

# Trans-Dance: Disciplinary Cross-Dressing and Integral Education in a Language and Sexuality Course

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**Abstract:** This article showcases an integral approach to education through the lens of a transdisciplinary graduate-level class on Sexuality and Language. The graduate-level class was co-taught by two CIIS faculty whose backgrounds span the fields of social and cultural anthropology, psychology, sociology, social policy, linguistics, education and drama-centered expressive arts therapy. The class brought together students from six separate academic programs and drew from a wide array of performative and arts-based modes of inquiry to create a deep context through which to unpack the complex relationship(s) between language and sexuality. These practices were interwoven with theoretical exposition and discussion in a hermeneutic spiral leading up to students' planned research projects. This "disciplinary cross-dressing," where diverse students and faculty engaged each others' points of view rigorously in a common inquiry, created powerful teachable moments and served as the foundation for a transgressive mode of scholarship and advocacy.

**Keywords:** Assessment, educational reform, experiential education, higher education, identity, integral education, interdisciplin(arity), language and sexuality, learning, linguistics, transdisciplin(arity),

*“My girlfriend is teaching me how to talk like a lesbian.”*

- student in Language and Sexuality course

## Introduction and History of the Course

Humans are sexual beings, even politicians and priests, if the headlines of recent years are any indication. We are also intensely social, and language is the primary medium in which we negotiate our joint construction of identity and reality itself. We are what we speak (including gestures, embodied language, etc.), and this includes our presentation as gendered and sexual

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beings. The intersection between these two domains, language/communication and sexuality, is a rich and generative area of inquiry that has garnered interest at universities throughout the U.S. and internationally (Cameron & Kulick, 2003, 2006).

Gender studies and allied fields such as queer studies (Yep, Lovaas, & Elia, 2003) are experiencing expansion relative to the general contraction of academic fields and departments now under way. Also, as my Chair pointed out, “any course title with ‘sex’ in it will tend to fill” and so it is no surprise that dozens of courses are now being taught with titles such as “Gender and Communication.” This was not meant to be just another course, however; the case is especially relevant for this audience because it also aspired to incorporate the principles of integral education. It was designed to truly engage students in deep learning by connecting critical reflection on their own stories as sexual beings with the formal material of the course.

I will briefly summarize some relevant strands from ongoing conversations about integral education and how it has been framed at my university and elsewhere. I report here on the course with the main intention of claiming some lessons in the praxis of integral education (Bronson, 2006, 2005)—that is how some key ideas from integral education as it is currently understood at my university have been translated into specific classroom practices and relations. Finally, I present a sketch of a framework for assessing such implementations and suggest some avenues for further discussion and research.

## **The Dimensions of Integral Education**

The term “integral” is contested and claimed by different lineages and perspectives. Among them, three are most prominently represented in public discourse: that of Wilber/Gebser (Esbjorn-Hargens, 2010), the Aurobindo/The Mother-Chaudhuri line (Ryan, 2010) and, in education, a more broadly construed approach perhaps most closely associated with “transformative learning” (Mezirow, 1990, 1991; for a different view see Ferrer, Romero & Albereda, 2010). All of them share an emphasis on the evolutionary and transformative potentials in human consciousness and experience and an intention to expand the modes of knowing that are valued and developed in this enterprise (Ferrer & Sherman, 2008). Thus, the problematic dichotomy between “objective” and “subjective” modes is directly engaged in integral education, rather than taken as a matter of common sense:

As a university we must make sure that we provide our students with the knowledge and thinking skills central to advanced education. We cannot in good conscience do any less. In actuality we want to do more; we want to also support them in exploring their interior lives and the intersections between that and their academic work. There is a creative tension here as we try to hold the paradoxes that arise out of competing paradigms (Wexler, 2010, p. 2).

The “creative tension” to which Wexler (The Dean and Academic Vice-President of California Institute of Integral Studies.) refers, presents itself in what my colleagues and I have identified as the key dimensions for integral education as we understand them at CIIS. After several years of inquiry, publication, and discussion, we came to see it would not be useful to thematize “integral education” as necessarily separate from the best in liberal (AACU, 2011) or

emancipatory (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994, 2003) education or to think of it as a single ideology and closed set of necessary and sufficient conditions.

