

TRANSFORMATIVE VOICES

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Teaching and Testimony is about the power of the word and transformative possibilities of inviting previously marginalized voices into classroom discourse. The activity of teaching testimonial narrative in its broadest sense brings to the center of attention the experience and perspective of the presumably voiceless, the peripheral, the unlettered, or the oppressed. Ranging from high school to graduate school, from inner-city immigrants in the Bronx to Freshman Composition students in Arizona, from an adolescent treatment facility in Minnesota to Women's Studies in Pennsylvania, *Teaching and Testimony* documents the efforts in the early 1990s of a remarkable diversity of teachers to incorporate testimonial narrative into classroom teaching. Indeed *Teaching and Testimony* is itself a testimony to a spontaneous, diverse, grassroots, politically and pedagogically conscious, counterhegemonic educational initiative cutting across levels and disciplines. Drawing on the words of Rigoberta Menchú, the contributors to this volume have confronted an imperial North American indifference and violence toward Central America, challenged prescribed curricular boundaries and official definitions of knowledge, and (dis)located North American students socially, culturally, historically, and politically. The chapters in *Teaching and Testimony* make evident that—in an inimical period of American history—teachers are still developing and deepening their students' and their own commitment to compassion, democracy, and mutual understanding.

Assembled in a spirit of support and encouragement for those teachers who are already engaged in the undertaking of bringing testimony into the classroom, *Teaching and Testimony* offers an invitation to other teachers to consider experimenting with some of the same materials and approaches. Today when the power and meaning of teaching and learning is often sapped by imposed, "trickle down" curriculums, legislated objectives, pedantic ivory tower infighting, funding shortfalls, standardized testing, and top-down, "scientific" management, the teachers in this book offer bottom-up narratives of vital classroom experiences that can and should serve as jumping off points for educational renewal and change at all levels. Energized by the teaching of testimonial narrative these teachers let their guard down, wrestle with the imme-

diate difficulties and possibilities of classroom teaching, and speak with passion about the importance of what they and their students are learning. By turning to the rich, varied, and complex experience and wisdom of Rigoberta Menchú and the Quiché peoples, the teaching described in these pages aims at a truly meaningful multicultural pedagogy willing to rethink established frameworks of learning.

When Menchú was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992, worldwide attention was drawn to the indigenous peoples of the Americas and, in particular, to their life-and-death struggle in Guatemala. In the 1960s and 70s Rigoberta Menchú grew up in the dire poverty, backbreaking plantation labor, virulent racism, and horrific military violence that condition the lives of indigenous Guatemalans. Despite unrelenting repression, the modern-day descendants of the Maya have strategically adapted and maintained their languages, traditions, and communities. Menchú's own family attempted to evade oppression by founding a village in the north central highlands. Thwarted by violence and legal chicanery, Vicente Menchú, Rigoberta's father, was forced to undertake exhausting efforts to establish security for his community, efforts that eventually positioned him as leader in an emerging peasants' rights movement. To this movement the Guatemalan military—supported by the United States government—responded with devastating force, murdering upwards of 100,000 people between 1980 and 1983, including Rigoberta Menchú's brother and both of her parents. By the time she reached her early twenties, Rigoberta Menchú had worked as a field laborer, been a maid in the capital city, participated in her father's organizing efforts, learned Spanish, become an organizer in her own right, witnessed the murder of family members, been hunted by the army, and fled to Mexico to join an opposition movement in exile.

On a trip for this group she traveled to Europe in 1981 where she collaborated with Elisabeth Burgos, an activist ethnologist, to record and publish her life story. Appearing first in Mexico (1983) as *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (My name is Rigoberta Menchú and this is how my conscience/consciousness was born) Menchú's compelling book won the prestigious Casa de Las Americas Prize as the outstanding testimonial work of 1983. Translated by Ann Wright into English as *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman of Guatemala*, the work began to be read and taught at North American universities. By the mid-1990s Menchú's book achieved the status of a minor classic. Vilified in a chapter of Dinesh D'Souza's best-selling polemic *Illiberal Education*, and boosted by the Nobel Peace Prize, *I, Rigoberta Menchú* is increasingly read in Humanities, Spanish, Writing, Women's Studies, Comparative Literature, Anthropology, and Political Science courses. It has recently begun to be used either in whole or part in secondary schools.

If readers of *Teaching and Testimony* have not yet read Menchú's words it will be hard to understand the commitment, energy, and heterogeneity of the teaching set forth in these pages. It might be difficult for those unacquainted

with Menchú to comprehend why the oral narrative of an illiterate Guatemalan servant girl should stimulate and connect the variety of classrooms, disciplines, and levels recounted here. Thus, it is incumbent on our readers who have not read Rigoberta Menchú's story to turn first to her words, however mediated by the form in which they are found. If after hearing Rigoberta Menchú you find yourself moved, if you want to think about the importance and possibility of passing on what she has to say, if you want to consider the complex possible meanings that her words and other testimonials like hers might have for North Americans, and particularly for North American students, then read on, your questions will be considered and addressed.

