



# The Amplifier

February 2017

Plug into news that informs and encourages

## From the Editor

*They took it easy on you at 2017 Spring Convocation. "Critical Climate." The smallest fragment of critical reflection would reveal just how hard the speakers at that function should have come down on the EJP student body, particularly in regard to the most common excuse for not being more involved in our program: lack of time. Well, Mother Lawless is not so tender-hearted. I'm calling bullshit on how so very busy you are that you can't find the time to study or to write for this project you claim to cherish. I see you. More tellingly, I hear you, at 11am when nothing's going on, and you scream from your cell, "Hey, check out that girl on Springer—bitch got booty!" (Oh yes, and I'm also calling you out on your pretense of feminist sympathies.) It seems to me if you have time to check out the booty parade on the Jerry Springer Show, you have plenty of time to write that response paper for your UI course. Sure, some of you have jobs, but they're not real jobs, let's shred that illusion right now. You're out and back in the cell, showered, within the span of a shift, no commute; and between holidays and weather-related staffing problems, you have more off-days and half-days than the most entitled union employee. You have a part-time job, at best. So maybe you miss a card game or a ball game or some time on the weight pile. Get your priorities straight. Are you students? You play at being students, maybe, but do you have any dedication to learning? How much time do you think a real college student has, who carries 15 credit-hours, a part-time job, extracurriculars, a social life, basic errands, and just maybe has a few hours left to drive out to a prison and sympathize about how hard you have it, you who live a life of pampered indolence by comparison? Are they missing some time at the gym, do you think?*

—M. Sean Lawless

## Cubs and Trump?! What does it *really* mean?

On November 2, 2016, two cities and millions of viewers were witnessing history unfold on a baseball diamond in downtown Cleveland. In the bottom of the tenth inning, Michael Martinez dug into the batter's box. Only he stood between the Cubs and a World Series title. With two outs and a runner on first, he was only looking to extend the inning. The Cleveland hopefuls were praying for another heroic home run like the one that sent this game into extra innings in the bottom of the eighth. I was unable to pray, blink, or breathe; I remained paralyzed on my bunk, seized by anxiety. I feared that any sliver of optimism or exuberance would somehow curse my beloved Cubbies. Even as Kris Bryant fielded the weakly-hit groundball and delivered a

perfect strike to Anthony Rizzo to record the final out, I dared not voice my elation. It wasn't until I saw Anthony Rizzo throw his arms in the air that my mind registered it was over—the Cubs were the champions. Only then did a smile liberate itself from the grips of my angst.

I was witnessing history through my thirteen-inch RCA window. While Cubs Nation filled the streets launching their shouts of joy into the night sky, I was confined to my cell. There would be no drunken carousing in the streets of Chicago for me. I, like so many other Cubs fans in prison, let out a yell that was absorbed by the walls that confine us.

I saw men with their smiling sons standing next to them, sharing a special occasion. It was an enviable moment of joy. I jumped off the top bunk, clipped my LED book lamp on my composition notebook, and wrote my daughter a letter. I don't remember what I wrote exactly, but I was instantly transported to a memory in which my daughter asked why we were Cubs fans. I remember looking at her innocent face, wondering where the question originated. I was not going to give her some bullshit excuse about having to root for our hometown's team. Instead, I chose to reveal to her the profound impact my father had on my fandom. I told her that when I was a little boy my dad used to watch baseball games while sitting in his ugly old brown recliner. And my brother and I would climb on top of him and watch baseball games. It was the animated drunken ramblings of Harry Caray that made the game interesting.

I don't know if my daughter even remembers this visiting-room conversation, but I'll never forget it. It's the clearest memory I have of sharing my fandom with her.

I would have loved to have been able to create new memories of being there with my baby girl, looking at her smiling face, both of us in our white Cubs jerseys with hundreds of dollars' worth of memorabilia in our arms.

On that night I would not be sharing this experience with the ones I love the most. There would be no hugs for my daughter or father. What should have been one of the most joyful moments in my life was a satisfactory yet hollow experience.

