Radical Academics
A Proposal
Rita Pougiales

Evergreen should assert and defend the position that knowledge, now radically fragmented, should be reunified. The principle of specialization inherent in fragmented knowledge at its best gives a distorted view of the human condition; at its worst it coincides with the modern split between fact and value, yielding the monstrosity of "value-free" inquiry. Accepting this faulty premise leads one to seek knowledge via the conventional academic disciplines of history, psychology, biology, art, etc., studied in isolation from one another, and results in the disciplines becoming concerned primarily with themselves rather than with the nature of human experience.[1]
David Marr and Rudy Martin, 1972

Evergreen, like all modern colleges, operates within a culture of specialization and fragmentation. The logic of the assembly line and the attractive simplification of rationalism are but two forces affecting the changes in society, colleges in particular. The consequence of these trends is not only in the fragmentation of knowledge and scholarship; as important is the separation of ethical and moral substance from *knowledge* and the *ethos,* the practices and way of life, within colleges. "Objectification of knowledge," as this process was justified academically and bureaucratically in academia, promised greater certainty, functionality, and, more recently, accountability (through the demand for assessment). Evergreen's original faculty members faced that problem at the college's inception and put in place a model of interdisciplinary teaching and learning, and administrative practices to promote collegiality and a non-hierarchical organization. Curricular and administrative fragmentation remains the most serious problem we face as we reconsider - in our processes of strategic planning, reaccredidation and governance group discussions - what it means for us to be a *public, interdisciplinary, liberal arts college.*

Evergreen's planning faculty found in Alexander Meicklejohn's "moral curriculum" a model for an interdisciplinary, values-based liberal arts college. Meicklejohn's Experimental College, founded in the 1920s, was at odds with what Julie Reuben, an American historian, called the "moral transformation" going on in American higher education in the late nineteenth century and continuing ever since. She captures the allure of the "objectification of knowledge":

> In particular, many of the younger generation of scholars thought that eradicating ethical concerns was the key to achieving intellectual consensus. This was a logical conclusion. In the early twentieth century, moral questions were sharply contested. The growth of cities and the rise of large corporations created new problems for which old maxims of right and wrong did not easily fit. The increasing diversity of the population undermined cultural assumptions about proper behavior. Changing family structures opened new questions about gender roles and sexuality. Given this context, it is not surprising that social scientists blamed morality for the lack of progress of their disciplines and insisted that ethical neutrality was an essential condition of scientific research…. This turned morality into a matter of personal preference….This implied that 'objective' knowledge could not really inform moral positions. If 'what ought to be' should not be confused with 'what is,' then perhaps 'what is' might have no bearing on 'what out to be.' (Reuben)

---

[1] David Marr and Rudy Martin, "M & M Manifesto II: The Current Crisis," as quoted in Sam Schrager's Five-Year Review essay, "The Liberal Arts at Evergreen." 2006.

The history of American higher education can be read as the gradual diminishment of ethical concerns and the rise of rationalism and managerialism. In other words, educators, scholars and political leaders have insisted that knowledge had to count for something and be managed.

Reuben argues that the scope of inquiry in colleges and universities was broader in the past. In addition to acquiring knowledge, scholars and teachers did so in an essentially moral context. "Moral," for Reuben, is not a fixed morality but rather an assumption of value and meaning embedded in all knowledge: What did the knowledge mean? What direction might it point to for further individual or community action? Why did it matter?

Many are calling for a restoration of such questions today. There is a growing discourse among educators working to restore our earlier relationship between education and life in a democratic society. This discourse is fueled by persistent bureaucratization of colleges and universities, the diminishment of democratic practices, and the appalling role, for many, of our country in the world today. It is also fueled by concern about the scope and quality of learning achieved by college graduates. An overemphasis, as has happened in the twentieth century, on the objectification of knowledge and its pragmatic application has limited the complexity and depth of inquiry and learning attempted in many colleges.[2]

I believe that to restore ethical practices and values requires processes of *public*[3] deliberation to determine shared values and priorities, the *ethos* of a community or organization, that can support a radical reconsideration of knowledge. The use of "radical" is meant to point to the roots of knowledge and the roots, the ethos, of a *college* - those faculty and staff who collectively determine the substance and experience of teaching and learning. "Radical academics" are those who strive for such a curriculum that is focused on both current knowledge in an area along with the deeper "radical" origins and historical transformations of that knowledge, and who seek working relationships and practices that provide the organization practical support for such teaching and learning.

