



Transdisciplinarity, Self-Help and the Creation of Learning Communities

Disiplinlerarası Eğitim Kendi Kendine Yardım ve Öğrenme Toplulukları Oluşturma

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Abstract

Through a case-study of a course taught in the Department of American Literature at Başkent University, Ankara, this article argues that it is possible to acquire transdisciplinary learning based on the acquisition of abilities rather than knowledge. To achieve this, we need to rethink the way curricula are planned, as well as how courses are taught; rather than relying on the traditional hierarchical educator/ learner model, we ought to think more about collaborative learning, in which educators and learners alike are responsible for planning, teaching and evaluating a course. In transdisciplinary learning, various kinds of material can be brought in; this article shows how self-help literature was used to shape educators' and learners' judgments on American literary texts, as well as develop their shared sense of self-confidence to express themselves. While the case-study restricts itself to one course, the article suggests that this kind of model could be introduced in any program of study, irrespective of discipline.

Keywords: transdisciplinarity, learning community, collaboration, self-belief, reflection.

Öz

Ankara'da Başkent Üniversitesi Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı Bölümünde okutulan bir ders kapsamında yapılan bir durum çalışması aracılığıyla, bu makalede bilgi yerine becerilerin edinilmesine bağlı olarak disiplinlerarası öğrenmenin de mümkün olduğu tartışılmaktadır. Bunu gerçekleştirmek için, geleneksel hiyerarşik öğretmen-öğrenci modeline kullanmadan, müfredatı planlama ve derslerin öğretilme şeklinin yeniden gözden geçirilmesi gerekmektedir. Ayrıca, dersin planlama, öğretme ve değerlendirme aşamalarında öğretmenlerin öğrencilerle işbirliği içinde oldukları bir öğrenme üzerine durulması gerekmektedir. Disiplinlerarası öğrenmede çeşitli materyaller kullanılmaktadır. Bu makalede, kendi kendine yardım literatürünün öğretmenlerin ve öğrencilerinin Amerikan edebî metinleri ile ilgili yargılarını şekillendirmede nasıl kullanıldığı ve kendilerini ifade etmedeki ortak öz güven duygusunun nasıl geliştirileceği anlatılmaktadır. Bu durum çalışması yalnızca bir dersle sınırlı olsa da, bu makalede, böyle bir modelin alana bakılmaksızın her eğitim programında kullanılabileceği öne sürülmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Disiplinlerarası eğitim, öğrenme toplulukları, işbirliği, kendi kendine yardım, yansıtma

The inspiration for this article came from a recent visit to İstanbul Modern art gallery, when I espied a painting in the new permanent exhibition claiming to be the product of a multidisciplinary way of thinking. The artist's identity is not significant; what matters more is to consider the description of "multidisciplinarity" underneath the work:

Artists turned their attention to sociology, philosophy, pop culture and technology, transcending a language that was purely aesthetic and limited [...] The issues being probed were sub-identity, ethnic origin, and whether individual physical differences should have any place or meaning in a democracy. Debate centered on such matters as the dependence of life on identity [...] on how the politics of identity/ difference were perceived within the confines of the state, and how efforts were made to control them (Multidisciplinarity 2014).

On this view multidisciplinary provides a means by which creative artists can conduct in-depth investigations into the relationship between individuals and society, as well as analyzing the politics of difference. According to the İstanbul Modern management, this form of inquiry seems especially suitable for a city like İstanbul, which not only straddles two continents but has a long history of immigration – either by choice or by necessity. In a catalog celebrating two decades of the International İstanbul Biennial, Vassaf Kortan describes the city thus: "[It] knows no physical boundaries [...] It spirals back into its own history [...] it knows no borders, it is "manic" because it is beyond reason [...] [it] does not have a center, it merely has areas with varying intensities of noise. Its center is the periphery, its periphery the center" (2007, p. 100). A city without borders, wherein cultures thrive and interact and individuals can perpetually redefine themselves in a context transcending "reason" and "sanity" – this framework sounds highly suitable for any form of transformative education, in which educators and learners can discover something about themselves as well as the worlds they inhabit, and subsequently utilize that experience to reshape their lives.