When I first heard Rigoberta Menchú speak in the fall of 1988 at the University of Oregon, she talked about the desperate plight of her people, of their terrible suffering and of the beauty and wisdom they had to offer humanity. Menchú was deeply concerned that the savage genocide still ongoing in Guatemala was being ignored by the world. With George Bush newly elected and American foreign policy in Central America still fixated on a cold warrior anti-communism, those of us involved in Central American solidarity work were desperate to get word out to the American people about what was really going on. That semester, in the introductory course that I taught as a graduate student, *I, Rigoberta Menchú* had a particular urgency. We talked about the way that our government was involved in the region, not only in overthrowing the Arbenz regime in Guatemala in 1954, but in the present-day military support and training, in the propping up of neofascist regimes, in the preparation of "interrogators"—the very torturers who murdered Menchú's brother and mother. In the years since 1988 I have continued to teach *I, Rigoberta Menchú* and found it a crucial text in a variety of courses, especially courses for the training of teachers. Today, in 1995, some of the issues have changed. The oppression of Guatemalan Mayan people has received increased international recognition through the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Rigoberta Menchú and, under the current administration, American foreign policy in Central America is less doctrinaire than in the past. The desperate urgency felt by those of us who taught Rigoberta Menchú's testimonial in the mid and late 1980s has been slightly reduced, yet the issues Menchú's story raise continue to be vital, not only for Guatemalans or on college campuses, but for the increasingly dynamic, complex, and tense relationships between cultures and peoples worldwide.

In exploring these relationships in the classroom, contributors to this volume are on the cutting edge of new, more meaningful pedagogical approaches that connect students to an increasingly global understanding of themselves and others. Many of these approaches have been inspired by the pedagogical praxis of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, and thus are part of the emerging critical teaching movement whose best known thinkers include Henry Giroux, Ira Shorr, Bob Peterson, Bill Bigelow, Maida Christiansen, Peter McLaren,

Patrick Shannon, Mark Hurlburt, Lil Brannon, and C. H. Knoblauch. As it translates Freirian teaching to North American contexts, *Teaching and Testimony* takes testimonial narrative in general and Rigoberta Menchú's story in particular as starting points for problem-posing learning. Indeed, this book identifies testimonial narrative as central to the creation of an engaged cultural studies approach for North American students.

Reading these chapters it becomes evident how much those of us already putting together testimony with teaching can learn from one another. Because Menchú's book has achieved broad recognition and its publication has been a remarkable success—surpassing 100,000 volumes—there are many teachers now using Menchú's story who will be intensely interested in what they will find in *Teaching and Testimony*. At the same time there are many more teachers directly and loosely involved with cultural studies or critical pedagogy movements who will find *Teaching and Testimony* immediately relevant to their approach and concerns. Moreover, *Teaching and Testimony* should appeal to a wide variety of teachers who are not necessarily yet familiar with Rigoberta Menchú or self-consciously defining themselves as critical pedagogists, but who are eager for innovative and effective ideas for the classroom.

It is the hope of myself and Steve Benz that *Teaching and Testimony* will also increase interest in Menchú's story. In the broader scheme of things, *I, Rigoberta Menchú* remains a marginal text in school curriculums and classroom reading lists. Many of our fellow teachers who might find her testimonial relevant to their students and discipline remain unfamiliar with the work and approaches to teaching it. (It is still difficult for public school teachers to fund the purchase of classroom sets of *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, or any other single text for the matter—no matter how much needed to supplement nationally produced textbooks.) Curriculum can become calcified, administrators may attempt to keep controversy out of classrooms, teachers may be uncertain about dealing with depictions of violence. Yet *Teaching and Testimony* demonstrates the relevance and effectiveness of Menchú's testimony for teaching and learning across a great variety of levels and disciplines.

Testimony is an encompassing term that reaches back to the communal, even tribal, honor for the spoken word. Giving testimony is central activity in various legal, historical, literary, psychoanalytic, ethnographic, and religious practices. Marking any expression as "testimony" stresses its truth content, the accuracy of its rendition of something experienced or witnessed. In the legal sense testimony involves providing evidence in a formal investigation of an event or events in the past. As an act of memory situated in time testimony is vital to our knowledge of history; it stresses the personal as reflective of a larger collective. When previously excluded voices are heard testimony can dislocate established frameworks and shift paradigms. Peter Nabokov's *Native American Testimony: A Chronicle of Indian-White Relations from Prophecy to the Present* (1991), for example, could be seen as the eruption of previously marginalized

testimony into the documentation of formal history. Testimony may serve as an expression of loss and a ritual of mourning. Simultaneously, as a communicative act testimony aspires to human continuity, the establishment of justice, and the making of the future. Indeed, the very activity of testifying turns victims into survivors, witnesses into agents of change. Teaching testimony brings this transformational potential into the classroom. It stresses the power of language to recreate past experiences, foster new understanding, and enlarge the circle of witnesses.