We came to our dimensions via a “grounded theory” approach of asking our colleagues and students for examples of what would count as integral education in practice and then inferred the underlying commonalities over many years of iterative dialogues. We were comfortable with articulating integral education (in practice) as a nexus of related dimensions or values with a “family resemblance” (Wittgenstein, 1953) where not every implementation would implement all the features but more robust implementations would. We wanted to identify these dimensions so that we might enhance them through reflection and assessment, where appropriate.

The five dimensions of integral education we identified were:

- Multimodal, valuing different ways of knowing
- Integration of personal growth and intellectual rigor
- Transdisciplinarity: (the integration of knowledge in the service of inquiry)
- Social relevance and interface with the external world
- Space for difference in the curriculum and classes (Wexler, 2010, p. 2).

C.I.I.S. is perhaps uniquely positioned as a place where the various strands of integral education can interact in conversation because there is no dominant ideology or approach. The range of integral theories and practices are rooted in a common commitment to realize more holistic, humane, and sustainable responses to the collective challenges of our day. They aim to address a hunger for alternatives to “business-as-usual” in a world in crisis, to the fragmentation and alienation inherent in the “dominant” paradigm (Bronson & Fields, 2009a, 2009b; Ferrer, 2002; Ferrer and Sherman, 2008).

The dimensions above represent the core common values of our community-of-practice at C.I.I.S., yet are broadly enough construed that others who identify with the overall vision can enter into the conversation, regardless of their affiliation. In education more generally, “integral” has been applied to a range of topics, approaches, methods and interventions (Bronson, 2005; Bronson & Gangadean, 2006; Esbjörn-Hargens, Reams, & Gunnlaugson, 2010). These represent (at least in some measure) different levels of embodiment of a common underlying worldview, one in which the spiritual is not disparate from the practical or intellectual and lived experience and creativity are central in the construction of knowledge (Gangadean & Bronson, 2004; Bronson & Gray, 2010; Bronson, 2004).

I have been a linguist teaching courses at the intersections of language, culture and consciousness at a variety of universities, most prominently in a graduate program in anthropology where I currently serve as faculty. Inspired by a colleague (Gregory Ward), who had been reporting for years about a course on language and sexuality that he had been teaching at Northwestern University, I decided to design a course that would address each of these elements. I enlisted the support of another colleague, Shoshana Simons, who is the Chair of the Expressive Arts Program at C.I.I.S. In the pages that follow, I will share some of the struggles and learning that emerged from the attempt to teach our version of the course with these dimensions as central.

## Multi-modal

From the outset, we wanted to include direct experience wherever possible as the foundation for subsequent reflection on the academic content. We were committed to following the hermeneutic spiral from the more concrete to the more abstract. Both of us felt that this was more congruent with how people learn naturally and would give them more robust as opposed to superficial outcomes. We also sought to establish a climate of safety and sharing and knew from past experience that these could be established by the use of ritual and other exercises. In this spirit, our opening experience involved asking students to listen to some soothing music and draw who they were as sexual beings. They subsequently shared with the class whatever they wanted to about the labels and stories that had shaped their identities. We used the introduction of the exercise to evoke confidentiality and to let people know that they should only say what they felt comfortable saying.

This experience became a jumping off point for an extended discussion of the construction of categories (see Whorf, 1956; Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999 for extended discussions). We shared with them how humans construct cultural categories from experience and then use them in place of gathering new information about an environment that is always in flux (Alford, 2002; Whorf, 1956). This was an opportunity to integrate some basic cognitive linguistics into the discussion.



Figure 1: The Tinky-Winky controversy is emblematic of the power of queerness to challenge gender binaries and the fragility of heteronormativity.

At the end of the first evening of the weekend workshop, we continued on the same note: we asked them to go home and look around their homes and personal spaces for objects that touched on some aspect of their sexual and romantic lives. They were to bring these objects, ready to share them with the class as they reflected on their own sexual identity socialization in light of the class material. We told them we would assemble the objects in an “altar.”

I started the altar that night and modeled the activity by sharing three artifacts of my own. I began with a small lavender plastic figure of Tinky-Winky (see picture), the famous Tele-Tubby with the triangle on his head who was “outed” as gay by Christian Fundamentalists. Tinky was a gift from a friend and immediately gained a place of honor on my personal altar at home. I told the class that he represented for me the power of queerness to bring the dominant into an obviously irrational frenzy simply by the tiniest hint of refusing to conform to heteronormativity. I loved the irony—a television program for 2 year-olds was now being seriously presented as a means of recruiting homosexuals.

