

# AN OVERVIEW

In this issue of *Thought & Action*, language and its uses—both inside and outside the classroom—emerges as a theme common to a number of articles. That this should occur is not surprising when you consider that language has a special place in the academy. It is the tool we use to do our work.

In her article, “The Power of Language in the Classroom,” Rosemary Salomone, the Kenneth Wang Professor of Law at St. John's University in New York, explores the implications of the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision involving the University of Michigan Law School's use of affirmative action, noting that the professoriate must take responsibility for realizing the Court's vision of diversity on college campuses as a national good. The Court's vision describes how: “[T]he interchange among students with 'widely diverse...cultures, ideas, and viewpoints generates classroom discussion that is livelier, more spirited, and simply more enlightening and interesting.” But Salomone writes, “if the Court's vision is to be fully realized, then faculty members must understand the power of language and the role they must play in drawing out and mediating diverse voices in the classroom.”

For Laura Nichols, the concern is giving first-generation college students the language they need to succeed. That language, writes Nichols in “Giving Students a Voice: Learning Through Autobiography,” is their own language. Writing of their own experiences, notes Nichols, lets students “make intimate connections with the material they are learning.”

The importance of language to another segment of the nation's diverse student body is the topic of Kristi's Kanel's article, “Accommodating ESL Students in the University.” The language barrier, writes Kanel, keeps oth-

erwise well-qualified social service professionals from providing badly needed services to the nation's second language communities. Kanel asks: If we can make accommodations for learning disabilities, why not accommodations for second-language students? In another vein, Andrew Furman, in "The Trouble With Students," takes a bemused look at the communications gap many professors bemoan in their relations with their students and too often characterize as a lack of interest or an inability to learn. "The real trouble with students," writes Furman, "isn't so much their skills, or lack thereof, as it is their humanness."

Noam Shpancer is also concerned with how teachers communicate with their students and asks his fellow instructors to take a hard look at their own classroom practices before complaining about their students. "What unique value is offered in your class," Shpancer asks, "that should compel a student to get up for it at 8 a.m. on a frozen winter morning?" And in "If I Wanted to Study, I Would Have Gone to a Real College," Tony Kuphaldt describes his efforts to stand up to students who want the teacher to do their thinking for them. "Students are loath to choose the more difficult path over the easier path," Kuphaldt writes, "and therefore must not be given the easier path as an option."

In addition to concerns about how professors communicate in the classroom, there are concerns with the world beyond the campus. Frank Edler, for example, writes about the encroachment by corporate quality improvement measures into the halls of academe. "Welcome to a world of education where the corporate definition of quality determines what quality means, where business values are replacing educational values at an unprecedented rate," he writes.

On another front, Victor Devinez exhorts those of us who recognize the importance of the labor movement in promoting the economic and political interests of people who work for a living to stop allowing the media to misrepresent what labor unions are and do and take it upon ourselves to combat the negative views of unions being foisted on our students. "My hope," writes Devinez, "is that students will come to understand that unions are essential for a healthy democratic society."

In the last article we consider here, Jon Hauss describes his experiences as a Fulbright Scholar at Masaryk University in the Czech Republic and the benefits of expanding one's horizons. "I developed a strong bond with students at Masaryk that has transformed my own sense of the possibilities of teaching and cross cultural exchange," he writes, heartening words in these times of cross cultural fear, distrust, and suspicion.

So with these articles, a couple of book reviews, and a bit of correspondence, we once more present you with ideas for reflection and hope you will use these pages to continue the discussion of these and other important issues affecting the enterprise of higher education.

—*Con Lehane*