I want to propose that we restore a context of meaningfulness (what Meiklejohn referred to as *moral)* in our teaching and scholarship, and a realignment of our administrative practices with the social and moral values we share. A recommitment to being an interdisciplinary and liberal arts college must begin with a realignment of structures and practices within the college, and a curricular transformation that encompasses ethical and moral concerns.

Reuben's historical study makes clear that American colleges have had strong ethical and moral centers. Intellectual inquiry until the early twentieth century assumed integration to knowledge and did not separate the pursuit of knowledge from questions of *right* or *good* or *meaning.* (Reuben, 1996) It was unthinkable to treat knowledge as a phenomenon distinct from the act of inquiry or to set aside values inherent to that knowledge. The process of separating knowledge from its source and values has been a modern phenomenon and one related more to the changed <u>function</u> of knowledge and the deeply embedded <u>relations of power</u> (especially by dominant political and economic forces) involved in its creation than to its nature[4]. This historic process has led to what Bruno Latour calls "centers of calculation."[5]

---

[2] See Elizabeth Minnich, "Teaching Thinking." Change

[3] I am using *public* as defined by C, Wright Mills and quoted on page 6 of this essay.

[4] Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1.*

[5] Bruno Latour, *Science in Action.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987.

Knowledge has become the product of schooling, and schools and colleges are deeply entangled in the dominant institutional infrastructure of American society (see Spring and Mills). Most scholars today recognize the role knowledge plays in the perpetuation of college curricula, academic departments and the justification required by government, and business organizations and practices. Knowledge fills many functions and has become vital to maintain the identities and justification for most social and political institutions.

When educators today reference political and social values they often sound despairing or cynical. They recognize that an appeal to ethics is often assumed to be rhetorical, taken as unreal and "magical" thinking in our bottom-line and pragmatic society. This is not to say the speakers don't believe in what they say but it is to suggest that there is little confidence or conviction that such values will be supported. Most educational activists must strike a balance between promoting and articulating change, and remaining skeptical of the efficacy of their efforts.

There are good reasons for such skepticism. Michael Katz wrote in the early 1970s[6] that American education has a long history of promoting change through curricular reforms that have had no effect on society, what he refers to as the *illusion of educational change*. Rather he finds schools' underlying hidden curricula have remained in synch with and supportive of the larger economic and political structures (see also Bowles and Gintis, 1976). A reform effort, understood in this way, is what Raymond Williams calls *an idea* – a concept, a thought, misconstrued as reality and with the cultural function of masking contradiction. It is the persistence, the tenacity, of contradiction that Katz finds to be the most consistent reality of American education. Any educational alternative that explicitly opposes standard practices is especially vulnerable to this tendency toward contradiction.

There are many educational organizations and professional associations whose mission and efforts are directed toward correcting social problems.[7] It is important to understand these programs as both sincere and well-intentioned efforts, and as ongoing evidence of the longstanding contradiction Katz finds in American education: educationists have promoted and implemented insightful and relevant social change efforts (in both curricula and learning practices) in spite of the lack of substantive changes in the society as a whole. For example, in spite of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that banned racial segregation in schools, segregation through tracking and other institutional mechanisms is as pronounced as ever.[8] Members of colleges, like the broader group of citizens, have accommodated such contradictions with a mental shrug that expresses a sense of futility and powerlessness.

More than contradiction, though, is at stake. Viewing contradiction through Foucault's understanding of organizations, the dynamics by which members of organizations accommodate contradiction can deepen the very practices they oppose. Assessment is a good example of this dynamic. Legislators and business leaders have called for greater accountability in colleges and universities. They have asked for measures of learning that demonstrate outcomes of institutional productivity and efficiency. In the face of this external pressure, teachers and educationalists, in

---

[6] Michael Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy, and Schools: The Illusion of Educational Change in America.* 1971

[7] Examples of projects conducted by such professional higher education organizations as the Carnegie Foundation, American Association of Colleges and Universities and the late American Association of Higher Education have included The Democracy Project, Civic Engagement, Equity and Diversity, and Teaching for Social Justice.

