Teaching and Learning at EGS

The Students are Our Resource

Paul Antze

When Steve Levine asked me if I'd consider teaching in the Arts, Health and Society Division at EGS, I first thought the idea was ridiculous and impossible. Ridiculous because, while I knew something about medical anthropology and a few related subjects, I had no background at all in the expressive arts. How was I going to teach these students, and at a graduate level besides? And impossible because proper university courses in my experience had always been year-long affairs, supported by extensive readings and a lot of writing. How could I pack all that, or even the key ideas, into an EGS class of three or four days?

Steve assured me I could. After all, he said, my job wouldn't really be teaching expressive arts therapy but just helping students to see it in a broader cultural context. So I decided to give it a try. Fifteen years later here I am, still showing up and still keen for each summer's new

session in Saas-Fee. What happened? Well, you could say I came to teach but stayed because I was learning something unexpected. Yes, over time I became better schooled in the theory and practice of expressive arts, but that wasn't it. I think it was more about a different way of imparting knowledge that I gradually absorbed at EGS while I thought I was just teaching.

It began in the course on research in the expressive arts that Steve and I teach together each year in the CAGS program. With Steve covering the expressive arts side, I'd imagined I'd have to deliver some kind of crash course on anthropological research. How would there be enough time? I needn't have worried, since we took a completely different path, one that began by getting students to share their past experiences with research and the kinds of questions they hoped to investigate. As it turned out, the students all differed from each other in ways I never could have imagined—in their background, their specific strengths and the kinds of projects they envisioned. They also brought a surprising depth and diversity of insights—clearly a resource waiting to be tapped. So our course gradually morphed into an intensive workshop, with students developing their research plans in pairs, then presenting them for critique and suggestions by the entire class and only finally by Steve and me. Students not only learned from each other, but also by helping each other. Thus the very diversity of the class (often an obstacle in university courses) became our greatest asset.

Something similar happened in my second, masters-level, course, "Illness and Healing in Anthropological Perspective," once again as a surprise. In worrying about how to deliver all that anthropology,

I hadn't reckoned on the immense wealth and diversity of cultural experience, both personal and professional, that my students would bring to each year's class. Here again the students themselves became a powerful teaching resource, and my task became an easier and much more exciting one: to draw out their experiences, point out the connections and help them see the underlying patterns.

Perhaps most surprising to me is that teaching in this way at EGS has gradually shifted my sense of the anthropological ideas I thought I knew so well. They seem somehow richer and more personally embodied now, infused with a new set of links to the expressive arts and to the individual lives of each year's unique group of students. Perhaps that is what keeps me coming back.

Paul Antze is Associate Professor Emeritus of Social Science and Social and Political Thought at York University. His research examines cultures of grassroots therapeutic movements and has lately turned toward environmental movements responding to the threat of climate change. He is co-editor (with Michael Lambek) of two books: *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (Routledge, 1995) and *Illness and Irony: On the Ambiguity of Suffering in Culture* (Berghahn, 2004).