This tiny little figure ignited a firestorm among Evangelicals and yet continued to show up each week to

“work” in his bucolic green meadow under a smiling sun unscathed by the controversy swirling around him. I explained that Tinky was a model for me as a gay man in his perseverance and power, and even if he were only “questioning”—understandable given his missing genitalia—I would count him as a queer little brother and fellow sacred clown. You might imagine what I shared about a picture of my mother and father as two beautiful young people in love (my mother a virgin), embracing just after taking their vows and years before their subsequent divorce when I was two. A picture of me and a former Brazilian lover dressed as Carmen Miranda was fodder for reflection on gender as performance. I enjoyed showing up as a teacher and a whole person with a history and felt that this in and of itself was a kind of intervention in the business-as-usual of college teaching.

We began with the activity on a Saturday morning with twelve students and two instructors in a small windowless room with the chairs arranged in a circle. One young woman brought a condom and shared what it had cost her to be prepared for safe sex. Many men she dated had been doubly surprised when she had whipped out a Trojan Magnum condom at the critical moment—first that she was apparently ready for sex and secondly owing to the “Magnum” extra-large size of the prophylactic in question. This was enough to end the encounter in some instances. She spoke of the contradictions inherent in being socialized as a sexually active woman who was not “supposed” to want sex.

A young gay man brought a gold wedding band and explained how he had at one point intended to give it to his partner as part of a commitment ceremony. Then, gay weddings were legal for a while and it became a “real” wedding ring. Before they could consecrate the marriage, the law changed and it was no longer “real.” He then broke up with his partner. He asked us to look at the ring: “It’s a wedding ring, it’s not a wedding ring, it’s a wedding ring. This is the story of my life as a gay man.” A woman in her thirties who had only recently committed to a relationship with a woman brought photos showing various aspects of her “butch” and “femme” personas. She shared her struggle as someone who was learning how to talk and behave like a “good lesbian.”

Each story and object shared had a tremendous impact on the group and the effect of the ensemble was truly remarkable. We arranged the objects in a corner of the room and left them there for the duration of the workshop. We would dip into them from time to time for a new story, providing a thread of coherence throughout our time together. I found that the possibility of going deep was fully present for us as a group after the initial round of sharing. There were many additional benefits: people introduced themselves and bonded without the usual delay; there were many ready examples to draw from as we explicated the theoretical approaches in the class; the material presence of the objects reminded us of what we had been talking about and energetically charged the room with their storied presence.



Figure 2: The students composed an altar of personal artifacts in order to elicit story-telling and deepen their connections with the material and each other.

I had a similar experience conducting the exercise with colleagues in a Teaching and Learning Group of colleagues at C.I.I.S. I asked them to bring objects that represented their personal relationship with teaching. We each presented our object then observed the assembled altar, wrote about what we saw and heard and de-briefed as to what we had learned about teaching and learning. We witnessed: a family picture book with pages ripped out, a farmer doll, a pair of eyeglasses, a stone with the word “nothing” engraved in it (“nothing is written in stone.”) My colleagues reported that it was particularly helpful to have been looking for the objects in the two weeks prior to the meeting. It caused them to think deeply about their work and sort through what was really important to them as teachers and learners. They remarked afterwards on the moving quality of the stories and the glimpses into each other’s intimate worlds that would not otherwise have been afforded.

This activity could be adapted to a wide variety of audiences and purposes as a way of getting beyond superficial classroom routines. It has the potential to establish a more intimate rapport among members of any learning community and a more personal and critical engagement with virtually any academic content. To be fair, this is nothing other than “show-and-tell in the 17<sup>th</sup> grade.” Some of the best teaching still seems to come from the elementary level, in my experience. Our colleagues in Kindergarten can remind those of us in higher education how to enroll the storied things of daily life as our co-teachers.



Figure 3: Integral education at its best combines personal engagement with deep intellectual inquiry.