[8] Peter Irons, *Jim Crow's Children: The Broken Promise of the Brown Decision.* New York: Viking Press, 2002

an attempt to circumvent or soften this demand, have often succeeded in refocusing assessment in more attractive ways by appealing to sentiments of student responsibility, student-centered learning and engagement. While reformers have worked effectively to broaden the goals and reasoning behind assessment, those efforts have also led in many cases to a strengthening of administrative authority and control. In Foucaultian terms, assessment (as a traditional or reform practice) is proceeding as a modern *panopticon*[9], a practice of surveillance of both teachers and students. This process, coupled with pressure for increased rationalistic and fragmented curriculum, will encourage training rather than education, and solidify authority already existing in traditional administrative structures.

It needn't be this way, though. But in order to conduct assessment in an alternative way the process must be securely rooted in the full complexities of learning using measures and approaches that do not subvert either the knowledge or values of the college.[10] To do this work at any current college requires a deeply integrated association of leadership, institutional research and teaching. Needless to say, such integration is the very thing lost through the fragmentation and contradictions of modern organizations and college. The foundation of any effective and integrated organizational change effort must be approached from the "ground up," arising out of members' agreement of the values promoted. This foundation, the agreed upon values of members, is the "ethos" of the organization and is the dynamic core of an ethical organization, the only kind of organization likely to succeed in promoting *radical academics*.

Organizing from the Ground Up: Ethos of the members of a college

Ethos, like the broader concept of *culture*, refers to the way of life[11] and animating values, of a group of people – life as it is lived "on the ground." All peoples establish the values or mores that reflect their common and grounded judgment about the nature of a "good life." It is never a question of whether group members share values; the question today is what place or influence those values are allowed to play in the lives of members.

It is a truism of our time that most people mirror the same fragmentation in their personal lives, with values separated from day-to-day decisions, as is present throughout society and organizations. A key step for emergent organizations is to draw out the values of its members and deliberate in a way to find essential shared values, the ethos of that organization.

I assume that members of a college or organization, *if allowed to freely establish common values and practices without the influence of social inequities or organizational hierarchy*, will find their common values, their community ethos. This is a grass roots approach that is based on broad deliberation and "emergent" structures and practices (e.g. our current Governance Group model). While less efficient, in terms of time and conformance with accepted organizational models, it is the most powerful approach for community organizing because values are achieved through the practices inherent to those values and goals. This reflects more than simple coherence; it means that members of an organization, as they work toward their goals, can call upon their deeply personal, social and cognitive understanding. This leads to a vastly more complex understanding and seeds in the members of a group genuine authority and ability to think well together.

---

[9] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*

[10] Please see upcoming essay by Laura Coghlan

[11] "Way of life" is a much more powerful goal than "identity."

When a college can organize itself so that structures and practices emerge from the lives of its members, it can be assured that their values - the common ethos - matter to its members and are already rooted in their lives. If members of a college can step out of their stratified and, for some, privileged positions and publicly formulate an ethos – those values and practices that <u>all will enjoy equally</u> – they will be compelled toward values of justice, equity and respect. For some, such a strategy in a modern organization would be seen as sheer madness – leading to inefficiency and chaos. What is most at stake is not effectiveness but authority and democratic concerns. An emergent model is not swayed by rationalist justification but the merits of values, meaning and commitment.

Unmasking organizational culture

Language – as text, symbols and verbal expression – is the currency in which organizational contradictions are assembled. There is an eerie, ostrich-like way in which we as college faculty and administrators conduct our work exclusively in the sphere of language, implicitly agreeing with one another that our language has agency. Words become good enough because, in fact, our public sphere of interaction has shrunk to the most minimal engagement with language – ideas and images systematically isolated from meaningful consideration or a *way of life* guided by those ideas. Such language practices are one reason we get entangled in contradiction with much stronger governmental and business forces.

Such contradiction, pervasive in our society, is the result of many historical forces: a pervasive misunderstanding by members of colleges that curricular and organizational structures and practices are neutral; a deep entanglement of college curricula and practices with other controlling institutions in society; and an assumption of agency and autonomy by members of colleges. This last is what Katz meant by "illusion of educational change" and what others refer to as the "myth of education." These forces collectively shape the consciousness of modern educators and over time function to solidify work conditions and philosophical justifications for our work.