In the past I have been involved in numerous attempts to introduce transformative learning into different curricula in Turkey. In the mid-Nineties I taught British Studies in the Department of English Language and Literature at Hacettepe University, Ankara, and tried to formulate a collaborative approach to learning. Through this kind of strategy learners would be able to conduct cross-cultural comparisons between their own cultures and the target cultures they were exposed to through readings, movies and other texts. The theory seemed viable enough, but in practice the curriculum (as well as the modes of teaching and learning) proved too educator-focused. The binary opposition separating the educator from the learners prevented us from reflecting on our lives and using that reflection as the basis for personal and intellectual growth (Raw, 1996, pp. 133-47). In 2004 I collaborated on an adaptation of the American dramatist Clifford Odets' play *Waiting for Lefty* (1937), with the action transposed to contemporary Ankara. I collaborated with learners from the Department of American Culture and Literature, Başkent University in the processes of script-writing, staging and rehearsals (I even had a small speaking part at the beginning). Although the production worked well in historical terms, creating the kind of empathy that draws audiences into the furnace of anger, idealism and resistance characteristic of Odets' world, I do not think there was any appreciable transformation amongst the learners as a result of the experience (Raw, 2004, p. 125). They might have acquired more self-confidence, but did not really have much opportunity to learn about themselves. Perhaps more time should have been allotted to reflection at the end of the project.

Most recently I co-authored a book with educationalist Tony Gurr that placed reflection at the center of the learning experience. Not only did we encourage learners to develop self-awareness, but we wanted educators to talk about their own experiences, not just with fellow-educators, but with learners as well as a means to create "new areas of research: metacognition increases abilities [...] The more opportunities there are to practice this type of thinking, the better prepared learners and teachers will be for their future careers" (Raw and Gurr, 2013, p.73).

In Spring 2014 I had one of those pedagogic experiences that might be justifiably described as transformative. In the previous autumn I had a recurrence of an illness that required six weeks of radiation therapy, leaving me severely vocally impaired. Although pronounced medically fit for work, I approached the prospect of teaching Ethnic Literature in the Department of American Culture and Literature at Başkent University with considerable trepidation; for the first time in my career as an educator, I doubted whether I had the capacity to participate in an effective learning experience. In an attempt to overcome my fears, I turned to the self-help book *Overcoming Anxiety, Stress and Panic*, which proposes a three-stage framework for problem-solving: (1) to reflect on one's behavior (is there anything you keep doing that causes the problem?); (2) to concentrate on one's thinking (is your problem really such an issue?); and (3) to turn to others to develop strategies for support (can someone else help you if you can't tackle the problem on your

own?) (Williams, 2012, p. 141). I realized that the Ethnic Literature course could be planned with the following ideas in mind: if I set aside the (erroneous) belief that I had to talk all the time in class, and let learners speak for themselves in whatever language they felt comfortable with (English or Turkish), then I could perhaps come to terms with insecurities about my voice. Second, if I concentrated less on what was being learned, and more on how to develop understanding, then maybe I could revise my own thinking about myself and my status in the learning encounter. Thirdly, if I could encourage learners to support me in planning the syllabus, negotiating the methods of assessment, and determining how they might learn, then perhaps I might recover my self-esteem.

As I reflected further, I began to understand how this approach to learning might provide the impetus for the kind of transformative experiences described by the İstanbul Modern curators. The boundaries between educator and learner would be rethought; the course would help both the learners and myself reflect on our identities in relation to the societies we inhabited; while the curriculum might be considered “manic” on “unreasonable” in its attempts to challenge the conventions dictating the majority of learning encounters in Turkish higher education institutions (which are predominantly educator-centered, with learners mostly required to reproduce a predetermined amount of information contained in the syllabus in exams). With invaluable contributions from the four learners involved (Merve Tutka, Tevfik Can Babacan, Serkan Korkmaz and Esra Akçay), this article will discuss how the Ethnic Literature course was planned and conducted, placing particular emphasis on whether it managed to transform the lives of those involved. Some of the issues discussed might seem very personal, but one of the course’s principal objectives was to try and dissolve the boundaries separating “personal” from “objective” material in an attempt to discover new learning strategies. In a concluding piece, I suggest that any form of interpersonal as well as educational exchange, whether taking place in the classroom, laboratory, art-gallery or therapist’s consulting-room, should not only guide individuals towards solving their own problems in an atmosphere of mutual support, but should point the way towards the future development of everyone involved in such exchanges. That is what constitutes true learning.

