking students to identify whether ten seemingly self-evident statements were true or false (e.g., "Women are included in the

U.S. Constitution"; "Same-sex couples are not allowed to marry in any state in the U.S."; "The percentage of U.S. children living in poverty is now higher than it was 30 years ago"; and "The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1994 requires large-scale employers to provide paid parental and family caregiving leave for employees"). After completing three readings on U.S. family policies, students took the quiz and indicated their response to each statement as true, false, or unsure. After students worked alone and struggled with their own answers, Katherine conducted a discussion of each statement, engaging students in the dissection of what they presumed was true in comparison to the facts and inconsistencies rendered by the social science research that informs U.S. family policy. For example, all of the students believed that marriage for same-sex partners was allowed in the state of Hawaii. In reality, marriage is banned in all 50 states, and only a "civil union" with marriage-like benefits is allowed in one state, Vermont (see Sweet Corn/buddybuddy 2002, Herek 1998). Also, students assumed that the Family and Medical Leave Act, which was passed after years of struggle, ensures paid leave, when, in fact, it only provides for unpaid leave and does that only under certain employment conditions (Martin 1997). Clearly the students made assumptions that reflected their heterosexist frame of reference.

As Stacey illustrated in the power analysis, students' assumptions about heterosexual normativity were stumbling blocks to their ability to cultivate knowledge that would allow them to analyze critically themselves and their society. Had they been educated outside a framework of normative thinking, they would not have experienced cognitive dissonance when exposed to public policy with regard to gay and lesbian families in America or to limitations in the otherwise progressive Family and Medical Leave Act. While students might not be expected to have all of the facts about public policy, what we also found missing was the critical apparatus that would make visible the context in which such policy would be produced as normative and acceptable. Through the quiz exercise and the social-scientific method of inquiry the exercise drew upon, students were required to acknowledge and wrestle with facts that demystified their own and society's heterosexist assumptions about families. Such exercises bring students into the promise of interdisciplinarity by asking them to cultivate a deconstructive learning style rather than a normalizing mode of learning that validates the status quo or masks the contradictions (i.e., fault lines) that our social structures rest upon. Through these exercises, students began to try on the critical lenses that allowed them to search for other fissures in the world around them.

## Mining the Motherlode

Mining the motherlode, the second stage in this model, involves the inter-disciplinary process of extracting the resources found in the fault lines of the social structures under investigation. Just as the geologist moves from dis-covering the fault lines to extracting material from them in order to under-stand foundational movement, so too, must the interdisciplinarian find out what is at the root of the disjuncture between what is and what is said to be within his or her own life and society. This stage involves a two-fold pro-cess. On the one hand, it is a theoretical process. The interdisciplinarian extracts tools from disciplines in order to better understand an interdiscipli-nary subject. On the other hand it is a process more practical in nature that focuses on the self as it informs the subject. Keeping in mind that our defini-tion of interdisciplinarity involves both self and subject, we understand min-ing the motherlode as an act of using disciplinary methods as tools to better understand the fissures in society and ourselves. This dynamic process of mining the motherlode consists of teachers and students alike shifting back and forth between disciplinary perspectives and social locations. As profes-sors, we provided our students multiple methodological tools—literary, metaethical, and sociological—to guide us in the excavation. By applying academic analysis to social phenomena, students and teachers collectively investigated the assumptions that lie at the foundations of society.

The interdisciplinary act of mining the motherlode is undertaken in order to gain "conscientization" (Freire 1997, p. 17). Conscientization refers to the development of a critical consciousness that allows the individual to recognize the distinction between nature in its inevitability and culture in its changeability; to make visible the myths that oppressors have used to domi-nate society; and to explore alternatives for liberation. Implicit in this pro-cess is a teleological view of human nature that prioritizes liberation over and against the normative restrictions posed by society. Such a perspective emphasizes the role of consciousness in handling "limit-situations" as ob-stacles that must be overcome in order for one to achieve full humanity (Ress 1996, p. 55). This process of conscientization is a natural partner to cognitive dissonance, as discussed in the section on exposing the fault lines. Together, these two stages propel interdisciplinarians into recognizing the disjuncture between normative thinking and reality and also into resolving the perplexing dissonance caused by the disjuncture. The interdisciplinarian no longer sees himself or herself as a victim of social illusion, but rather as a potential agent of social change.