The dominant elements at play in the organizational culture of colleges – acceptance of traditional organizational practices and structures, assumptions of the efficacy of education, deep interlocking relations with national and international networks of power - shape our reality and will. While we can recognize some of these dominant elements, others are obscure. No single college or other organization can rupture or break out of this nest of institutional relations and ideology. That does not mean, though, that members of colleges must be passive. Unmasking the forces shaping contemporary colleges along with having an organizational culture anchored in the deeply held values and goals of its members makes it possible for members of colleges to <u>resist,</u> to stay in tension with those external relations in order to sustain alternative practices and structures.

For those colleges that attempt to <u>resist</u> dominant forces, particularly those colleges that want to promote democratic values and freedom of thought, they must create practices and structures that are coherent with and support those values. Philip Selznick writes in *The Moral Commonwealth*, "Institutions embody values, but they can do so only as operative systems or going concerns. The trouble is that what is good for the operative system does not necessarily serve the standards or ideas the institution is supposed to uphold. Therefore institutional values are always at risk…A major function of the moral order [within an organization] is to preserve inherently precarious values against ruinous competition from the cheap, the easy, the cost-effective, and the urgent." Almost all colleges today, in an effort to accommodate the contradiction between their mission and organizational practices, have let these dimensions

separate developing a stratified, rather than interactive, existence where the language of pedagogy masks contradictory structures and practices.

For educational institutions to have any effective and sustained impact on public values and social priorities, they must embed public values in their own organizational practices and structures, and in the experience, cognitive and social, of learning about the nature, complexities and significance of those values. This is more than a rhetorical position. It is only when those who attempt change know, by unmasking dominant political forces and by reflection on their own experience, the full range of intellectual, emotive and political dimensions of the intended change that they can help develop the understanding, skills and personal qualities to pursue and sustain alternative practices. This requires administrative practices that <u>actively</u> resist fragmentation in structure and operations.

Paulo Freire has had a profound influence on educators worldwide with his insight that people can unearth contradictions and oppression in the relations of power in which they live by learning to problematize and "re-read" their lives and the conditions that shape their lives. His literacy program succeeded when people could take a "second look" at their lives and penetrate beneath the surface to find the biases and inequities shaping it. In other words, Freire provided a way for people to untangle the serious contradictions in their lives by reclaiming core community values - their ethos - and identifying the counter values they had adopted or were forced to accept that put them in a conflicted relationship with themselves. That task, to rediscover ones ethos, is to unearth the ethical foundation of a community. For Freire, such a process requires people to unmask the dense social and political conflicts within which they live and then create the understanding and practices necessary for long lasting communal agency and authority. Freire urges communities, educators in particular, to strive toward what he calls *conscienzation,* a critical cognitive awareness of the relationship between day-to-day *knowledge* and relations of power. The cognitive transformation necessary to fully understand the dominant and abstract dimensions of power and consciousness is rigorous. Without a deep cognitive advance, learning that is well suited as a goal of higher education, we risk a simple inversion of injustices; the source of that inversion, according to Freire, is a "pedagogy of oppression."

Fredrik Barth's "anthropology of knowledge" offers a complementary framework with Freire.[12] Barth asserts there are three elements to *knowledge* – the substantive content, the symbolic representation of it, and the social relations that sustain it. These three elements span and clarify the relationship between epistemological and organizational dimensions of "knowledge." He writes:

> I see three faces or aspects of knowledge that can be analytically distinguished. First, any tradition of knowledge contains a corpus of substantive assertions and ideas about aspects of the world. Secondly, it must be instantiated and communicated in one or several media as a series of partial representations in the form of words, concrete symbols, pointing gestures, actions. And thirdly, it will be distributed, communicated, employed and transmitted within a series of instituted social relations. These three faces of knowledge are interconnected. p.3

And further,

> [My] thesis is that these three faces of knowledge appear together precisely in the particulars of action in every event of the application of knowledge…Their mutual

---

[12] Fredrik Barth. "The Anthropology of Knowledge," *Current Anthropology,*, Vol 43, Issue 1, February 2002.