As with most literature courses in Başkent as well as elsewhere, the Ethnic Literature course had hitherto been text-based, with the syllabus entirely determined by the educator, who subsequently assumed total control over the learning agenda. This seems an appropriate model for the kind of education in the contemporary university – not just in Turkey but worldwide – wherein “the social relations [...] between the teacher and the student – are forgotten. Instead of being about the personal and intellectual transformation of the individual, higher education has become an investment in human capital [...] universities are becoming factories for the mass production of graduates” (Pearce and Tan, 2013, p.140). I decided that the aims and objectives as well as the syllabus for my course would be planned collaboratively. From the beginning of our discussions it was evident that Ethnic Literature had to involve something more than studying American identities; this meant extending our focus in an attempt to develop “new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference” as an alternative to “[t]he old patterns” which “still condemn us to cosmetically altered repetitions of the same old exchanges, the same old guilt, hatred, recrimination, lamentation, and suspicion” (Lorde, 1984, p. 295). We wanted to examine what the process of relating across difference involved, and how members of different cultures learn (or do not learn) to adapt themselves so as to facilitate this communicative process. Maybe considering cultural exchanges in terms of “new” and “old” patterns isn’t particularly helpful; we need to consider them as a series of endlessly renewable patterns, dependent on context. In our Ethnic Literature class, we strove to create the kind of openness that might permit the creation of shifting patterns that might have a bearing on the learners’ – as well as my own – future lives.

We decided to plan the syllabus collaboratively, choosing a variety of texts – whether literary, cinematic or otherwise. While these texts would be drawn from American cultures past and present, we looked at them comparatively: what did the experience of reading or viewing them tell us about our own lives? This approach was very different to that I adopted at Hacettepe University a decade and half ago. Back then the emphasis was on the target culture, and how learner exposure to its products could refine their understanding of their home cultures. The Ethnic Literature course was planned on the assumption that everyone in our group, whether Turkish or English, read the texts differently; by evaluating and reflecting on such differences, we would learn how to develop a variety of communicative strategies across cultures as well as acquiring a renewed belief in the capacity of literature (and other media) to stimulate curiosity about the world and those who populate it. This strategy resembled that adopted by Literature for Life groups worldwide, which use the experience of reading, watching and talking about texts to stimulate “a desire for more education, which supports future employment [...] all of which supports the [...] community” (Kenny, 2014).

The first texts we selected were Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853), and Steve McQueen's Oscar-winning adaptation of the same name (2013). Although the story seems straightforward enough, our discussions raised some interesting questions: in a context governed by slavery, could there be such a person as a "free" African American? To what extent is Solomon simply accepting the societal patterns of dominant white culture at the beginning of the novel, rather than pursuing his own lifestyle? And at the end, following his fateful encounter with the Canadian Bass, does he rely on the intervention of his white friends to secure his release from slavery? McQueen's adaptation shows Northup (Chiwetel Ejofor) acquiring a strong sense of self-reliance during his long period of enslavement, but still does not deal adequately with the ending, which largely follows the source-text. Eventually we concluded that self-determination is well-nigh impossible for members of ethnic minorities, especially when they are treated as second class citizens. The white viewed them as potentially subversive: give the African American equal rights and "society" as a whole might fall apart. This was the dominant ideology in the United States until well into the Seventies, and still prevails in some areas today. Just before our course commenced, CNN described in a report dated February 15, 2014 the results of the trial of Michael Dunn, a 47-year-old white man accused of killing African American teenager Jordan Davis in Florida. Dunn was acquitted of first degree murder, prompting one prominent lawyer to comment: "As black males [...] in America [...] it is almost as if your life is less valuable. The rules are different" (Sanchez, 2014). The phrase "the rules are different" is highly significant here, suggesting that one of the ways to sustain white hegemony is to treat others differently' to consciously embrace George Orwell's dictum that "All animals [or other beings] are equal, but some are more equal than others" (Orwell, 2012). The only means to reshape this kind of society is to acquire tolerance; something significant in contemporary Turkey as well as the United States.