An epilogue will highlight the relevance of these points for this audience. In a recent workshop I conducted with linguist Gregory Ward of Northwestern University (Bronson & Ward, 2011), I was reminded of the “integral” character of the exercise. When I asked Gregory if he would be able to explore such intimate stories in his upper division Language and Sexuality course, he said that he would not, nor would he be inclined to do so in a mainstream university environment. He wanted students to make direct personal connections to the material, but did not feel that he could directly incorporate an experience of this kind into the curriculum. At C.I.I.S., faculty have the freedom to, indeed are invited and encouraged to interweave the materials and experiences of every day life into the formal curriculum

## **Integration of Personal Growth and Intellectual Rigor**

My colleague Gregory Ward meets his students on an informal field trip to an LGBT venue as part of his course. I chose to do a “cyber-field trip,” where the students were asked to review a web site on gender images in advertising ([www.genderimages.com](http://www.genderimages.com)). We discussed the problematic content and the explicit and implicit messages regarding the prototypical gender identities being appealed to. They were then instructed to go to the Craig’s list personals, to a sexual orientation different from the one they identified with *today* (I was aware of the recent embrace of gender fluidity) and to review the language used there for evidence of the underlying values and indices of that corner of the sexual/romantic marketplace.

The students were amazed with what they found. The men-for-men sex ads were a bit shocking for some of them in their explicit description of anatomy and acts. “What is Tina?” asked one student, referring to a coded term for methamphetamine, “What does VGL MM on the downlow mean?” asked another (Very good looking married man looking for discrete sex with another man). In our discussion, we reflected on the roots of the narratives from which each orientation was drawing. We connected with our readings and the complex interplay between biology and culture that lies at the root of sexual identity and desire (Cameron and Kulick, 2003, 2006).

The intellectual work was accompanied by an expansion of the students’ capacity to respond with empathy to sub-cultures that were quite different from their own, not unlike what an anthropologist has to go through in the field. We discussed some of the pre-formed judgments that they had, even some distaste at what they saw depicted. Since these were all students in a graduate-level course centered on an exploration of sexual diversity, this seemed an appropriate teaching moment for combining intellectual content and personal growth

Such “critical moments” (Bronson & Watson-Gegeo, 2008; Bronson, 2009) were woven throughout the intensive weekend portion of the course. For example, a half-day presentation by Willie Wilkinson, a health educator specializing in sensitizing health care workers to the trans-issues, focused on acknowledging existing stereotypes and uncomfortable questions that students had about people with these diverse gender identities. They learned about how to respectfully approach people who were in various stages of transitioning and the importance of separating social identity from biology. The students were deeply moved by the film clips that complexified issues of class, gender and race as the subsequent discussion revealed. As these vignettes have illustrated, the integration of personal subjectivity and intellectual growth, is not a descent into

narcissism (Montuori, 2006). It is actually an important part of a more general move toward the “higher ground” of transdisciplinarity (Bronson and Watson-Gegeo, in preparation).

## Trans-disciplinarity

*Interdisciplinary* work is interactive, combining theory, methods and practices to address questions difficult to tackle with the tools of a single discipline (Klein, 1996, Frodeman & Mitcham, 2007). Interdisciplinary work adapts but does not challenge existing boundaries. In contrast, *transdisciplinary* inquiry problematizes disciplinary compartmentalization as imposing limits in creating useful knowledge to address complex issues (Nicolescu, 2002, 2003; Klein, 1998; Stokols, 2006). Centrality of the research questions and the need to reconcile seemingly incommensurable methods for constructing knowledge require greater rigor than is typical of interdisciplinary inquiry, including a nuanced engagement with the researcher’s positionality (Montuori, 2006; Alcott & Potter, 1993). Transdisciplinarity has been a hallmark of C.I.I.S programs since its inception. The majority of programs are organized around central themes and inquiries that transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries and require deep, ongoing and critical self-reflection on the part of faculty and students by design.

In practical terms, how was a trans-disciplinary orientation embedded into this course on language and sexuality? It began as so many creative projects do with a conversation I had with colleague Shoshana Simons, the Chair of the Expressive Arts Therapy program. She had worked as a community organizer, organizational consultant and expressive arts therapy educator for many years and had been trained in psychology, performing arts and social science research. She was also an out lesbian who had grown up in the early stages of the feminist movement. We decided to make the course a collaborative effort in which she would specifically attend to our prime directive: that the discussion of academic content should be grounded in some kind of experiential activity where possible.

