

Adam Tramantano

BUILDING FROM WHERE WE ARE

My first job was a camp counselor. For years I would say that my first *real* job was working for a carpet cleaner, which was actually my second job. I believed that working as a counselor at a camp wasn't real work. It wasn't until I was a teacher for about ten years that I would proudly recognize the work I did as a camp counselor.

I was a sophomore in high school when I first became a camp counselor and, at the time, I didn't think of it as work. Maybe it was because I wasn't paid by the hour or maybe I didn't think of it as serious work. Was serious work supposed to have an immediate economic relevance? Carpet cleaning certainly had that. It could have been a belief about what "work" meant. I probably thought that work wasn't supposed to be fun or at least wasn't supposed to resemble relating to people.

I realize now that I was operating under the belief that certain jobs aren't work. I think about this quite frequently now as I read headlines that continue to denigrate the profession of teaching. Teaching, like being a camp counselor, is a relational job—a trade based primarily on how well we try to understand ourselves and others. It is quite a few other things too. Teaching is complex and rich and tends to permeate every aspect of our lives.

A few years ago, when I started my doctoral work at Teachers College, I was in need of a topic, of something to develop an educational research project about. I want to say that I thought deeply about what I did, but I didn't. Really, it sort of came to me, the idea that teaching is about improvisation.

When I wonder about why this topic matters so much to me, I think it's because improvisation is a creative act and I believe work—all work—can offer workers the same profound level of meaning and engagement (and freedom) as creative production. In short, to look at improvisation in work is to look at work as a form of creative production.

That's how I, in this current moment, see one of the big premises of this journal. Of course, the great thing about an academic journal is that its vision becomes focused by those who read it and those who write for it.

In this inaugural issue, I'm proud to host work that presents thoughtful considerations of improvisation in work. These considerations resonate with established work in the field as well as raise new points of inquiry. Rather than summarizing them here, I'll allow the works to speak for themselves.