From a traditional learning perspective, mining the motherlode is

initially perceived as an aggressive act of raiding that which is held as sacred: assumptions of truth, the tenets of academic perspectives and disciplines, and the worldview that emerges from one's social location. Our intention, however, was to teach each other how to use the frameworks of our own disciplines and social locations in order to produce a living laboratory that would allow us to scrutinize self and subject as they have been institutionalized. Mining the motherlode, then, is the process of delving into that which seems impenetrable and sacred in our lives.

After seeing the urgency of unmasking the contradictions in normalizing ways of thinking, we were willing to enter into a risk situation. This called for allowing one another the opportunity to trespass into our respective territories whether they are disciplinary or experiential. No one teacher could claim sole authority over the subject. No person could claim sole authority over any cultural position or social location. This allowed us to engage in, and use, acts of encroachment (Klein 1990) to enhance for, and with, each other what each one of us had not been able to accomplish separately, or had been able to achieve only in a limited fashion. We became interdisciplinary interventionists, relying upon each other as guides and discovering in the process how similar many of our standpoints were.

To illustrate how we taught students to "mine the motherlode," we offer the example of one activity, the Social Strata Inventory (see Allen, Floyd-Thomas, & Gillman 2001, p. 324-325) that epitomized the objectives outlined above. An assignment given early in the class, this paper required students to critically reflect on a series of questions linked to racial, ethnic, and gendered patterns in their family histories. We gave students the opportunity to first mine their own motherlode before coming together collectively as a class to mine the motherlode of multicultural families. Stacey recommended this assignment, designed by her mentor Dr. Katie Cannon, as a tool to get students to reflect on race, class, and gender issues within the contexts of their family upbringing.

The majority of the students took offense at the seemingly invasive questions that were asked on the inventory regarding the way gender, race/ethnicity, religion, work, and language impacted their family structure as well as their identity and expectations as a family member. They resented our right to "grade" them on something so personal as their values and beliefs. As teachers, we were unprepared for the students' reactions because the bulk of our previous experience in using the Social Strata Inventory and similar exercises was extremely positive. Only a few students said the experience of writing the inventory had the desired effect of helping them rethink who they

were, their families, and their views on race and ethnicity. More of the students were baffled and annoyed by the assignment, expressing aloud that the questions in the inventory made them feel they were forced to admit to racist stereotypes or simply make up opinions to please the teachers. Their inability to address in any detail the questions regarding their family's attitudes and assumptions about race intergenerationally, and the effects of those attitudes on family structure and on their own upbringing, forced them into the uncomfortable situation of acknowledging ignorance about their identity as socially constructed beings. It became painfully evident that what knowledge they could claim about their families served as a microcosm for the very societal ills that we had critiqued in the power analysis and other classroom exercises. For example, one student commented that he now felt even more racist than when he had entered class. He felt that we were forcing him to notice race, when before he felt he was "colorblind."

We suggest that their reactions revealed an invisible contract that students hold in traditional classrooms where they are the observers who see and never the ones observed and seen (hooks 1994, Maher & Tetreault 1994, Palmer 1998). The traditional type of learning allows for the comfort that refuses cognitive dissonance and self-reflection, and allows the student the option to perceive herself as fundamentally separate from the subject. We found that multiculturalism was not just what attracted them to the course but now also, when seen in a more subjective light, was something that repulsed them and contributed to their withdrawal and resistance. Moreover, students felt overwhelmed by the scrutiny of three teachers who themselves marked the shifting identity categories of race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation in ways that defied the normative heteropatriarchal family structure. They now saw us as selves, not just as teachers of subjects. They now saw themselves not just as students, but also as selves acting within society.