While in the broadest sense any form of literature, biography, or history could be recognized as a form of testimony, *Teaching and Testimony* uses the term to focus on the introduction into the classroom of previously excluded voices. In Latin American studies *testimonio* has received a good deal of critical examination and come to mean specifically a longer oral narrative connected to a collective historical experience of oppression, marginalization, or struggle created by an individual who, because of her or his own circumstance, must collaborate with a second person for transcription and editing (see Beverley, Shea, Sklodowska, Sommers, and Yúdice). *I, Rigoberta Menchú* is such a testimonio. While *Teaching and Testimony* collects stories of the classroom encounter with the testimony of Rigoberta Menchú, there are, of course, many other testimonial and testimonial-like narratives that focus on the experience of oppressed or marginalized people and that are important for North American students to read and discuss. Testimonial narrative as a genre, as a form of narrative, and as a subject of classroom attention has only begun to be explored.

We should recognize that testimonials have played a role in the classroom well before *I, Rigoberta Menchú* became available in the late 1980s. Narratives of survivors of the Jewish holocaust such as those of Anne Frank, Elie Wiesel, Primo Levi, and others have led to powerful learning experiences. (In their recent book *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing In Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub [1992] focus on holocaust testimony and describe their own experiences teaching it at Yale.) Testimonial is an important narrative form for learning across the curriculum. Ethnographic testimonials such as Studs Terkel's *Working* or Oscar Lewis's *Children of Sanchez* have been used effectively by teachers in many different fields of study. African American and Native American traditions, in which testimonial-like narratives are prominent, from the slave accounts to *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and *Monster*, from *Life Among the Piutes* to *Black Elk Speaks* and *Lakota Woman*, are increasingly recognized and taught.

Throughout this volume the contributors to *Teaching and Testimony* refer to many testimonials they are already teaching along with *I, Rigoberta Menchú*: David Blot also uses *Don't Be Afraid Gringo*, the story of an Honduran peasant woman; Teresa Longo includes *Let Me Speak*, the testimony of a Bolivian mine worker in her course; Teresa Longo and Tace Hedrick both have their students read Elena Poniatowska's *Massacre in Mexico*; Jonnie Guerra and Sharon Ahern

Fechter use Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*; Janet Varner Gunn compares Menchú's testimonial and Anne Dillard's memoir, *An American Childhood*. June Kuzmeskus and Meri-Jane Rochelson organize their teaching around testimonial narrative.

An awareness that the most disempowered can speak out and be heard gives students hope that their voice, too, might be valuable. The more informal oral language of testimonials may be closer to a student's home language than works found in standard school textbooks or anthologies. As published validations of the lives and experiences of people that might otherwise be unknown, testimonials send the message to students that all lives are important, that their own experiences may be worthy of serious attention and academic analysis. Teachers who work with testimonial find that testimonials not only bring new perspectives to the classroom but they enable students' own writing. The collective authorship of many testimonial narratives invites students to consider collaboration in writing, and the genre can offer a model for seeking out stories worth listening to and recording. Students may be stimulated to take part in the making and dissemination of testimonials themselves, a project richly explored in this volume by Meri-Jane Rochelson and David Blot. The "real world" context of testimonials gives them a vitality in the learning process, catalyzing examinations of the relationships between classrooms and "the world outside." While focusing on the testimonial of Rigoberta Menchú, *Teaching and Testimony* nonetheless breaks ground for books and articles yet to be written on the teaching possibilities of other testimonial works and testimonial narrative more generally.

While teachers are likely to find chapters in *Teaching and Testimony* that are written out of situations and settings similar to their own, one of the great strengths of this book is the opportunity it provides for us to learn from different disciplines, approaches, and pedagogical situations. *Teaching and Testimony* invites all of us to become more interdisciplinary in our own classrooms and more conscious of the overall educational system and the specific locations in which we work. Reflecting on our own disciplines and practice is a primary purpose of this book. While *Teaching and Testimony* is closely unified in its focus on the teaching of Rigoberta Menchú's particular story, it brings together teachers from a wide diversity of situations for interactive and mutually supportive learning.

As it traverses these levels and disciplines, *Teaching and Testimony* organizes thinking about pedagogy in a way that is particularly sensitive to purpose and context. Since almost all the chapters are stories of teachers and students, they are full of intriguing turns and surprises. Those few chapters that are not classroom narratives are, we feel, particularly important to the intentions of the volume and are certain to hold the reader's attention as well as provide trenchant analysis of crucial issues.