The need for tolerance also extends to classroom practice, as a means to reform traditionally unequal constructions of pedagogic practice, in which educators deliver information-based lectures that consciously prevent learners from making interventions. An alternative method of reinforcing educator hegemony is through fact-based exams that require learners to reproduce a certain body of knowledge to secure high grades. In the Ethnic Literature course the rules were altered: learners could not only use whatever language they chose, but they set the agenda for each lesson. As an educator I proposed certain texts to be included on the syllabus, but the decision as to whether they should be studied was a collaborative one. This form of classroom practice not only rendered everyone responsible for their own material, but prompted further reflection on how to create an ideal learning environment. It's not just simply a matter of creating an atmosphere of equality; everyone should acknowledge the presence of difference within a social or educational situation.

The idea of difference was particularly significant to me after my operation. At the beginning of the course I had many unhelpful thoughts; that I would somehow be not as "good" in my pedagogic practice as in the past. Through regular conversations with Merve, Tevfik Can, Serkan and Esra, I understood that I was experiencing the same kind of insecurities that influenced Solomon Northup's behavior towards the whites in *12 Years a Slave*; the learners confided to me that they felt much the same on occasions, especially when confronted with the presumed educator-as-expert. The only way to negotiate such feelings was to conduct a "thought review" (Williams, 2012, p.357) by reflecting on our reactions and considering not only whether we can change them but also change our interpretation of them (Williams, 2012, p. 356). Through this process I understood that my post-operative awareness of difference could be treated positively; my vocal disadvantages gave learners more opportunities to contribute to our discussions, and hence increase their sense of responsibility for their own learning. My status within the classroom altered; I was no longer the "expert" but rather a participant in a series of collaborative exchanges. The learners were not only incredibly supportive as I tried to re-acquaint myself with the academic environment, but their contributions emphasized the sheer range of interpretations available for *12 Years a Slave*. An acknowledgment of difference in terms of classroom practice as well as textual reading conjures up a world of infinite possibility and/or experiment, enabling educators and learners to adapt to shifting situations in their lives. If Solomon had inhabited this kind of environment, then perhaps he might not have endured the indignity of slavery.

Combining literary analysis with self-help techniques designed to overcome feelings of self-doubt within individuals, as well as in their relationship to others, this construction of learning laid the foundations for a course dedicated to maintaining a collaborative environment in which all participated "in meaningful conversations about a variety of topics – not just ethnic literatures, but encompassing issues "that are often of direct concern to the local community. It is just this kind of meaningful *conversation and dialogue* that remain a necessary component [...] [of] problem solving [...] [so] that students [and educators] are able to articulate what they know and how they know it [...] [as well as] further their own understanding" (Berliner and Glass, 2014, p. 328, italics mine).

Another unit in the syllabus focused on the life and work of the actor/singer Paul Robeson (1898-1976), paying special attention to his songs “Ol’ Man River” from the musical *Show Boat* (1927), and “Deep River” from the film *The Proud Valley* (1940), plus the recently published biography by Jordan Goodman. We wanted to find out how and why Robeson was marginalized throughout his career, not only on account of his skin color, but for his political views as well. Although it was never proved that he had any active connection to the American Communist Party, his passport was confiscated, preventing him from traveling abroad for most of the Fifties. At the time of the so-called “Red Scare,” when thousands of liberals were placed in front of HUAC (the House Un-American Activities Committee) and asked point blank whether they were communists or not, Robeson was perceived by the State Department as a security risk. Even his fellow African Americans accused him of “jeopardizing the democratic processes that were giving African Americans the rights they were entitled to” (Goodman, 2013, ch. 4). His only “crime” was giving a speech in praise of the Soviet Union, which was perceived by many in the American government as a deliberate attempt to promote “the interests of a foreign country to the detriment of the United States” (Goodman, 2013, ch. 9). One member of the State Department alleged that Robeson “repeatedly criticized the condition of Negroes in the United States, and always with this [sic] making invidious comparisons between the treatment accorded them in this country and that [...] in the Soviet Union” (Goodman, 2013, ch. 10). Robeson favored no one country over another; he was solely interested in fighting for “the rights of my people [African Americans] who are still second-class citizens in this country” (Goodman, 2013, ch. 11).

