Sample Annotated Bibliography


Father Sweeney was a meticulous record keeper as evidenced by the voluminous folders and boxes that dominate nearly an entire floor in the Burns Library at Boston College. Boxes 16 and 17 contain all of his teaching materials including syllabi and assignments. Furthermore, this series of boxes also house conference proposals and other professional development materials. Additionally, boxes 16 and 17 hold his personal correspondence between colleagues and superiors, including documents where he articulates his vision for a revised version of composition instruction at Boston College. I intend to use Father Sweeney’s personal writings to demonstrate his desire to shift and rework the curriculum at Boston College.


This article details the classical curriculum at Boston College beginning with the founding of the college in 1863. Donovan charts the changes and adaptations to the classical curriculum including a defense of the system of education in the 1894-95 course catalog. Donovan also examines the Ratio Studiorum, which is the blueprint for Jesuit education. From the Latin, Ratio Studiorum is translated to mean a “plan of studies”. This model placed a significant focus on the classics, specifically Latin and Greek. I plan to use Donovan’s work to demonstrate the foundations of the composition curriculum at Boston College and then to highlight why Father Sweeney was compelled to change the curriculum.


Brian Doyle was a former student of Father Sweeney. In this article, Doyle recalls fondly how Father Sweeney was different than other professors at Boston College. Doyle remembers a man that recognized the intimidating qualities of the university and helped his students meet those challenges head on. A particular way that Father Sweeney was able to do this according to Doyle was through his unique ability to “wheel” students to perform. Father Sweeney was very cognizant of the backgrounds of his students (mainly first generation college students who were from working class backgrounds). Doyle maintains that Father Sweeney was able to both honor the classics (Ratio Studiorum), while simultaneously imparting useful knowledge on his working class students. I intend to use Doyle’s article to demonstrate (through a first hand account) how Sweeney revised the composition curriculum to expand beyond the classics and also provide students the ability to harness some applicable knowledge.

Freire’s text is built upon the notion that a new pedagogy must emerge in order to best serve students. Freire’s main point of contention is what he refers to as the “banking concept of education”. As such, students are merely empty vessels until the teacher bestows their knowledge upon them. This pedagogy is problematic because it further perpetuates oppressive attitudes. Within the banking concept, students are relegated to a severely limited role in their own education. I intend to use Freire’s as scaffolding for Father Sweeney’s push to expand the composition curriculum at Boston College. I hope to make connections between the static instruction of the Ratio Studiorum and the banking concept of education as articulated by Freire. Many of the limitations that Freire demonstrates also relate to the limitations of the Ratio Studiorum, especially for working class students. In essence, Father Sweeney’s crusade to expand the composition curriculum is a similar battle cry to that of Freire- both believed a new pedagogy was essential to the success of students.


This book is made up of six autobiographical essays focused on education, socio-economic status, language, and culture. Each essay marks a progression from childhood to adulthood, continually touching back on the aforementioned themes. Rodriguez documents his struggle and perceived failure to shuttle between the culture of home and that of the academy. I plan to use Rodriguez as an example of the struggle many of Father Sweeney’s students were also encountering. For many at Boston College the language of school was not the language of home. Father Sweeney recognized this and his awareness of this trend was a major factor for his insistence of revising the composition curriculum at Boston College.


Sullivan’s article details the 400-year history of the Ratio Studiorum. Noting the consistency of the Ratio Studiorum curriculum, Sullivan highlights the miniscule amount of changes that have occurred over this lengthy period. Sullivan also juxtaposes major events in history and education against the static (or to some constant) Ratio Studiorum, noting how the pedagogical approach is strictly adhered to at most Jesuit universities to this day. I plan on using Sullivan’s article to help highlight how society and education have progressed and changed; yet the Ratio Studiorum has not. Father Sweeney did not advocate dropping the Ratio Studiorum; rather he wanted to expand the curriculum to more accurately reflect the needs of “current” students. Sullivan’s article will also demonstrate the rich history of the Ratio Studiorum and the Church’s hesitance to alter the long-standing pedagogy. Thus, Sullivan’s article will highlight the friction and opposition that often greeted Father Sweeney’s proposals among colleagues and the larger Jesuit community as well.