For North American students and teachers, learning about other locations can be disturbing, even threatening. This is the theme that my coeditor Stephen Benz takes up in the second chapter of the introduction. By identifying preparatory and concluding activities for readings of Menchú's testimonial, Benz indicates the need to teach carefully and reflect critically about the crossing of cultures entailed in teaching *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. This theme animates all subsequent chapters.

A starting point for teachers intending to use *I, Rigoberta Menchú* is greater knowledge about Menchú's life and the debate her work has aroused; the first section, "Controversial Figure," addresses these issues. In his chapter, "From Peasant to National Symbol" the Guatemalan novelist Arturo Arias describes Menchú's emergence as a public figure, informing us about how her testimony was transcribed and filling us in on the subsequent events that led to the Nobel Prize. While Menchú was attaining public stature in Guatemala and around the world, her testimonial simultaneously became a center of contention in America's academic "culture wars." The next chapter responds to Menchú's vilification by Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education*. By revealing political bias and the factual incorrectness in D'Souza's account, Gene Bell-Villada, professor of Spanish at Williams College, turns the tables on those that charge the academy with "political correctness."

The ensuing group of chapters enrich our understanding of the Guatemalan and Latin American context with a specific view to facilitating the teaching of *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. This section, "Teaching the Latin American Context," provides a variety of approaches to thinking about the culture, politics, literature, and language of the region. In the first chapter Mary Louise Pratt describes how she immerses her students in the social and political situation in Guatemala while simultaneously cultivating an understanding of the testimonial as both a political and personal document. Inserting Menchú's text in the humanities curriculum at Stanford was perceived by the media as an assault on the Western Canon, yet Pratt's account of the way she makes the work meaningful to her Stanford students underscores the educational value of bringing previously marginal voices to the center of attention. Pratt's chapter is followed up by another by Gene Bell-Villada, outlining his approach to appropriate Latin American background materials—particularly the film featuring Menchú, *When the Mountains Tremble*. Bell-Villada also describes how he addresses students' preconceived notions about Latin American history, indigenous cultures, and social issues such as feminism. In the third chapter of this section, "The Testimonial of Rigoberta Menchú in a Native Tradition," Luis Arata helps teachers understand specifically how Menchú's testimony expresses a continuity of Mayan beliefs and traditions. While students sometimes react negatively to the adoption of Western practices by the Quiché, Arata describes the fluidity and flexibility of Mayan thought. In essence his chapter demands that Western readers recognize the biases of their cultural frame and invites a

reversal of critical gaze. The understanding of cultural difference is further complicated by William Westerman's consideration of the diametrically opposed functions of violence in different social classes in Guatemala. Bringing together the disciplines of folklife and peace studies Westerman examines the conflicting roles of military violence and community self-defense in Guatemala with his students at Villanova University. After exploring historical, cultural, and social contexts for Rigoberta Menchú's testimony the next chapter describes the possibility of reading Menchú's story against a background provided by Central American literary works. Teaching at a private high school in Nebraska Judith Peterson has formulated an interactive curriculum made up of works excluded from even the most current multicultural textbooks. An argument by Sharon Ahern Fechter for the inclusion of Rigoberta Menchú's testimony into Spanish language learning is the last chapter in this section. Fechter proposes that while the testimony can be used for traditional syntactical and grammatical study, more significant is the possibility that its incorporation into the context of second language acquisition can facilitate cross-cultural understanding.

After situating Menchú's testimonial in a Spanish American context *Teaching and Testimony* explores what happens when Menchú's story and middle-class Euro-American students come together. In the classrooms described in these chapters there is a complex interplay of openness and denial, sympathy and resistance, activism and alienation. Working with small-town students in Massachusetts, June Kuzmeskus describes an inspiring high school classroom that weaves together testimonial narrative and students' writing. Becoming conscious of their own identity by examining others, Kuzmeskus's students engage in a problem-posing form of learning tied to their responsibilities as democratic citizens. Across the country in a small liberal arts college in Oregon Patricia Varas and Catherine Collins facilitate a similar process in their freshman humanities course as they utilize *I, Rigoberta Menchú* to help students understand differing world views. While both of these chapters are hopeful about the way students can learn and grow, they also hint at some of the deeper difficulties that confront us in attempting to understand the implications of a third-world story for first-world readers. In her chapter, "Having to Read a Book about Oppression" Robin Jones shares her finding that relatively privileged students at the University of Colorado don't automatically love the work. Instead their expectations for entertaining reading appear to be disappointed by a "depressing story." Distanced by Menchú's difference, Jones's students relate to the testimonial, when they can, on an intellectual rather than empathic level. Working with students at the University of Iowa, Steve Mathews explores a similar network of problems. Mathews believes that rhetoric about American multiculturalism has created barriers to understanding international exploitation and the need for international alliances. Stacey Schlauf's students at a Catholic university in Pennsylvania react to Rigoberta Menchú's testimony with

denial, finding it overwhelming, “too much blood and gore, too much rhetoric and politics, too much indigenous culture.” By faulting the older generation of the Quiché for teaching the young about their oppressive circumstances her students blame the victims and fail to recognize Maya resistance strategies. Readers of *Teaching and Testimony* will discover that these difficulties, rather than defeating teaching, serve to engage, even energize it.