Such deliberate misrepresentations are also found in the contemporary educational establishment. We looked at certain familiar stereotypes of learners as “a horde of mindless bodies ‘enslaved’ by their institutional enrolments,” and who remain passive in outlook; or learners as products of late capitalism driven by “an insatiable consumerist desire to cannibalize [...] and treat their education as yet another consumable item” (Kimber, 2013, p. 237). Such representations are essentially colonialist, designed to keep learners in their place as subordinate to their educators and hence “unworthy” of expressing any cogent opinions. The only way to rethink such distinctions is for every member of the learning group to take time to *listen*; in other words, listening without interrupting, without passing judgments and without giving unwanted advice and/or suggestions. The following poem by an anonymous author offers invaluable guidance on how *not* to listen:

When I ask you to listen to me
and you start giving advice
you have not done what I asked.

When I ask you to listen to me
and you begin to tell me why I shouldn’t feel that way
you are trampling on my feelings

When I ask you to listen to me
and you feel you have to do something
to solve my problems,
you have failed me, strange as that may seem.

Listen! All I ask is that you listen
not talk or do – just hear me (Sutton, 2007, p. 308).

Although originally intended for carers looking after those who have tried to harm themselves, this poem offers invaluable suggestions for the classroom: no one should proffer advice unless actively asked to do so. To do otherwise can lead to a reinforcement of the educator/ learner oppositions that prevent rather than encourage communication. Similarly learners should not be told that what they say is “wrong” or “unfocused”; nor do they require guidance on how to “solve” their learning difficulties. I put myself in the learners’ position, [and thereby learned to think more broadly (Williams, 2012, p. 273). On several occasions silence proved an effective strategy, giving more space for the learners to debate the issues raised by Robeson’s life, as well as helping me understand how to listen rather than just *listen*; to try and understand what learners were really saying and hence not trample on their feelings. By doing this, I worked towards establishing a community in which learners would not (however inadvertently) trample on *my* feelings, as I tried to come to terms with my vocal difficulties. Such efforts proved highly therapeutic both psychologically as well as personally, helping me understand the differences of views amongst the four learners as they tried to negotiate the final semester of their undergraduate program.

Another unit in the syllabus was devoted to Richard Wright's novel *Native Son* (1940), plus the two film adaptations dating from 1951 and 1986. Thematically speaking, all three texts developed the issues raised in the Robeson unit, as Wright shows how the central character Bigger Thomas is perceived as an inevitable product of African American society in the pre-Civil Rights era – at least according to the dominant white perspective. Ever since birth he has been told about his destiny, as well as the kind of person he is expected to be. The author James Baldwin once wrote that no African American exists “who does not have his private Bigger Thomas existing in his skull” (Baldwin, 2014). Paul Robeson was expected to behave according to certain stereotypical norms; when he challenged this belief he was immediately branded a subversive, threatening the future of the (white) American way of life.

By comparing the novel with the two film adaptations, we discovered how perceptions had altered over time: the seldom-shown 1951 version was a product of a society riven by fears of the “Red Scare.” Hence it was inevitable that Bigger (Richard Wright) was portrayed as being responsible for his own fate; if he had not committed a crime, then he would not have suffered the treatment meted out to him. Thirty-five years later in the post-Civil Rights era Bigger (Victor Love) is represented as the victim of a racist society; however much anyone endeavors to defend him, he will always be perceived as a “criminal” on account of his ethnicity. Our analysis of the three texts not only re-emphasized the importance of acknowledging difference, but showed how representations change over time and space. This kind of historical awareness is essential in the contemporary classroom in terms of content, as well as understanding how learners learn differently over time. In an age of multiple communication channels – both virtual as well as person-to-person, we need to rethink our understanding of the educator/learner relationship so as to increase the range of potential learning opportunities.