In the spirit of transdisciplinary inquiry, we specifically wanted to harness materials and perspectives from linguistics, psychology, feminist and criticalist thought, and anthropology to focus on the intersections of language and sexuality. The main texts in the course (Cameron & Kulick, 2003, 2006) prepared the field for us by providing both a coherent, if somewhat polemic master narrative, and ample source material for students’ independent research in an area of interest.

I saw my job as a linguist to use the opportunity to introduce the idea of “linguistic mindfulness” (Bronson and Gangadean, 2010) as a key learning outcome. Since there would be little time to take students into the intricacies of linguistic research, I was challenged to distill this outcome into specific moments of learning that would connect with students where they were, while indicating the complexity that further study would elucidate. My effort centered on two areas: the construction of categories, and the genealogy and performance of gender identity in online and face-to-face discourse.

The discussion of categories emerged naturally from the first night’s discussion as the students themselves provided the raw material. I wrote down the terms they used to describe their own sexual identities and then proceeded to ask how one knew what each category was. I

relayed some basic research about our natural reliance on prototypes (Rosch, 1978) as more central members of each category, with more marginal members not activating the category as fully. I went on to point out the social and historical construction of the categories they used (Foucault, 1995). My colleague Shoshana was able to connect with the tradition of narrative psychology where clients reflect on the structural sources of the stories in which they are embedded as part of the healing process.

Our linguistic “fieldwork” was already described above in the “personal growth” section. Students had a first hand opportunity to journey to other corners of the sexual landscape and to report and reflect on what they found. They could connect this with articles and chapters on the language of personal ads, which had been widely studied. We also experimented with embodied language by asking students to walk around the room as though they were walking in various parts of the city, some more LGBTQ- friendly than others. Surprisingly (for some in the class), two young gay men reported that they actually felt less comfortable in the gay-friendly Castro District of San Francisco. They said that in that part of the exercise, they became aware of being on display as sexual commodities in a cutthroat marketplace full of judgments about their appearance and desirability. We used this to discuss Foucault’s (1995) development of the “Panopticon” as the internalized observer who embodied social control in the individual.

In the culminating exercise of the unit led by health educator Willie Wilkinson, students were asked to come up with interventions appropriate for diverse trans-clients who were struggling with substance abuse and other issues. Students had moved through an initial discussion of terms and stereotypes to the application of their newfound knowledge for an imperiled population. This cycle exemplified our original commitment to base our work in experience and to return to application and significance at the appropriate point in each unit.

The small lessons I would add to the burgeoning discourse on transdisciplinarity from this one case are these. True transdisciplinary work requires that departments and institutions actually recognize and reward cooperation across disciplines and departments. Since so many great ideas start in informal salon settings, more purposeful “intellectual matchmaking” (maybe starting with better food) could help such inquiry to become vital and central rather than marginal (as it is currently on most college campuses). So many of the great questions of our day require this kind of cooperation—students are not typically drawn to Philosophy 1A or Psychology 1A per se, but they do care about what it means to be human and what their work is in a collective response to a world in crisis—and so do many faculty.

Students’ inherent concern with the big questions should be amplified in the forge of transdisciplinary inquiry, ongoing among faculty on a healthy campus, and not dampened by departmental and disciplinary turf wars. This course holds some clues as to how this imperative can be realized as a matter of increasing, rather than decreasing intellectual rigor, while more responsibly preparing the next generation of scholars and practitioners to work in and with the disciplines as we have known them. Moreover, the image of the lone trans-disciplinary scholar or practitioner is an oxymoron in addition to being an archaic vestige of an earlier social, technological and economic era in higher education.

## Social Relevance and Space for Difference

By now, my major points about the organization and aims of the course and how these were realized in practice have been made. Also, the numerous references to the same activities and materials in different sections indicate that there are many synergies across the dimensions that have organized this article thus far. Integral education in its most robust embodiments is not simply an exercise in self-development or of transcending disciplinary boundaries as a way of claiming new, albeit transdisciplinary turf. It shines when students are actually prepared to work professionally in areas of their choosing, to apply what they have learned to real-world concerns and people in the contemporary world. The translation into practice has been more straightforward for the clinical psychology programs at C.I.I.S.: the MFT (Marriage Family Therapist) Community Mental Health program is the most recent example of attempts to benefit underserved communities. Opportunities to connect integral perspectives with problems in the world are available to all students in the form of internships and service learning projects supported by work-study funds.