Indeed, as these teachers and others throughout *Teaching and Testimony* describe bringing together Euro-American students and Menchú’s testimony, certain problematics are increasingly clarified and addressed. Teachers find that many of their students are disconnected from the testimonial’s graphic descriptions of violence. Already desensitized by violence in popular entertainment, Jones speculates that her students may be unable to distinguish real from fictive suffering. Conversely Schlau and others argue that the violence described in the text is overwhelming, leaving students feeling powerless. Mathews believes that his students are conditioned to understand the representation of violence as classical tragedy—intended to release pity and fear—rather than as part of a particular historical circumstance that can and must be connected to our own. In teaching testimony at Yale Shoshana Felman found that the crisis her students experienced was productive (1992, 53); the contributors to *Teaching and Testimony* would tend to agree. As they explore representations of violence and the reactions of their students, these teachers find ways to overcome empathetic failures. Thus, rather than *I, Rigoberta Menchú* having a numbing or dehumanizing effect, over and over, the evidence collected here suggests that careful teaching of the work serves to resensitize, to have a profoundly humanizing effect on American young people.

While the presence of violence in the testimony may at first distance Euro-American readers, the issue of Christianity initially and problematically invites them in. Menchú’s Christian activism seeks affiliation across boundaries of nation and culture, yet Christian students struggle over whether or not to identify their beliefs with those of Menchú, some opting to see her version of liberation theology as apostate, others recognizing it as a rediscovery of true faith. For those with an understanding of culture as a clean and neat category, or with a recognition of the nefarious role of religion in the conquest, Menchú’s Christianity presents a puzzle—in the hands of a Guatemalan Indian the Bible has become a weapon in a life and death struggle for her own way of life. These complex problems of religious identification and its classroom significance continue to be explored in subsequent chapters as well (see also Hedrick, Goldrich, and Willinsky).

In marked contrast to teachers of traditional Euro-American students, the authors included in the next section, “Rigoberta Menchú and Minority/Non-traditional Students,” find that their students are more readily able to identify with Menchú’s story. Teaching English in a second-language classroom to Latino students from the Caribbean and Central America, David Blot finds that

reading Menchú's testimony at the Bronx Community College encourages his students to value themselves and openly share about their own lives. He finds that Menchú's testimonial affirms his students' experience and empowers their writing. Working with court-mandated, minority teenagers in inner-city Minneapolis, Angela Moroukian believes that her students sympathize with Menchú because they have a personal understanding that ill treatment need not be deserved. Alienated—and excluded—from traditional schooling Moroukian's students open up when they are given choice and authority. Like the teenagers June Kuzmenkus teaches, Moroukian's students hunger for an opportunity to make an impact and to influence an adult world that seems to discount them. Many teachers in *Teaching and Testimony* discover an affirmative power in working with testimonial narrative, yet as these chapters demonstrate the effect is contextually and pedagogically sensitive, tied, in part, to the social location of the classroom.

While we need to recognize testimony as a valid form in its own right—one that like the novel entails enormous variety—the study of testimony as a genre soon engages questions of form and voice, of representation and verisimilitude, and of production and reception. Testimonial narration presents an individual who speaks for others, offering a specific version of “the truth,” and, presumably, an experience or perspective that is otherwise not being heard. Since Menchú herself did not read or write at the time her testimony was recorded, she depended on Elisabeth Burgos to organize and edit her story (though as Arturo Arias points out Menchú did have a final opportunity to review the manuscript as it was read aloud to her before publication). Readers of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* depend on Ann Wright's translation from Spanish. Menchú tells us that what she experienced really happened and asserts that her personal story is representative of other native and poor Guatemalans. (Based on what all of the contributors to *Teaching and Testimony* believe—many of them experts in the region—her claims are both fully believable and well documented, but, especially in the classroom, no truth is holy; students ought to be encouraged to explore the validity of Menchú's claims.) Testimonials, like other texts, are published and circulate in particular kinds of marketplaces. When and if they enter a classroom, it is usually because they are chosen by specific teachers for certain reasons. Classrooms and curricula exist within established institutional and pedagogical frameworks. All of these factors exert an influence on the way that a testimonial, or any other text, will be understood. Moreover, the very act of identifying a text or voice as speaking from an oppressed or marginal position shapes the way readers understand its meaning. As we have seen, the readiness of the reader to attend to a testimonial influences what they bring away from it.

