



Spring 2021 Newsletter

Editor's Note: Seeds of Transformation

By: David Scobey, *Director, Bringing Theory to Practice*

It's been a year of change for Bringing Theory to Practice and a year of crisis in higher education. BT2P moved to a new home at Elon University, and we launched the new website you are reading now. We responded to the larger turmoil in higher ed with an initiative called The Way Forward, creating both a grant program and a podcast aimed at catalyzing positive educational change in the face of the pandemic, the economic crisis, and the harms of systemic racism. The time seemed right to re-imagine the BT2P Newsletter as well, and to focus this issue on ways educators are meeting the moment of crisis.

We are extremely proud of the Newsletter, past and present. Since 2008, under the editorial leadership of Jennifer O'Brien and then Caitlin Salins, it has been a significant voice of reportage and reflection about purposeful change in undergraduate education, lifting up not only BT2P's programs, publications, and convenings, but also projects, provocations, and commentary from our larger community. All back issues of the Newsletter are available as pdfs on our website; we hope you will return to them.

This issue, however, marks a change. The Newsletter has gone digital, leaving behind the old world of hardcopy layouts, printing costs, and bulk mailing. Along with saving money and trees, the new format will allow you to search and access individual articles and allow us to integrate visuals, media, and links to other resources. We will continue to publish the Newsletter three times a year and continue to engage the core themes of BT2P's mission, but we are excited to explore new modes of storytelling and outreach. We welcome your feedback, suggestions, and pitches.

The theme of this issue—Seeds of Transformation—speaks to the larger context of turmoil in the academy. We share the conviction of many that the crises of 2020 have brought long-simmering problems in higher education to a boil. Higher ed is at an inflection-point in which big change—whether for good or ill—has grown more necessary and more possible. Much of BT2P's current work aims to discern the positive way forward.

But (in contrast to some other voices) we also believe that higher education contains often untapped reservoirs of creativity and innovation with which to meet the moment. Even as BT2P works to catalyze new thinking and action for change, we want to lift up the change that is already happening. This issue of the Newsletter features such seeds of transformation. It presents an array of projects, pedagogies, and communities of practice that offer generative responses to and through the crisis.

- Amiko Matsuo (South Seattle College) powerfully reflects on teaching ceramics in the pandemic and her students' exploration of the theme of belonging under quarantine. (Warm thanks to students Quan Wang and Cassandra Haddon, whose journal reflections and beautiful work are included in the essay.)
- Tia Brown McNair (Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Student Success, Association of American Colleges and Universities) reports on AAC&U's important Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT) Campus Centers initiative, a network of academic institutions bringing the national TRHT movement into higher education.
- Susan Browne (Rowan University) recounts the growth of faculty organizing for diversity, equity, and inclusion in Rowan's College of Education, both before and during the racial reckonings of the past year.
- Amy Gatto (Active Minds) describes Your Voice Is Your Power, her organization's initiative aimed at confronting the harms of systemic racism on the mental health of BIPOC students.
- Mary Balkun and Marta Deyrup (Seton Hall University) document a multi-institutional partnership with Ramapo College to introduce digital humanities practices to their disciplinary colleagues—and how the project evolved and deepened during the pandemic.

These articles present and interweave a variety of themes and approaches. Tia Brown McNair, Susan Browne, and Amy Gatto focus on efforts for racial justice and equity; Amiko Matsui and Mary Balkun and Marty Deyrup describe innovative responses to the challenge of teaching and learning in the pandemic. Browne, Balkun, and Deyrup tell us stories of faculty change-work; Gatto and Matsui, of holistic support for students under stress. And the scale of the work ranges from an individual course (Matsui) to college-wide organizing (Browne) to multi-institutional partnerships (Balkun and Deyrup) to national initiatives (Gatto and McNair).

Yet all the work presented here brings to this moment of crisis a shared commitment to holistic, inclusive, transformative education. Together they weave a hopeful glimpse of the possibilities for positive change.