Here the dynamic of the class changed. Stacey was no longer a professor of ethics and Black Studies but a Black person as well. At the same time, the students' Whiteness became visible to them. They had a consciousness of their racial identity, gendered roles, class privilege, and heterosexist inclinations—identity markers that they had never scrutinized, let alone critiqued. This marked the point at which we all saw ourselves being seen. We became conscious of our every action, of that which we said and that which we did not say. As the subject was multicultural and the professors represented diverse social locations and disciplines, it did not allow for the moment to be circumvented by anyone. No epistemology or ontology went unchecked. The moment created a teaching-learning environment where the

subject could no longer be owned by any one orientation, whether academic or social. In this process, the shortcomings of our individual disciplines and social locations were redeemed by the interdisciplinary connection we facilitated. The moment called upon everyone to be miners of the motherlode, drawing upon past and present experiences with, and against, the company of others to create and transform knowledge of the subject.

## Sorting Epistemological Treasures

The third stage in our interdisciplinary model is sorting epistemological treasures. In the previous stage, the experience caused by the process of conscientization potentially leaves teachers and students in such a self-reflective mode that, if their self-critique is not re-directed and the subject is not newly informed with a communal understanding, they could be left with a heightened sense of self-consciousness, communal alienation, and disaffection from the subject. At this point we understood that sorting epistemological treasures would be a necessary process of reintegration. While in the phase of exposing the fault lines, students become conscious of themselves learning the subject, and in the mining the motherlode phase, students learn how the subject teaches the self; in the third phase, students become aware of how selves learn from other selves about the subject both textually and experientially. Just as the geologist, in order to become more adept and proficient at her trade, has to experience many different geographical and cultural locations so as to appreciate the difference as well as value of the resources that emerge from such diverse terrain, so, too, the interdisciplinarian travels to other epistemological sites to discern alternative ways of knowing. Upon realizing the limitations in knowledge of self and subject, the learner desires to transcend them. Now, regardless of individual social realities based on time, culture, race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation, the learner explores other worldviews in order to transcend her own limitations that distort selves and subjects.

The process of traveling to a world different from one's own is daunting because here the individual decenters herself as the sole authority on an issue as she grounds herself instead in the perspectives of others that are ostensibly different from her own. This third step moves us from the individualized perspective of interdisciplinarity into a pluralistic understanding of the subject. When the students initially found themselves guided by Stacey and Katherine, whose identities ran counter to those of the students in terms of race and sexual orientation, respectively, the journey to the Other appeared threatening. The knowledge that they could convey as guides (i.e., profes-

sors) was deemed confrontational because in asking students to be open to ways of thinking and being different than their own, students were made to see that their ways of seeing and being were not absolute. Stacey's and Katherine's epistemologies were perceived by the students as an abstraction of identity (of Blackness or lesbianism, respectively) rather than reality itself (read Black or lesbian). What was problematic in this regard was that, on the one hand, they had to focus on marginalized cultural identities, and on the other hand, the professors corresponding to these cultural identities did not conform to students' preconceived notions of what it meant to be Black or lesbian. Katherine's and Stacey's presence caused dissonance inasmuch as they represented the very authority figures as teachers who embodied the marginalized identities about which they were teaching. The dissonance, while disconcerting, was not overwhelming because students knew that the power differential and the academic objective of the course precluded such experiential threats. Given any other setting, the stereotypes they held—that they might be accosted either racially or sexually—might have led to an insurmountable fear that could not have been adequately addressed or resolved.

If students felt disconcerted with Katherine and Stacey, they were quite comfortable with Laura's embodied presence. Though Jewish in physicality and name, and a declared mother of two children of Hispanic paternity, students seemed so desperate to take refuge in the familiar that they held onto Laura's white skin and heterosexuality as the essence of who she was and who they wanted her to be. Laura apparently embodied the students' epistemological frame of reference and therefore did not pose the threat of difference. Without thought or trepidation, they were willing to engage the substantive material and perspectives she presented. Whereas Katherine and Stacey could authentically present the notion of Otherness as it informed the subject, Laura could help the students process and apply these interconnections and the relevance of them to their own lives. Laura was able to take advantage of the students' stereotypical views of the world, using their trust in her to act as facilitator in their world traveling.