Thus understanding testimonial narrative may need to engage emerging critiques of anthropology and ethnography (such as James Clifford's [1986] *Writing Culture*), the postcolonial analysis of subjectivity (see Gyatri Spivak's

chapter, "Can the Subaltern Speak"), the possibility of intellectual/subaltern alliances (Beverly, "From Margin to Center"), reader response, poststructuralist and deconstructionist theory, and so on. All of these approaches can help us become sharper thinkers about testimonial narrative; at the same time, I believe, theory should help us understand ourselves and the process of communication so that we become better able to hear what others are saying, to identify difference and find common ground, and to act more wisely on behalf of peace and justice.

While many of the chapters in *Teaching and Testimony* engage with the problematics of the testimonial form, the chapters in the next section, "Testimonial Constructions," make this issue central. The section begins with the wonderful "Testimonial Dictionary" produced by a collective of graduate students and their professor at the University of Wisconsin. Rather as Roland Barthes analyzes Balzac's "Sarrasine" in *S/Z* (1974), so the Wisconsin collective deconstructs their own teaching of Menchú's testimonial. They identify coded terminology and examine the power relationships inherent in testimonial creation, its classroom study, and linguistic and cultural translation. Tracing similar themes, Tace Hedrick finds that her nontraditional students in central Pennsylvania arrive in class with preconceived notions about literature that block their identification with the text. Though recognizing the defamiliarizing power of testimonial, Hedrick is intrigued by the possibilities for feminist teaching with Rigoberta Menchú; her students are able, ultimately, to connect Menchú's story to their own oppression as women. (For those interested in explicitly feminist approaches see also Schlaug, Jones, and Fechter and Guerra). Clyde Moneyhun uses Menchú's testimony to teach critical thinking to his Freshman Composition students at the University of Arizona. Urging them not to accept the testimonial at face value, Moneyhun challenges them to question their initial reaction and think carefully about the creation and purposes of testimonial narrative. In the last chapter in this section Meri-Jane Rochelson describes the way she organizes an entire course around testimony and oral history. Putting into action a plan that several other contributors to *Teaching and Testimony* suggest, Rochelson has her multi-ethnic class of honors students at Florida International University work with individuals in their community to produce testimonial narratives. Conscious of some of the complex questions of voice and appropriation, Rochelson's students found themselves entering into collaborations that deeply engaged them in the activity of witnessing.

In many of the chapters in *Teaching and Testimony* Rigoberta Menchú's testimonial is linked with other related works for certain specific reasons: to facilitate students' exploration of Latin American context, of other contemporary experiences of oppression, of the expression of hitherto marginal voices, and so on. As the contributors demonstrate, establishing these kind of linkages forges interactive and engaging curricula. The chapters in the next section of *Teaching and Testimony*, "Comparative Strategies" focus directly and in inno-

vative ways on the possibilities for comparative teaching of testimony. At Mount Vernon College, a women's university in Washington, D.C., Sharon Fechter and Jonnie Guerra team teach an interdisciplinary course on women's lives. In this class their students develop an extensive comparison between *I, Rigoberta Menchú* and a nineteenth-century slave narrative by Harriet Ann Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Although Fechter and Guerra recognize significant difference between the two works and contexts, by bringing them together they facilitate their students' learning about important issues including the history of the testimonial form, the ongoing nature of violence and servitude, the mistreatment and social control of women, and strategies women have used to fight for themselves. If the texts taught with *I, Rigoberta Menchú* tend to foreground the experience of other minority peoples, Janet Varner Gunn's activity of comparison is particularly interesting as her students at Hobart and William-Smith juxtapose Menchú's story with Annie Dillard's autobiography, *An American Childhood*. This comparison allows them to consider the difference between the "autobiography of nostalgia"—which individuates the narrator's past—and the collective narration and community experience that characterize testimonial. In her effort to integrate the theme of social justice into an otherwise traditional high school curriculum in a homogeneous suburban community in Michigan, Geraldine Rodriguez inserts several sections of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* into her course. Her students compared Menchú's testimonial with both *To Kill A Mockingbird* and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. Rodriguez's approach shows the power of even subtle curriculum modification, as her students not only learn about Menchú but are subsequently able to make a serious and meaningful reading of Twain's comic novel. As with other students described in *Teaching and Testimony*, Rodriguez's high school sophomores' encounter with Menchú's story initiates reflection on their role in a democratic society.