Six days later, I was nervously pacing the cell, wearing out the channel buttons on my television. I was searching for news coverage that would abate my fears of a Trump presidency. No amount of channel surfing was going to change the inevitable: at 2:38 a.m. central time Donald J. Trump was declared the winner.

I was angry, confused, and utterly disappointed. I wanted to scream obscenities at the television set, but my cellmate had already gone to sleep. Even at three in the morning I was too restless to even consider trying to sleep.

I had been forming a letter in mind all day. I was going to tell my daughter that Hillary Clinton had proved that girls are just as good as boys and they could be whatever they wanted to be—even president. As it became evident that Hillary would not win I had to alter my message. I wanted to apologize on behalf of half the country. I wanted to reassure her that this loss doesn't mean

Continued on next page



girls are in any way inferior. I wanted to comfort her, and protect her from this dreadful result. I realized that the only thing I could offer her at the moment was words, but I hoped one day she'd understand that I'd given her all I had.

There are moments in history that become ingrained in our memories, and we are able to recall every "trivial" fact. But in those moments nothing is unimportant. These neutral details are injected with emotions granting them significance. Our memories are validated by those with whom they are shared, which raises the question: *If nobody shares the experience with you, did it really happen?*

How is it that I speak of being alone when I am constantly surrounded by hundreds of individuals on a daily basis? Every single day for the past seventeen years I have been part of mass-movement lines that herd us to and from chow halls, recrea-

tional activities, and academic settings. I have come to realize that in prison (and perhaps you might recognize this in the free world as well) being alone is not about the number of people around; it is about the connection you have with them. I've been banished from society, branded with a number, and boxed in storage, but I still see what's going on out there, and still hear about the happenings of the world—whether it is a suspenseful sporting event or something more consequential like a presidential election. I was stripped of my freedom, but I wasn't stripped of the ability to feel compassion, confusion, elation, and so many other emotions that arise because of what I see our world becoming. I like to believe a great majority of the 2.2 million voiceless and incarcerated men and women in this country feel the same way.

—Angel Pantoja

## Positively Speaking

Ever hatch a clever plan after drinking a few too many? There's a word for that: the German *Schnapsidee*. Some of our audience might even be in a position to read this because of a *Schnapsidee* gone horribly sideways, particularly if it involved *mbuki-mvuki*, or flinging off one's clothes in order to dance.

*Schnapsidee* (get it, "schnapps idea"?) and the Bantu *mbuki-mvuki* are two of over 200 unique words published by University of East London psychologist Tim Lomas in *The Journal of Positive Psychology*. The full title of Lomas's paper is "Towards a Positive Cross-Cultural Lexicography: Enriching Our Emotional Landscape through 216 'Untranslatable' Words Pertaining to Well-Being." (Since the actual ingenuity of drunken plans is best determined after sobering up, the relevance of *Schnapsidee* to well-being may well be negative, as noted above.)

These 216 words are deemed untranslatable because they express concepts that have no single-term equivalents outside their language of origin. Part of Lomas's thesis is that the existence of such one-of-a-kind words implies the exclusivity of particular cultures' explicit recognition of certain positive emotional states. This isn't to say outsiders are deprived of experiencing these states, but only of the opportunity to specifically identify them, so that each "instead thus becomes just another unconceptualized ripple in the ongoing flux of subjective experience."

Unconceptualized they may be (or at least loosely conceptualized), but the familiarity of the states belies the notion that they pass as mere ripples. Who among *The Amplifier's* student readers hasn't at one time or another had their mirror out on the gallery around mail time, heart filled with *iktsuarpok* (Inuit), the anticipation which causes one to keep going outside to check if an awaited person has arrived? And what day is free of *saudade*, Portuguese for "a melancholic longing/nostalgia for a person, place or thing that is far away—either spatially or in time—a vague, dreaming wistfulness for phenomena that may not even exist?" "Magari," we might sigh at such moments, if we only knew this Italian word of wishful and pensive regret which conveys something like "in my dreams" and "if only."

