THE WABASH CENTER

JOURNAL ON TEACHING

Volume 1

Number 1

January 2020

The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching

An open access digital journal on teaching in religious and theological studies

Published by The Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion

Hosted by Atla

Published quarterly online
https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/journal/

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JOURNAL DESCRIPTION

The journal publishes a particular type of academic writing in which teacher-practioners critically reflect on their teaching practice – surfacing their assumptions, analyzing their pedagogical intentions, reflecting on the effectiveness of their learning designs, and diagnosing challenges to student learning.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Thomas Pearson
Editor

Welcome to the new open-access, online, *Wabash Center Journal on Teaching*.[1] This is the inaugural issue of a journal that has a long history and rich pedigree. For twenty-two years the Wabash Center[2] has been publishing *Teaching Theology & Religion*[3] (*TTR*), owned by Wiley-Blackwell. Now we've moved our whole editorial team from *TTR* to this new publishing venture in order to make our efforts available digitally without subscription. Although the Wabash Center will no longer be involved in the publication of *TTR*, Wiley-Blackwell intends to continue publishing it with a new editorial team[4] beginning with volume 23 (January 2020).

When we started *TTR* as a new and unknown center for teaching in the 1990s, we needed the prestige of a major publisher in the field of religion and theology to lend gravitas to the emerging field of the scholarship of teaching and learning. But for many years now we have regretted the paywall our articles have lived behind, limiting our ability to promote this scholarship, support authors, and inspire readers.

The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching will continue publishing the high-quality, peer reviewed scholarship on teaching in the fields of theological and religious studies that has been the hallmark of *TTR* for over two decades. The new journal carries forward the same scope and focus of scholarship – but now our efforts will be freely available online.

In the new journal you'll find the popular Teaching Tactics. In addition to Forums (with contributions now listed individually) we will also highlight Special Topic sections. And the new journal reintroduces Book Reviews, which were removed from *TTR* in 2015 to allow more space for articles in the print journal.

So while you'll find *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* familiar, you will also begin to notice new developments. The open-access online platform allows us to provide convenient links to sources on the internet and links back to previously published articles. But more than that, the new platform provides the opportunity for *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* to become more than just a print journal available online. It's easy to insert links to video clips, graphics, or sound files – although these links must be found on the web or created by authors. It takes a leap of imagination to conceive how teaching issues and contexts, arguments and evidence, could be represented graphically, in motion, visually. Until now, the written word would have seemed to be the distinctive home for sustained rigorous, reflection on teaching. But we're moving into a new world in which the "text" that creates and makes legible academic thinking needn't be limited to words on a page.

So we issue this challenge to our readers and authors: send us[5] sustained critical reflection on your teaching practice and context that explores the boundaries and possibilities of representational forms and genres available on an open-access online platform.

In this inaugural issue we're excited to publish a Teaching Tactic by Daniel Alvarez[6] that includes video clips and slides that provide how-to instructions and an actual illustration of Zoom breakout rooms for group discussions that combine online and on-campus students. The Tactic by Amy DeRogatis and Isaac Weiner[7] links through to sound clips on the Religious

1 https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/journal/

2 https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/

3 https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/14679647

4 Graduate Theological Union. 2019. "GTU and Wiley to Partner for Teaching Theology & Religion in 2020." https://www.gtu.edu/news/gtu-and-wiley-partner-teaching-theology-religion-2020.

5 https://serials.atla.com/wabashcenter/Make_Submission

6 https://doi.org/10.31046/wabashjournal.v1i1.1495

7 https://doi.org/10.31046/wabashjournal.v1i1.1521

Sounds Project database,[8] demonstrating in itself how scholarly work has long since transcended written texts. The link embedded in the Tactic by Stephanie Powell and Amy Beth Jones[9] portrays the visual a-ha moment they stage for their students. Christina Kilby's Tactic[10] simply provides a convenient link to the film that is central to the teaching strategy. What new formats might our authors develop that could be embedded into the succinct Teaching Tactic genre?

We fashioned a centerpiece for the inaugural issue by drawing on our deep reservoir of experience and connections to commission two broad essays on the status of the fields of teaching theology and religion – one on theological education[11] by Frank Yamada (Executive Director of the Association of Theological Schools), and the other on teaching in undergraduate contexts[12] by Eugene V. Gallagher and Joanne Maguire (two longtime Wabash Center colleagues with wide workshop and consultation experience across a range of undergraduate contexts). Both essays identify broad trends in society and higher education, and the ways in which they have shaped and will continue to influence both what and how we teach. To fill in the details and offer our readers greater nuance closer to their teaching practice, we are announcing a Call for Papers for short (two thousand word) essays[13] that take one of the trends or factors identified in these two essays and analyzes a concrete practice in curriculum, course design, or teaching practice that responds to it.