The teaching of testimony not only generates self-reflection on the part of students, it fosters it among teachers as well. An interplay between pedagogical experimentation, personal growth, and professional commitment is thematized in virtually every chapter in *Teaching and Testimony*. The last grouping of chapters foregrounds the activity of "Reflective Teaching" and views it from a variety of perspectives. For more than ten years Dan Goldrich has taught a remarkably engaging large section political science class (175 students) on Central America at the University of Oregon. The first chapter of the section describes the way that Goldrich's course incorporates a wide variety of personal testimony from Central America, including not only Menchú's written testimony but her speaking presence as well. Goldrich's reflection on his teaching is tied to his efforts to address the personal and emotional impact of Central American testimony on his own life. As with other contributors, the encounter with testimony seems a crucial part of enriching the commitment to peace and justice for the teacher as well as the student. The next chapter by Teresa Longo

is actually a teacher's diary written as she reflects on her students and herself as they read Rigoberta Menchú's testimony and move forward in their course on Latin American Cultural History at William and Mary College. Longo's journal indicates the spillovers in teaching Menchú's story, the ways that reading the testimonial effect student understanding of the rest of the curriculum, the possibility of weaving the issues one cares about in teaching into one's own intellectual and scholarly life. Next we have included a selection from a computer conference of my own students, aspiring secondary English teachers at Western Michigan University, as they discuss the topic of teaching *I, Rigoberta Menchú* in their future classrooms. Though these students express a variety of viewpoints, their reflections remind us both of how we evolve as teachers and of the learning that can be generated by authentic dialogue with peers and colleagues.

The final chapter in *Teaching and Testimony* pulls together a number of strands in earlier chapters. Like Edward Said, John Willinsky is interested in the way that the understanding of cultural others is shaped by the long history of European colonial domination. While Dinesh D'Souza would appear to posit an essential cultural difference between Mayan Indian and Westerner, Menchú, Willinsky argues, has a more complex vision of culture. She simultaneously defends against the anthropological—or educational—passion for appropriation (via her secrecy) and strategically utilizes transcultural forms (e.g., her Catholicism). Willinsky is concerned, as other contributors to *Teaching and Testimony*, that a facile treatment of cultural otherness may maintain a colonizing relationship rather than developing common cause in securing dignity and human rights. Thus his analysis draws on Rigoberta Menchú's testimony to reflect on a central problem for contemporary multicultural pedagogy.

Indeed *Teaching and Testimony* provides an important starting point for thinking about the multicultural movement and efforts to diversify teaching and learning. In schools and universities across the country there is a good deal of talk about multiculturalism but insufficient reflection about how to do it well. Consequently one of the crucial contributions of this book is the presentation of classroom narratives of critical and effective multicultural teaching. From these narratives there emerge three guiding principles.

First, these chapters assert that at the center of multicultural learning must be respect for the words and experience of others, expressed and interpreted as much as possible in and on their own terms. Although no testimony offers a transparent truth, these chapters stress the importance of listening to the located, present-oriented voices of real people. Such voices are seen to play a role in creating culture through a dynamic, interactive, and communicative process. Multicultural teaching must not be a form of tourism that looks only at superficialities of culture to ultimately reinforce distinctions between "us" and "them." In this sense the integration of testimony into teaching eschews canonical or folkloric repetitions of fixed "tradition" in favor of creative, conscious, constructivist, and even "postmodern" positioning within and against

established social, cultural, and political boundaries. To link “teaching” and “testimony” is to call for richer, more dynamic, and more empowering forms of “cultural literacy” than are dreamed of in E. D. Hirsch’s philosophy. Emerging from urgent historical circumstances testimonial knowledge is created in a collaborative act of performance and transcription that challenges orthodox cultural authority.

Second, just as a meaningful approach to cultural border crossing involves attention to the voice of others, throughout *Teaching and Testimony* it is evident that the views and experiences of students themselves must also be highly regarded. There is a persistent effort on the part of teachers in this book to meet their students where they live. In North America this may mean that teachers need to begin by challenging (imperial) cultural privileges that insulate some students from even recognizing that any vision or experience other than their own exists. For other teachers it may mean the acknowledgment of the struggles of their students and an effort to connect them to the struggles of others. Developing pedagogy from their students’ perspective and becoming learners themselves in the classroom, the contributors to *Teaching and Testimony* engage in the reformulation of authority through a classroom ethic of voice and participation. What is at stake in the multicultural pedagogy put forward by *Teaching and Testimony* is the fostering of critical and engaged democratic citizens affirming the voices of others and their own.

Third, the chapters in *Teaching and Testimony* demonstrate that meaningful multicultural teaching cannot be confined by established academic disciplines or learning frameworks. The contributors have developed approaches that facilitate student understanding not only within disciplines but simultaneously across and against them. Multicultural teaching must incorporate a style of pedagogy that crosses educational boundaries, integrating historical, political, anthropological, sociological, and textual studies. Moreover, the knowledge explored through teaching testimonials is as dynamic and diverse as the contexts in which they are taught. Given their urgency and historical specificity testimonials resist canons and canonization, and they differ substantially from rarefied textbooks. The contributors to *Teaching and Testimony* offer evidence that pedagogies for multicultural study must consciously and courageously interrupt narrowly framed learning and fixed ways of knowing in an effort to empower the marginalized and change the future.