The vocabulary introduced by Lomas offers an impressive lexicon for much of what we prize about EJP. Courses and workshops all contribute to *kombinowac* (Polish), acquiring valuable skills or qualities by working out novel solutions to

complex problems—qualities such as *Fingerspitzengefühl* (German), the aptitude for thinking clearly about how phenomena relate on a variety of levels. Wrapping up a difficult course or putting the last bit of polish on a paper or article can result in *suaimhneas croi* (Gaelic), "a state of happiness encountered specifically after a task has been finished." Of course, sometimes a class or activity can be less engaging than one had hoped, which makes it a perfect time to practice *Sitzfleisch*—literally, German for "sit meat"—the capacity to press on through difficult or boring tasks.

Catalan's *enraonar* describes rational, civilized discourse, which demands *dadirri* (aboriginal Australian for "a deep spiritual act of reflective and respectful listening"). These illustrate the type of social interaction characteristic of EJP activities, which are a far cry from so many of our daily exchanges which at best can be called *talanoa* (Hindi), hollow chatter serving as social adhesive. This points to something too rarely acknowledged about EJP: its contribution to *tarbiya* (Pashto), or ongoing moral education. We can always use a bit more *apramada*, which in Sanskrit refers to a developed sense of the ethical implications of one's actions. The Nguni Bantu word *ubuntu* expresses the EJP ethic. It is the concept of reciprocal kindness based upon common humanity. Archbishop Desmond Tutu wrote of *ubuntu*, "It speaks of the fact that my humanity is caught up and inextricably bound up in yours. I am human because I belong. It speaks about wholeness; it speaks about compassion."

Ethical training is best served by example. The Yiddish *menschlichkeit* "encompasses being a good human being in its fullest sense . . . to not only be human and humane, but also filled with reverence for life, compassion for others, concern for the health and well-being of the planet, and justice for all." It is not just *hirgun* (Hebrew for saying nice things only to make someone feel good), to point out that few persons exemplify *menschlichkeit* as sweepingly as EJP instructors, advisors, and volunteers. They are all also *pihentagyü*—Hungarian for "relaxed brain"—quick wits with a knack for coming up with sophisticated jokes and solutions. This is what makes working with them such a delight. (Though *they* can be a bit too effusive with the *hirgun*.)

The things we study and practice as EJP members may not necessarily lead to *yuan bei* (Chinese), or "complete and perfect accomplishment," but they certainly contribute to a sense of



*ikigai* (Japanese), life as worthwhile and meaningful. Most importantly they inspire in us a deep appreciation for *orenda*, which comes from the Native American Huron language and “describes the power of the human will to change the world in the face of powerful forces such as fate.”

*The Journal of Positive Psychology* isn't the only place to find these words. We have several subsets under our very snouts. Ask any of the Spanish-speaking Learning Partners what *vivencias*, *vacilando*, *gula*, or *sobremesa* mean. (I'm not giving the definitions here—you'll have to ask them.) Some of the Muslim brothers studying Arabic might be able to tell you about *sumud*, *betmoun*, *asabiyyah*, or *tarab*. (Ditto.) And in mindfulness group, you might learn *karuna*, *maitri*, *dhyana*, and *wu wei*.

A little digging might take you beyond the 216 words Lomas unearthed. Figuring the best place to find unique words would be a unique language, I turned to UI's Professor Estibalitz Ezkerra. Professor Ezkerra is a native speaker of Basque, which belongs to no known linguistic family. She offered two words fitting Lomas's criteria, *min* and *emeki*. According to Ms. Ezkerra:

*Min* means pain. However, when it is added to another word it evokes the feeling that causes the search for something that may not be materialized. It's like longing for something, which may cause a pain that's not necessarily bad. So, *jakin-min* means the thirst for knowledge, but also the longing for knowledge. It can be a positive attitude or a negative one, depending on the subject. *Herri-min*, on the other hand, means the longing for home, what is felt by exiles, refugees, anyone who is away from home, voluntarily or not.

*Emeki* literally means “gently,” “tenderly,” “sweetly,” but in a way that's very feminine. The word *eme* means “female” or “women” depending on the context, so to do something *emeki* means to do it with a softness proper to women. It can be a very queer word or a sexist one, depending on the use.