Nevertheless, this area that requires much greater emphasis, especially if the larger purpose of integral education is to remain relevant in a time of scarce resources in the academy. Integral theory per se has been developed extensively and entire academic programs have been devoted to it. But these are not sustainable without a built-in connection to larger communities and worlds outside the few who can take the time to devote years of study to a particular language and framework. The integral education movement must keep its eye on the prize if it is not to go the way of so many attempts to rethink education and become simply another footnote. If it is not preparing the next generation so that they are capable of doing more relevant work in multiple communities-of-practice, what good is it, anyway?

Attention to difference was built into every aspect of the language and sexuality course, although I would not yet hold it up as a model since it is still such a new course to me. The initial reviews from students were very positive. One said in a class evaluation: “Attention to these issues (difference) was woven seamlessly into the class.” The work with trans populations was mentioned as pivotal in de-centering students’ hetero-normative prototypes, widening their acceptance of variation and deepening their respect for sexual and gender diversity. The altar exercises and the numerous opportunities to de-brief, allowed students’ individual difference to emerge so that their stories became a source of insight for others. Owing to the climate of intimacy and complexity that evolved, differences could be explored respectfully without, for example, anyone being put on the spot or interrogated as the “token bisexual.”

Integral education in all its manifestations has been characterized by an attempt to widen the lens of what is acceptable as a way of knowing and learning. It requires unflinching and ongoing inquiry about self and world. In the contemporary world integral education must, like its cousin, integral theory, be critiqued as a relevant source of responses to the problems of our day, chief among them as a space for dialogue that respects difference and paradox as sources of new knowledge (Parry & Duran, 2009), rather than as a struggle for supremacy between competing views (see Puhakka, this issue). In this sense, the lens must be widened and the gaze extended to include not only a critical perspective on race, class, gender and other forms of difference, but the gazer herself (see Bronson & Fields, 2009b regarding “positionality” for a recent discussion).

Integral education must include an ongoing critique of access (who gets to be integral?) and its adherents' inevitable complicity in a post-colonial, racist, sexist and classist system. Otherwise, the movement will not achieve its promise as a source of relevant knowledge in a diverse and globalizing world. The problem of translating across cultures, nations, frames and viewpoints is certainly central in 21<sup>st</sup> century collective life. Integral education has its part to play as a source of interventions, but only if it mindfully accounts for how its ideas translate into practice in multiple and variegated settings (where difference in many forms is present).

## Conclusion: Toward an Integral Praxis

As an educator of teachers at UC Davis, I often hear versions of the following: "That sounds great in theory,...but what am I going to do tomorrow?" This article has provided a few snapshots of what a class looks like that is designed to embody some key dimensions of integral education. I will close by making some preliminary suggestions about how integral educators might begin to assess their own and each others' practice in these dimensions. Without conceptual tools for assessment and some process for collective accountability, how will anyone know whether any particular class is effective as integral education? Without a framework for evaluation, how will we know that we are actually *doing* integral education rather than simply talking about it or "putting old mind in new bottles" (Bronson and Gangadean, 2010, p. 149)?

"Integral assessment" is a new frontier (Davis, 2010) that deserves much more attention than I can give to here. I do want to say that we can we assess what is essential in integral learning without putting it back into the same old boxes or limiting spontaneity unduly. Articulation of clear integral learning outcomes is basic if still challenging for most educators. We and our students need to know what we expect of them and how we will know they have achieved it. Assessment beyond this is complex enough in traditional settings. Moreover, it is a particularly tricky proposition where issues of personal growth and development are concerned, which needs much fuller exploration outside the scope of this essay. How does one decide if a student has adequately integrated personal and intellectual growth in an "assignment" or discussion, or is that even the right kind of question? At the very least, student work will need to be read by faculty from a different perspective if integral goals are in mind.