Conscious of her influence over the students, Laura assigned and led class discussion around Lugones's (1990) article about world traveling. This metaphor of world traveling provided a framework in which we could interrogate our failures to identify with others because we perceive them as different. The metaphor also provided a context for building bridges that would allow us to travel into the Other's world. Lugones's concept of world traveling involves "loving perception," which comes only from breaking down barriers and traversing other territories. Lugones bares her own life as the

self through which the subject can be fully explored and differently known. She obliges us to travel into her world and once there, see her world through her eyes. In this sense, she enacts the three stages of the model we have outlined herein: exposing the fault lines, mining the motherlode, and sorting epistemological treasures. She exposes the fault lines in the confession of a lifelong conflictive relationship with her mother caused by an ongoing resistance to submit to her mother's worldview. She becomes cognizant of her own cultural arrogance. She illustrates how she mines the motherlode when she narrates her moment of conscientization. She explores her mother's worldview at its roots and origins—the family that her mother grew up in and the historical and cultural context that produced it. Only then could she set aside her arrogance, deriving from a limited worldview, place herself in the shoes of her mother and put into practice a loving perception. By seeing her mother's life through her mother's eyes, Lugones is able to better understand her mother by privileging her mother's understanding of herself as the primary lens for analysis. If there is a perceived need to become liberated from the limitations or dissonances imposed by the social group to which one belongs, it is mandatory to set aside, such as Lugones did, one's epistemology so that another can come into view. That epistemology can only be explored by bringing the Other from margin to center (hooks 1984). By decentering oneself, it is possible to know something and/or someone else; only by knowing something and/or someone else can one know self and subject more fully:

> There are "worlds" we enter at our own risk, "worlds" that have *agon*, conquest, and arrogance as the main ingredients in their ethos. These are "worlds" that we enter out of necessity and which we would be foolish to enter playfully. But there are "worlds" that we can travel to lovingly and traveling to them is part of loving at least some of their inhabitants. The reason why I think that traveling to someone's "world" is a way of identifying with them is because by traveling to their "world" we can understand *what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes*. Only when we have traveled to each other's "worlds" are we fully subjects to each other. (Lugones 1990, p. 401)

In taking students and teachers alike through the reading of the Lugones article, Laura led the process of world travel both methodologically and experientially. Like Lugones, Laura used narrative as an embodied act of world

travel. She did not use narrative in the manner that would be considered normative within the context of her discipline, which might be to study the aesthetics of a work or to use a literary work as a means to facilitate language acquisition (a task that would be impossible in this case given that the text is in English, although written by an Argentine woman). Laura's first encounter with world travel was through the study of Hispanic language and literature. She was drawn to the discipline because she wanted to discover worlds beyond her own. But what she most wanted to discover was that which was considered unnecessary by her discipline.

Laura's investment in her subject necessitated that she go beyond disciplinary boundaries by (a) reading any and all literature written by Hispanic people; (b) reading works even outside of the Hispanic language or that did not form part of the literary canon; (c) finding, researching, and teaching works such as Lugones's article that fall into the disciplinary fault lines. Laura was devoted to the article because as a sample of Hispanic feminism, the article is often not included in traditional women's studies courses; but inasmuch as it is written in English, it would not form part of a curriculum in Hispanic Studies. Nor would it be taught in English because it is not centered on a popular or dominant worldview. Nor is it canonized in the Hispanic worldview of which it is a part because Lugones is an Argentine residing in the U.S. who has refused to conform to the mandates of her mother's culture or to her academic training as poet. When Laura, as a White woman, chose to foreground this Hispanic woman's worldview while placing her own in the shadows, students perceived her differently, which ultimately allowed them to see themselves differently. Moreover, Stacey and Katherine were able to better understand their particular family cultures (i.e., Black and lesbian families, respectively) by allowing a literary narrative and a literary criticism method to inform their academic orientation to the study of their own specialized area. The concept of world travel obliged us all to set aside our own orientations and inclinations to the field and lovingly (e.g., empathetically) privilege another's as a path to enhance our own perspectives.

Empathy requires a moving of one's ontological and disciplinary position. It is the mental entrance into the feeling or spirit of one's colleagues, into personal dispositions, sociopolitical locations, culture, and worldview. Empathy is an act of vulnerability, necessitating being capable of being wounded, liable to injury or criticism, as Krieger (1991) explains in her critically reflective essays about the relationship of social science and the self. We soon discovered that developing empathy for each other as teachers was

far less a struggle than helping students develop empathy for perspectives other than their own.