In an attempt to work towards this process of rethinking, I began one class by introducing Homi K. Bhabha's theory of the Third Space. First formulated in *The Location of Culture* (2004), he used it to describe that space where the dominant and the subordinate come together, free of oppression (Bhabha, 2004, pp. 17-19). In educational terms, this connotes a space where learners' cultural capital merges with the content of any given curriculum (Maniotes, 2005, pp. 45-57). Following Bhabha, we looked at the concept in terms of the efforts made by various authors and/or public figures to find various modes of self-expression in unequal societies. Robeson's Third Space was established through his singing, as he delivered protest songs at public concerts attended by all types of music-lovers, irrespective of their skin color. Bigger Thomas' Third Space occupies the realm of the imagination; that part of the human psyche that no one can colonize. Louise Erdrich uses linguistic play and poetic imagination to create a Third Space for religious experience; and by doing so challenges binary oppositions within Christianity, as well as between Christianity and tribal realisms. This technique is evident in her short story “The Shawl,” which first appeared in the *New Yorker*, and had already been studied by the learners working with me (Erdrich, 2001). From my own perspective the experience of reading the piece attests to the power of the individual consciousness that perpetually resists any attempts at classification or colonization. The poet Charles Bernstein expresses the point in his short poem “The Honor of Virtue”:

What I say is what I meant
 & what I saw is what I said
 But neither seen nor spoke
 Is what I think I thought (Bernstein, 2013)

Yet learners could not evaluate the effectiveness of this Third Space until they had forged it for themselves. Hitherto in their undergraduate curriculum they had been encouraged to rely on critical authorities to shape their understanding of American cultures – for example, by using Bhabha as a basis for evaluating “The Shawl.” Despite the undoubted benefits of this methodology in promoting understanding of how individuals respond to the world around them, it still rehearses the established educator/learner relationship; the educator gives learners the theoretical texts and asks them to shape their responses according to the ideas set down in that text. The only way to liberate the learners' minds was to ask them to formulate their own theoretical models as a means to (re)define their relationship to American cultures. Through this strategy they could perhaps appreciate how a work of literature is not just something to be studied on a syllabus, but provides an insight into people's lives. By constructing their own theories, learners would use their experience of reading about and/or discussing these people's lives (in the work of fiction) to transform themselves.

Tevfik Can came up with a complex polysystems theory comprising *deformalism* (“there are multiple meanings that can be understood from a text”); *defamiliarization* (“when you are entering a work of art, you

ignore your background and you become the character you create”); *significan* (“whatever you write as an author or whatever you read is important for someone [else]”); and the concept of the *Fourth*, rather than the Third Space, centering on the conflict between what we are told to do and what we would *like* to do. The resolution of that conflict is entirely in our hands; we can choose to follow others or enjoy “new and exciting experiences” of our own. The Deformalist strategy helps us to define who we are as well as evaluating our shifting relationships to others (Babacan, 2014).

Merve wrote about *ballitation*, which should encourage everyone to face themselves and admit the truth as a basis for self-definition: “When you believe in yourself, trust yourself, and admit your rights and wrongs, there is nothing that can pull you back down.” Through such persuasive strategies “you create your own rules and regulations [of life]” and thereby find our “who you really are.” Sometimes regular interaction with others facilitates this process: “A smile on a child’s face after understanding what I have shown [...] is one step up the ladder for me.” On the other hand this self-confidence may help individuals through bad as well as good times: “[if] I’ve come to like myself, and see beauties within me [...] I can keep climbing up the ladder of life. Keep balliflying!” (Tutka, 2014).