In another context, we offered the framework of *topic, approach, method, and intervention* (Bronson & Watson-Gegeo, 2008) as a means of sorting through various research programs and propose that the same be done with integral education. The idea is that there are at least these levels of embodiment for the dimensions, not that they are mutually exclusive categories in practice. At the most basic level, integral content can be included as a *topic* imply by being included on the reading list or being discussed in class. Thus, students might read transdisciplinary thinkers like Gebser or Wilber, but not actually go much deeper into the possibilities of the ideas in practice. Checklist approaches to integral education risk falling into the *topic* category inasmuch as they select an activity from each "quadrant" but do not attend to the integration of knowledge across modes or quadrants or the actual impact on learners (see Ferrer & Sherman, 2008; Bronson & Gangadean, 2010, 2006 for critiques).

Integral education as *approach* involves a purposeful interaction with the content or material that brings the ideas and dimensions alive and integrates deep and generative learning in

students, regardless of the mode of delivery (Palmer, 2004). Even a great lecture can be truly integral in this sense, the emphasis on multiple ways of knowing notwithstanding. In the non-dogmatic view being presented here, what matters is the result. It is important not to fetishize the method per se—a method is no guarantee of educational success (as the track record of the fad-crazy educational industrial complex attests).

Approaches to disciplinary material can always be more or less trans-disciplinary in practice, leaving open multiple viewpoints and acknowledging the contributions of diverse scholars from other traditions outside the canon. Educators already engage difference with varying levels of concern and skill in the way they present any content or respond to students, even when they are not consciously choosing a particular curricular or pedagogical goal related to “diversity.” Courses of study as lived experiences can be assessed in terms of the extent to which they actually evoke and “lean toward” the integral dimensions in the hidden as well as the formal curriculum.

As a *method* integral education may involve many explicit practices such as visualization, role play, working with materials, dialogue, personal reflective and scholarly writing, and field trips as discussed above. *Methods* represent particular pedagogical or other practices designed to generate deep, integral learning in students. They are part of the formal or informal curriculum and depend on the mindful embrace of the educator of the available palette of options appropriate for her setting and goals. Since so much of assessment is centered on the quick fix or next round of test results, the evaluation of the methods of integral education are especially complex and merit further study by scholars of teaching and learning.

Integral education as *intervention* can be evaluated in terms of how well it actually impacts the students and communities it is designed to serve. Thus, transdisciplinarity is valued in integral education not because it is in vogue, but because it is a responsible stance in a world where the old boundaries are being dissolved. Learning how to learn from differently positioned colleagues in work teams is much more important than knowing a fixed canon that will be outdated by the latest internet posting by the time the next article is printed. By assessing integral education efforts as *intervention*, one can highlight how well the desired shifts have been achieved and can do so in a setting of collaborative inquiry with the learners. In this, integral education finds common cause with educators everywhere who seek to create the deep learning and build the capacities that are required for the next generation to respond more artfully and humanely to the challenges they will face.

## **Conclusion: Trans-dancing under the Big Tent**

As the new series by SUNY Press indicates (Esbjörn-Hargens, Reams, & Gunnlaugson, 2010 is the first), “integral education” is on the map as a potential force within the general rethinking of education now underway. A major challenge is to develop the theme from being something more than just a “big tent” concept (for disparate and even contradictory content and forms of pedagogy) into a practical program for a collective move to “higher” educational “ground” (Bronson and Watson-Gegeo, in press). As with so many grand projects, the proof lies in the details of practice, in the intimate step-by-step embodiments in multiple sites and settings that critical practitioners from many disciplines can review and learn from. I have offered this report

in the spirit of clarifying some lessons from my own case and opening the way a bit for those who might follow.

We ended the workshop part of the class with the following vignette:

The papers have all announced it, it is on the radio and t.v. and everyone has heard it and is in the streets because they believe it: All difference is now respected and all peoples emancipated. There will be no more institutional or collective discrimination. Everyone will have guaranteed health care, education, a safe and clean environment, healthy food and housing. All people are welcome everywhere and are safe and protected, regardless of whom they love...

The students then enacted role plays in which they showed their responses the moment they heard the news. We ended with a celebratory dance, a trans-dance, of psychologists, anthropologists and social scientists, lesbians and gay men, bisexuals, straights, and gender-queer to a compelling disco world beat. One of my students slipped a pink boa around my neck as we continued our now raucous dance—it holds a place of honor (right next to Tinky) in my office to this day. I already have my first piece for the next altar and, more importantly, the story and enduring hope that goes with it.

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