We had to travel to each other's worlds, as Lugones describes, to foster the empathy needed to sort epistemological treasures. As previously stated, although mining has traditionally been perceived as an aggressive act, we believe it is more appropriately understood as an act of empathy, a process of engaging with another's discipline in order to figure out how differing pedagogies and epistemologies merge. At one point in the course, empathy emerges from the aggression characteristic of the work in mining the motherlode because it allows for a mental entrance not only into disciplines, but also into the real life situations of the Other—ourselves as teachers and our students. During a phase of increasing intimacy, we engaged in a transformation of intellectual discourse in which aggression, typically defined as a masculinist model of acting upon the production of knowledge, was replaced by empathy, a more feminist process, characterized by an "acting with" the Other to produce knowledge (Jordan, Surrey, & Kaplan 1991).

Stacey further explains, in a passage from one of our recorded dialogues, how Katherine's and Laura's expressions of empathy for her crystallized this "acting with" in an experiential way:

> Before the class began, I had anxiety about whether or not I could trust being in the classroom with two White female professors. I wanted to know what this experience would reveal to me about whether or not social justice was feasible in working with White feminists who were both senior faculty. Would our differences eventually make us enemies? Could we pull this collaboration off? What if I felt betrayed by our involvement? What would the collaboration reveal to them about me and me about them? What roles would our orientations as members of divergent cultural and scholarly communities play in our ability to function well in the course?
>
> These initial hermeneutics of suspicion were later abated when I saw Katherine and Laura's responses to the students' racist dispositions in the Social Strata Inventory. I had been the one to suggest we assign this paper, and I've been doing this assignment in classes very successfully for the past seven years. It was always such a sure thing, so why were students so angry now at having to look at their own racism? Well, I can see now that it was because there were two White teachers in the class who would possibly legitimate their racism, or allow it to be expressed. The students were

hostile toward me, and they expected the other teachers to back them up. But Laura and Katherine refused to take the easy road. Although Laura and Katherine could never experience the plight of a Black female professor in this context or any other, they were able to practice empathy by assuming that it was indeed their responsibility to confront those racialized remarks rather than assuming that such a task should fall under the auspices of the Black professor. Such a premise contrasts with the normal privileged disposition, namely, to allow the professor in question to deal individually with conflicts concerning race. In doing so, they allowed me to step out of the token role of "the Black professor as race police." In this regard, empathy is not being the Other, but seeing oneself inextricably bound to the Other; it is not assuming the Other's identity, but knowing one's self with and against others. Their empathy affirmed in me that trust was possible.

## Forging New Gifts

The fourth stage in this interdisciplinary model is forging new gifts, the outcome of the previous three stages. This stage focuses on the rewarding process of putting forth the effort. Transformation in the teaching-learning process was evident in the passion, surprise, and ecstasy that both teachers and students experienced in applying knowledge in a manner that resulted in the understanding of knowledge as a collective process, one that must be faithful to the diverse perspectives that constitute the collectivity. In achieving this, we became mutual discoverers, arriving at new insights and transforming painful dissonances into empowering realities that we could share as gifts. Much like the laboratory context that Archimedes set up for himself, in which the world was an all-embracing set of stimuli, the interdisciplinary classroom in its ideal form reproduces this world and the joy of obtaining apodictic knowledge. As Freire (1997) demonstrated, students can be made aware of their own cognitive dissonances. Within this pedagogical space, forging gifts is not a freak or random occurrence, but like all creative designs, happens purposefully. It is anticipated but not foreseeable. As one of our students remarked, in her evaluation of the course, the high point of the class was: "The point during the lecture when the readings and discussion click together and the idea makes sense. It's a great feeling when all the ideas come together and you can make personal realizations."