determination takes place at those specific moments when a particular item of substantive knowledge is cast in a particular communication medium and applied in action by an actor positioned in a particular social organization: their systematic interdependence arises by virtue of the constraints in *realization* that these three aspects impose on each other in the context of every particular application.. p. 3

Barth goes on to emphasize that these three variables must be understood as involved constantly in "processes of mutual determination." In being able to recognize these variables, and think freshly about "knowledge," he cautions academics:

> It is important not to be too clever and willing pupils of established Western scholarship, lest we squander the opportunity for a fresh perspective that can arise from the relatively unexplored world of ethnography. As academics, we have been marinated in Western philosophical discourse to the point where we might too readily accept its current parochialisms as universal premises.

Later in the essay I will suggest ethnography as a form of inquiry that can help educators recognize the multiple dimensions of knowledge as laid out by Barth.

A college organized as Freire and Barth suggest would manifest a two-way commitment: structurally in organizational and social practices, and epistemologically in the nature of inquiry, knowledge and skills (the curriculum). Such a college would be known by its organizational practices and behavior, and its members' engagement in what I am calling "radical academics" – inquiry that seeks the root, the originating sources (empirical, cultural, psychological) of what becomes knowledge. These two major dimensions of colleges are not separate and parallel but rather interactive and dialectical. They must be.

<div align="center">

Radical Academics
Ethical Structures and Practices

</div>

The ethos of a group can only emerge through face-to-face interactions and deliberations of its members**.** C. Wright Mills, writing in *Power Elite*, uses *public* to designate those groups or communities that interact face-to-face, and the qualities of that interaction that actually support emergence of shared,values, principles and common ethos. For Mills, *public* is defined in the following way**:**

> In a public, as we may understand the term, (1) virtually as many people express opinions as receive them. (2) Public communications are so organized that there is a chance immediately and effectively to answer back any opinion expressed in public. Opinion formed by such discussion (3) readily finds an outlet in effective action, even against – if necessary – the prevailing system of authority. And (4) authoritative institutions do not penetrate the public, which is thus more or less autonomous in its operations. When these conditions prevail, we have the working model of a community of publics, and this model fits closely the several assumptions of classic democratic theory. (Mills, 1959, p.)

Mills' idea of a *public*, as organization and as practice, directs our attention as members of organizations considering changes to how the members of the college should interact, appropriate structures for the organization of work and authority, and processes for making decisions about the conditions of our common work lives. He offers us a model of emergent practice where members of an organization will take the concerns and priorities of its members seriously and reach decisions based on the views of its members.

Mills offers us a challenging, even daunting possibility. His framework makes clear that deliberation and emergent organizational practices are the source of authority necessary to counter the press of dominant ideology and practices. It is the authority essential to determine and then practice the expressed ethos of that group.

While deliberation can be valued for its own end, for a public educational institution and one that has a commitment (rhetorically or actually) to serve the public good, deliberation should be the means by which we find common ground, and recognize and explore the "precious, intangible values" at the core of knowledge and learning. Deliberation, because it is an explicit interactive practice, allows us as members of a college to place ourselves in a *relationship* with our structures and the outcomes of those structures – curriculum, policy, etc. Awareness of the elements of organizational and epistemological relationships reminds us that we created our structures, can change them and that the function of structure is to support good teaching and learning (the alternative is that structures take on an identity and become self-justifying).

A *public,* through deliberation, can exercise both judgment and authority. Members of a college can influence not only organizational structures and values through deliberation but also establish an epistemological relationship between the faculty and the curriculum. This is especially critical for faculty members who teach in liberal arts colleges and with a preference for interdisciplinary teaching and learning. Both pedagogical commitments – liberal arts and interdisciplinary teaching and learning - require a radical reconsideration of the traditions and structures of disciplines and the reuniting of knowledge and the "social good," a key principle of democratic and socially just practice.

Philip Selznick, in *The Moral Commonwealth,* builds on the work of Mills and other social theorists to argue for the restoration of ethical - what he prefers to call moral - organizations. Underlying his writing is the recognition that values and ethical considerations can only survive with appropriate structures and practices. In the absence of such structures, organizations develop corrupting contradictions. He writes,

> Ideals go quickly by the board when the compelling realities of organizational life are permitted to run their natural course. The imperatives of organization are sometimes ennobling…but they can also corrupt and demoralize…[there is] a process at work wherever administrative and economic necessities – budget, personnel, productivity, cost, competition – override concern for personal and institutional integrity. P. 248

He goes on to write, "Organizations of many kinds are notoriously prone to turn moral persons into immoral agents," Selznick writes. What must members of an organization do to retain principles and values? What would distinguish an ethical college from any other institution?