As this volume puts forward a rich tradition of teaching developed in the early 1990s, it is also relevant to ask about the future, about where we go from here. Followers of multicultural, cultural studies, and critical pedagogy approaches have so far principally directed their energies to a determined effort to democratize society through transformations of the educational system. *Teaching and Testimony* documents at the classroom level the partial success of this effort. At the same time such successes are recognized and celebrated, how-

ever, by returning once again to the voice of Rigoberta Menchú we can complicate and enrich our vision of social and educational change.

It would clearly be wrong to equate her testimonial with a narrow or traditional individual biography; *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (*consciencia* meaning both “conscious” and “conscience”) can and should be read as the story of an exemplary and revolutionary process of self and community education. Menchú describes a people under harsh oppression educating themselves outside of an internally colonizing school system as they participate in a daily struggle to maintain their lives and identity. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Paulo Freire describes the importance for oppressed peoples of escaping “the duality in which *to be is to be like*, and to be like is to be like the oppressor” (1992, 33). The Menchú family attempts to circumvent this duality by refusing to send their children to the national school where they would lose their Indian culture and become “ladinoized.” As a girl Rigoberta Menchú learns about history through the daily practice of Quiché customs, through birth ceremonies where infants are told of the suffering that the people have experienced, and marriage ceremonies where the drinking of Coca-Cola is examined as a threat to Quiché culture. The process of learning is organized around the “scattered centers” of diverse communities where women and families play a central role. Rigoberta’s mother travels to villages where she doesn’t speak the language, but is able to communicate with the women as she participates with them in daily tasks. When one of the government soldiers is captured, it is the women of the village who, by telling stories of their own experience, manage to reeducate him. Rigoberta’s father’s efforts to secure land rights for the people of his village lead repressive authorities to imprison him, but the prison itself—outside the control of the Guatemalan national educational system—ironically becomes a crucial place for the Quiché to learn about the broader agenda of the resistance movement, the relationship of the peasants’ struggle for land in the countryside with the workers’ struggle for rights in the city. (Barbara Harlow has examined jails themselves as important places for education in resistance movements.) Thus, the struggle described in *I, Rigoberta Menchú* is not simply along ethnic divisions but involves identification in concentric circles with family, village, Guatemalan native peoples of different languages, and with the poor and working classes. The resistance to exploitation and oppression described in the testimony necessarily involves change through contact with the *ladino* world. Nonetheless, the Quiché incorporate Western practices strategically, making them part of the dynamic development and expression of a living Mayan culture.

In attempting to examine the significance of the Mayan experience of revolutionary educational praxis for North American students and teachers, we should begin by recognizing that even in predominately literate, “information age” cultures, schooling may involve an assault on home language, family life, and culture. The remarkable educational experiences described in Rigoberta

Menchú's testimonial are not based on preset or nationally administered content standards or behavioral objectives, but emerge from home and work life. Rather than adjusting individuals to fit into already given roles and relationships (what we might call vocational or family life education), the Quiché liberation struggle transforms and democratizes the categories themselves to better serve peoples' needs. It behooves critical educators to turn attention toward transformative pedagogies that can be integrated into sites and institutions beyond school buildings as well as across the disciplines. They might want to complicate their stance on the home schooling movement. Or, for example, Menchú's testimonial might suggest that in the effort to broaden the scope of transformative teaching we not forget the jails and prisons and their relationship to maintaining the social order. With America rapidly locking up more and more minorities and the poor—rather than addressing fundamental issues of economic inequality, racism, drug dependency and violence—it becomes increasingly important to listen to and learn from those voices who speak of gaining political understanding in prison, to examine other testimonials such as those by Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver, George Jackson, Angela Davis, Mary Crow Dog, Leonard Peltier, Luis Rodriguez, and Kody Scott. Like her fellow enemies of the state, Rigoberta Menchú calls on us to remember the powerful and precious connection between justice and peace.

As "scattered centers" themselves of counterhegemonic pedagogy the contributors to *Teaching and Testimony* have already made significant contributions to rethinking classrooms, schools, and society. Their efforts constitute resistance to prepackaged curriculum, imposed national standards, established lists or supposedly comprehensive encyclopedias of cultural knowledge. Following Rigoberta Menchú they have challenged the artificial divisions established by national borders, resisted a totalizing global modernity, connected cultural knowledge to international economic and political systems of exploitation, and established links between their students and, in Fanon's phrase, "the wretched of the earth." The ongoing challenge, like that faced by the Guatemalan resistance movement, is to convert oppressive educational forms into liberatory ones, to integrate learning and living within and beyond the classroom, and to elaborate the strategic alliances that can create a united front for the development of more democratic forms for social, cultural, economic, and political life.