From the teachers' points of view, our collaborative process by the end of class involved the gifts of mutual respect and caring for what we had

to teach each other. Mutuality capitalizes on the vulnerability required for empathy and also requires reciprocity, the understanding and acceptance of differences, and a politics and praxis of solidarity. Mutuality involves reciprocity in that it is an act from which both the individual and society as a whole benefit. Reciprocity means "giving back in kind and quality, mutually exchanging and being changed by another's data and resources, and paying back what has been received from cooperative work, mutual dependency, action, and influence" (Eugene 1996, p. 16). Thus, vulnerability and reciprocity cannot be separated from the understanding of difference (Isasi-Diaz 1996). Moreover, mutuality requires a willingness to develop and deepen levels of personal conversion and vulnerability to another's perspective. Exploring and acknowledging differences are principal methods to be utilized in developing a means of mutual appropriation and reciprocity.

Isasi-Diaz further describes mutuality as a praxis of solidarity, an intentional reflective action, aimed at the building of community for those who struggle against oppression in the name of social justice. The movement towards mutuality starts with a denunciation of injustice. It requires effective political action, a liberative praxis that has as its goal radical structural change on the part of those who stand in solidarity with others. It insists on a connection between all forms of oppression. It is the basis for a commonality of principles as it shapes a new order of relationships that opposes any and all forms of domination. As religious scholars suggest, the process of mutuality creates "right" relationship.

Professors and students alike offered and received the gift of mutuality in the ways we validated and substantiated each other's perspectives. As our examples of trust, aggression, and empathy reveal above, mutuality is the reward where one's anxiety is given reprieve. Mutuality is seeing the evidence of the things hoped for that had previously not yet materialized. The previous three phases culminated in our realization that we had given each other these gifts.

## Conclusion

Heuristic metaphors are devices that help to explain, define, or theorize the processes by which knowledge is produced in an interdisciplinary teaching-learning context (Klein 1990). They are also the methodological tools that we applied in order to produce knowledge. As all metaphors, they function rhetorically, engaging the participant-observer through *ethos* (the rational processes) and *pathos* (the feelings) in order to bring to bear an enhanced understanding of complex questions. We have developed here an interdisci-

plinary model that is grounded in liberatory pedagogy. This model accommodates multiple perspectives in the teaching and learning process, traversing disciplines and involving teachers and students alike. We found that by combining our intellectual and personal resources in a team-taught experience, true interdisciplinary learning could occur (Klein 1990, Kockelmans 1998). Families would not be singularly fragmented by social address (e.g., race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, nationality, physical ability), but rather understood and critiqued in ways that reflected families' realities in transformation. To teach about families in ways that are not inherently alienating and false, we needed an interdisciplinary approach.

Based on our teaching-learning experience in this course, we see interdisciplinarity as a method of intellectual inquiry that moves between disciplinary frameworks, breaking down borders and collapsing disciplinary boundaries in order to critique the truth claims of a discipline and of our social locations as socially constructed individuals. We see interdisciplinarity as the deconstruction and reconstruction of the ways we know and the ways we live, the ways we think and the ways we see others and ourselves. By traveling between and beyond the borders, we learned to circumvent epistemological constraints governing and controlling self and subject and the organic relationship between them. We, as teacher-scholars, used this method self-consciously, knowing that we were ideologically inscribed in the process as selves that inform the subject, and selves informed by the subject. We were purposefully oppositional, perhaps subversive, always governed by political and ideological ends in order to uncover the illusory effects of knowledge claims (Allen 2000, Cannon 1988, Freire 1997, Lather 1991).

The following six components that our model brings to the fore are essential components of interdisciplinary teaching and learning: (a) a conscious effort to develop and explore new paradigms and theories; (b) an unapologetic attempt to unify theory and praxis; (c) a stated subjectivity to our teaching and learning; (d) an empowering teaching and learning process for all concerned; (e) social change and self-reflexivity as desirable ends; and (f) retooling in a multi-method approach as necessary. Using these components and the model we've outlined, we were successful at not only being interdisciplinary teachers and empowering our students with some tools and lessons that such an experience offers, but we learned how to better our own teaching and learning.

We offer this model not as a failsafe prescription for interdisciplinarity but as a vision of interdisciplinarity that maintains that new knowledge cannot be done in a vacuum. Interdisciplinarity instead re-

quires intimate interchange among fellow travelers who journey together briefly while trying to get to their individual destinations, not knowing exactly how they will get there but knowing that they will never be the same when they return as they were when they left.

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