An ethical organization, one rooted in the *ethos* of its members, is based in a very dynamic and interactive relationship between organizational structures (prescribed practices, traditions, policies) and the ethical values and competence of participants of that organization. Such an organization is not achieved simply, though, by summing the qualities of the members. All organizations are deeply intertwined with a whole host of other public and private organizations, and are inevitably drawn toward those external and normative expectations and practices, if for no other reason than expediency. An ethical organization is possible when the ethical concerns of its members are supported by organizational structures and practices that can withstand the pull of those external forces.

<u>Radical Academics</u>
Re-integration of knowledge and inquiry

The history of the university indicates that the problem of morality is an epistemological one. The upheaval of the 1960s has forced scholars to reconsider ideas about knowledge…However, this scholarship has largely explored one part of the sixties' critique – elaborating on the hypocrisy and futility of claims of neutrality. There has been little work that explores the other side of the critique – how to engage scholarship in moral concerns.(Reuben, 2000, 50)

The radical pursuit of knowledge is open – to the unanticipated, to surprise and to second thoughts. John Dewey argued that knowledge (and its meaning) is only truly known in the <u>experience</u> (personal or organizational) of that idea. In other words, if preparation *for life in a just society* is the goal of education then the ability to achieve it rests not only on a conceptual and historical understanding of *justice* but also an approach to learning through which that understanding of *justice* is experienced. For Dewey, learning was the artful melding of ideas and experience. Paulo Freire understood a similar necessity for learning in the relationship he found between dialogue and praxis. (Freire) In order to understand <u>what</u> students are actually learning, faculty members would have to be able to search for and see the many conditions that shape learning.

Thomas Kuhn described education as most experience it, as simply adding details and examples to already acquired fundamental knowledge (what he calls in the history of science "redoing science"). Much of higher education today reaffirms, and deepens, what we already <u>know</u> and puts aside what we have experienced; it functions as a process of reconfirming the knowledge upon which so many other structures and practices depend – scientific labs, professional organizations, disciplinary associations, priorities for funding, etc

To explore the nature of knowledge and allow questioning of current curricula faculty would have to believe that social relationships "fix" or reify knowledge. "Knowledge" has a history formulated within academic and research communities; as such, all knowledge must pass the test of cultural relevance and established authority. Our most critical knowledge, therefore, is humanly constructed and is embedded in a web of formal and informal structures and traditions.

If faculty accept this portrayal of the nature of knowledge and learning, it would make what we "know" a source of ongoing and lively conversation. But it isn't. Instead, the cultural dynamics of knowledge have spawned Kuhnian paradigms – a wide and entangling array of assumptions, professional practices, departmental structures, line item budgets, specialized agencies for accountability, accreditation policies, etc. – that hold knowledge static. Not all of that activity is bad; current research into AIDS, environmental contributions to autism and the matriarch cal foundation of Christianity are all making vital contributions to modern life. But there is more bad scholarship than good; more teaching that limits thinking than opens it up. As college faculty we have no common understanding of the nature of knowledge which would allow fruitful cross disciplinary discussions about our respective scholarship and applied work, and no standard by which to argue that some scholarship and teaching is <u>better</u> than others.

Radical academics seek to understand current knowledge and, simultaneously, the cultural and political forces sustaining that knowledge. It is only with such "double vision" that we can *know* the nature (the radical roots) of knowledge. It is only at this level of understanding that educators can simultaneously distinguish "knowledge" as both current state of understanding and the historical and current forces shaping that knowledge. Double vision

allows educators to recognize the interaction of current knowledge with political and social forces.