Then there is *buufis*, introduced in the spring 2016 new student reading group selection *City of Thorns*. *Buufis* is a recent verbal coinage from Dadaab, the Kenyan refugee complex for displaced Somalis. According to author Ben Rawlence, *buufis* “is a kind of depression rooted in an inextinguishable hope for a life elsewhere that simultaneously casts the present into shadow.”

Lomas's research aims toward enriching the emotional vocabulary—and thus perhaps the emotional experience—of English speakers. A familiarity with the lexicon he has uncovered may help us realize that even in prison our lives have access to more varied emotional content than merely *buufis* or *saudade*. At worst it might provide us with more flashy jargon we can pull out of our rears to dazzle the eye and further obscure empty rhetoric in articles and research papers. (Please don't do this.)

—M. Sean Lawless

Offer new words to Lomas's research or view his current list at:  
[www.drtilomas.com/lexicography](http://www.drtilomas.com/lexicography).

*The Amplifier* is a publication by the students of the Education Justice Project, a unit of the University of Illinois, at Danville Correctional Center in Illinois.

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## Attention!

Submissions sent to *The New Inquiry* for their prison-related issue are being “returned to sender.” This writing opportunity was posted on the EJP bulletin boards and in the January 2016 issue of *The Amplifier*. The address given in *The New Inquiry*'s own submission call was the one posted. Please save your write-outs and send no further submissions to *The New Inquiry* until future announcements are made. Sorry for the inconvenience.

## Submission Guidelines

Comments and submissions may be addressed to *The Amplifier* and placed in the EJP suggestion box or handed to Ms. Cumpston or a member of *The Amplifier* editorial staff.

Submissions may be in any legible format.

Submissions will be selected for publication according to:

- 1) EJP values and standards as outlined in the EJP handbook
- 2) Editorial needs

Submissions will be edited for clarity, length, and technical issues, using the *Chicago Manual of Style* and AP guidelines as authoritative. When possible, editing will be done in cooperation with the author, and greater latitude will be given to creative/personal pieces.

The deadline for the April issue is **February 24**.

### Eddie's Enigmas— STRAIGHT SPELLING

What do the words in the following list have in common?  
**LAUGHING, CRABCAKE, HIJACK, LIVERWURST, DEFTLY, CALMNESS, STUNTMAN, CANOPY.**


Rating = ●●○○○

Solutions to EDDIE'S ENIGMAS can be found on the bulletin boards in the Computer Lab and Resource Room 1.



Updates to the EJP  
Calendar may be found in  
Public Documents  
February Calendar!

# FEBRUARY

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
		1	11:30a Workshop: Antimicrobial 5p Language Partners 5p Mindfulness 2	9a Newsletter 9a CAVE 5p For-credit courses: 396 Russian Revolution 350 Intro to African Art 420 Journalism 486 Linguistics 3
5p WAMP 6	8:30a Workshop: Bioinformatics 11:30a SRR 5p Language Partners 5p WAMP 6p Advising 7	5p Workshop: Illinois Politics 8	8:30a Workshop: What makes you tick 5p Language Partners 5p Mindfulness 9	9a Newsletter 9a CAVE 5p For-credit courses: 396 Russian Revolution 350 Intro to African Art 420 Journalism 486 Linguistics 10
5p Teaching Partners Training (Assessment) 5p WAMP 6p Advising 13	11:30a Prospective EJP Students 5p Language Partners 5p WAMP 14 	15	5p Language Partners 5p Mindfulness 16	9a Newsletter 9a CAVE 5p For-credit courses: 396 Russian Revolution 350 Intro to African Art 420 Journalism 486 Linguistics 17
5p WAMP 20	8:30a Python 11:30a SRR 5p Language Partners 5p WAMP 6p Advising 21	22	5p Language Partners 5p Mindfulness 23	9a Newsletter 9a CAVE 5p For-credit courses: 396 Russian Revolution 350 Intro to African Art 420 Journalism 486 Linguistics 24
5p Teaching Partners Training (Classroom) 5p WAMP 6p Advising 27	8:30a Workshop: Bioinformatics 11:30a SRR 5p Language Partners 5p WAMP 28			

STRAIGHT SPELLING HINT  
Can you say your ABCs?

The wisest mind has something yet to learn.

George Santayana (1863 - 1952)



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