Esra was more preoccupied with *akti*, which concentrates on the capacity of human beings to adopt different roles, protean-like, to cope with life’s vicissitudes. In *12 Years a Slave* Northrup employs this strategy negatively: “Although he could help other slaves, he chose to run away from what was not suitable for him. This can be considered selfish rather than magnanimous behavior.” She also contributed a short story – “A Man With Two Faces” – focusing on the choices faced by every individual between showing “care and love” for others, and self-interest: “As long as I have a home, enough food, and money, love means nothing to me.” The ensuing action analyzed the protagonist’s lack of self-confidence that underpinned his behavior; if he chose to believe in himself as well as others, he could improve himself (Akçay, 2014).

Serkan introduced us to *expectation*, which defined all responses to a given text in terms of an individual’s background and past experience: the responses of one person to a film might be very different from those of their fellow-filmgoers. Such responses perpetually shift – after watching a trailer a person might think “This film looks great,” but might be disappointed once they have seen the complete work. The same principle underlies all social interactions: “people tend to exaggerate what they like [in conversation],” which frequently leads to disillusion among their friends, especially if they have not enjoyed the book/ film/ television program so much. In a world of subjectivities we have to reject the idea that there is something called “an individual’s genuine reaction that he or she decodes” (Korkmaz, 2014).

The most interesting aspect of all four interventions was their emphasis on continual *change*, spanning Can’s idea of the Fourth Space, Merve’s recipe for acquiring self-belief, Esra’s meditation on the relationship between individuals and the communities they inhabit, and Serkan’s discussion of relative judgments. Such changes can be considered transformative insofar as they force everyone to reconsider their lives and how they might be de- or reconstructed for the better. This is not just an abstract process, but something that happens to everyone, whether in fiction or in “real” life (whatever that might signify). Through face-to-face discussion, as well as virtual communication, we understood how our Ethnic Literature course had encouraged us to conduct a “thought review” (to re-invoke Chris Williams’ term); inspired by the texts on our syllabus, we had not only tried to come to terms with *how* we learn as individuals, but had also developed a respect for difference. Tevfik Can, Merve, Esra and Serkan put forward their own theories based on re-reading the material for the course in terms of their own lives, and by doing so acquired the self-confidence to trust in their own judgments. They transformed themselves into *active* learners, who understood how literary and other texts have the power to alter the course of their lives.

From my point of view, the experience of the course proved therapeutic in two ways. First, I felt that the boundaries separating educator from learners had been dissolved; we were all engaged in similar processes of self-discovery. My initial fears about my voice proved unfounded; in a learning community supported by the four learners, I understood how to develop alternative modes of communication based on listening rather than speaking. To invoke Tevfik Can’s term, I created a Fourth Space for myself, in which I discovered new and exciting experiences of learning, and by doing so understood how to ballitate (in Merve’s formulation) by discovering new constructions of self-belief. Being part of a learning community, I had transcended the need to perform *akti* (as Esra described it) and embraced expectation (Serkan’s idea) instead: the knowledge that I could still be myself while allowing for perpetually shifting judgments.

Secondly, I came to understand that multidisciplinary, as defined at the beginning of this article, is just not particularly important to the learning process. It doesn’t really matter whether a given course includes literature, politics, sociology or any other subject; what matters more is *how* a learning community approaches the material. By all means dispense with the barriers separating “reason” from “sanity,” “center” from “periphery” or “educator” from “learner,” but remember that something must be created instead to

enable members of that community to develop their abilities. This is where self-help becomes so important, as it helps individuals to come to terms with their own doubts, and thereby helps them to acquire the kind of *transdisciplinary* knowledge that significantly expands their learning capacity. The distinction between multi- and transdisciplinary knowledge is an important one: multidisciplinary demands an emphasis on content, while transdisciplinarity focuses on abilities that can be acquired through exposure to various kinds of material. It's not so much *what* you study as *how* you study it. This concept is what made our Ethnic Literature such an intellectual as well as a psychological eye-opener; the product of careful planning and a readiness on everyone's part to participate. This form of learning community could be re-created in any disciplinary area, whether in the humanities, social or physical sciences. Tevfik Can's, Merve's, Esra's and Serkan's theories could be applicable to everyone – educators and learners alike, as a means of bringing “mindfulness to the moment, discovering again and each day how teaching [and learning] might be an act of meditative discernment, of wisdom, of love” (Seidel and Jardine, 2014, 183).

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