Using the "anthropology of knowledge" as a frame, ethnography becomes a relevant process of inquiry for educators, scholars and administrators.. This anthropological methodology rests on the practice of "participant observation," and can serve as a powerful pedagogical practice to understand knowledge as members of a group inquire into it and, alternately, create perspectives from which to question the values and assumptions in that knowledge. Ethnography can help unmask knowledge – its origin, the values embedded in it, the forces that explain its persistence, and the effect it has on those who adhere to it. Knowledge, in this sense, is recognized as both the empirical evidence of what a people know (their knowledge) and believe (their ethos), and as cultural artifact that must be understood in its historical and cultural context.

How would ethnography actually affect approaches to teaching? First, an understanding of learning, one that revealed the relationship between the knowledge learned and the process by which it was learned would reveal the social and cognitive dynamics of knowledge. Much of western education continues to envision learning as an individual and cognitive experience. In a society so deeply individualistic it is not surprising that our views on learning are framed in this way, irrespective of all the evidence to the contrary. Educators must be able to recognize knowledge making as an <u>interpretive</u> process (conducted with others and in relationship to tradition) inclusive of both empirical and meaning-making cognitive strategies. Such an understanding would effect not only our assumptions about current knowledge but inform approaches to teaching and learning, particularly encourage interaction and inquiry-based activities.

Second, college curricula must expand, in all departments and fields of study, to account for the origins of disciplines, the <u>nature</u> of knowledge. Rather than see the history of different fields as tangents or parallel interests, as seems to have happened with the history and philosophy of science in science education, those origins and the historical forces that transformed fields over time can be placed back – at the center – of learning and teaching. This would not only make clear that knowledge is constructed but also reveal the values and biases shaping the direction of "knowledge making" in different areas of study. To include such an emphasis would *radically* challenge the authority of disciplines, and make clear the necessity of interdisciplinary study.

The "reintegration of knowledge," as my colleague Sam Schrager argues[13], would promote the reassemblage of understanding and allow for more forceful learning. He writes, "As the nub for a definition of common purpose, the renewal of knowledge has the great virtue of inclusiveness." There is no special organizational formula for such a reassemblage or renewal of knowledge. Some colleges offer interdisciplinary and integrated studies, where teams of faculty members teach together or in tandem to bridge fields of study. While such structures and practices are useful, individual faculty members can promote such learning by the theme, questions and points of view within their classes.

Third, as Reuben points out, it is time for college faculty to face the many issues of value and ethics that are inextricably tied up with what is learned and how it is learned. Most modern academics are unfamiliar with the history of American higher education, especially the waning of ethical considerations from college curricula. Many tend to be well-behaved academics who

---

[13] Sam Schrager, "The Liberal Arts At Evergreen." Five-Year Review Essay, Winter 2006. The Evergreen State College.

accept the view that knowledge is neutral or objective (capable of passing standards of evidence in different fields of study) and that matters of morality or ethics are best studied in appropriate fields like philosophy and religion. The current "division of labor" manifest in disciplines has left little opportunity to bring matters of meaning and value into what is taught and learned.

By the very nature of ethics and morality, any such inquiry must be integrative and interactive for both teachers and students. Faculty members who can collaborate with teaching colleagues in interdisciplinary study are more likely to inquire more deeply and achieve a more powerful reintegration of knowledge. It is not enough to bring disciplines together, Lego style; disciplinary perspectives must be cognitively re-integrated through lively, uncharted conversation. Roland Barthes sees the academic courage and freedom of thought required for such inquiry:

> Interdisciplinary work is not a peaceful operation: it begins *effectively* when the solidarity of the old disciplines breaks down… to the benefits of a new object and a new language, neither of which is in the domain of those branches of knowledge that one calmly sought to confront.

Eduardo Galeano writes in *The Book of Embraces* about the experience of *sentipensante:*

> From the moment we enter school… education chops us into pieces: it teaches us to divorce soul from body and mind from heart. The fishermen of the Colombian coast must be learned doctors of ethics and morality, for they invented the word "sentipensante," feeling-thinking, to define the language that speaks the truth.

Such thoughts invite much more complex thinking for faculty members, asking us to simultaneously consider the actual nature of knowledge and experience, the cognitive experiences required to understand knowledge, and the ethical principles and experiences embedded in that knowledge and understanding. Rather than addressing these conditions sequentially (e.g. reserving the final week of class for discussion of values) a faculty member committed to promoting ethical practices and inquiry would be drawn to strategies that integrate knowledge, experience, critical cognition and ethical issues.