These two essays are written from ten thousand feet. Closer to the classroom is Anthony Baker's essay, Arguing the Mystery,[14] describing several years of revisions to his introductory theology course at Seminary of the Southwest, striving to weave together his goals: teaching theology and teaching critical thinking.

Similarly focused on concrete pedagogical challenges, John Van Maaren's essay (Transformative Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge[15]) provides an invaluable review of the literature on threshold concepts – conceptual gateways through which students pass to enable further learning in a particular discipline. There has been little work analyzing what these troublesome concepts might be for the fields of religious and theological studies. Therefore Van Maaren's essay concludes with some preliminary suggestions for threshold concepts in biblical studies. We continue the conversation by publishing three short companion essays[16] (by Richard S. Ascough, Tat-siong Benny Liew, and Jocelyn McWhirter), each of which describes a particular teaching strategy they use to address a key threshold concept in their biblical studies courses – thus constituting a Special Topic section of the journal on threshold concepts.

In contrast to this focus on the classroom, a Forum of short tributes[17] to Professor Katie Geneva Cannon by several of her former graduate students (upon her death in 2018) describe the influence she had on them as a pedagogue and mentor.

And so, quite fittingly, this inaugural issue of the journal contains multitudes: from the "status of the field" essays, to heartfelt tributes to vocation, to book reviews, and tightly focused reflections on teaching practices (including provisional experiments pointing toward new ways that scholarship on teaching might transcend written text). We're proud, therefore, that we were able to sit down with Maryellen Weimer to discuss[18] the legacy of *Teaching Theology & Religion*, the possibilities for the new *Wabash Center Journal on Teaching*, and the context of these journals in the broad history and trends of scholarship on teaching. No one is better positioned to comment on this, since she looks at several dozen disciplinary-based pedagogical journals on a regular basis to gather material for her column for the *Teaching Professor* website. The perspective she provides on the

8 http://religioussounds.osu.edu/

9 https://doi.org/10.31046/wabashjournal.v1i1.1590

10 https://doi.org/10.31046/wabashjournal.v1i1.564

11 https://doi.org/10.31046/wabashjournal.v1i1.1580

12 https://doi.org/10.31046/wabashjournal.v1i1.1579

13 https://serials.atla.com/wabashcenter/cfp/Changing_Contexts

14 https://doi.org/10.31046/wabashjournal.v1i1.136

15 https://doi.org/10.31046/wabashjournal.v1i1.1526

16 https://doi.org/10.31046/wabashjournal.v1i1.1583

17 https://doi.org/10.31046/wabashjournal.v1i1.1546

18 https://doi.org/10.31046/wabashjournal.v1i1.1581

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purposes and value of our endeavor is awe-inspiring.

Our mission to support the scholarship of teaching and learning in theological and religious studies is reborn as we leave the Wiley-Blackwell paywall behind and launch our new journal. The internet sets no limit to the creative possibilities of scholarship on teaching.

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ARTICLE

Teaching Religion to Undergraduates in the 2020s: A Preliminary Reconnaissance

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ABSTRACT

We survey the current landscape of teaching religion to undergraduates to imagine its contours over the next five to ten years. We follow Dee Fink's outline of backwards design for course development to consider outside factors, the nature of the subject matter, the characteristics of learners and teachers, and issues related to particular courses, focusing on introductory and general education courses. Such courses serve students best when they are designed with broad goals, often articulated in the institutional mission. This opens new ways of conceiving of the field from the student perspective while helping teachers to attract more students and to embrace a variety of pedagogies and curricula to better serve the students they teach.

KEYWORDS

course design, curriculum design, institutional mission, teaching introductory courses, teaching general education courses, teaching religion

In *Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses* (2003), L. Dee Fink provides a thorough guide to course, and, by extension, curriculum design. At its heart is the process of "backwards design," which starts with an articulation of what students are supposed to learn from a particular course or curriculum. Designers then work backwards towards formulating specific learning activities that will help students achieve the goals set out in the beginning, modes of feedback to students, and the connection and integration of all those considerations into a syllabus or program (Fink 2003, 63).

Fink's emphasis on the importance of careful design to promote learning has been an influential contribution to both the scholarship of teaching and learning and to the practice of teaching in colleges and universities. His highlighting of situational factors that shape the contexts for teaching and learning has been salutary, particularly as higher education has been going through a prolonged period of attack, transformation, and transition. In this essay we will use Fink's sketch of situational factors to chart some of the teaching challenges that lie ahead, particularly for teachers of the academic study of religion in undergraduate contexts.

Fink (2003) breaks situational factors down into several subcategories.

1. Outside factors can influence the design of learning experiences, factors such as the expectations of the general public, oversight agencies such as accrediting agencies or state legislatures, and institutional or system-wide administrators.

2. The nature of the subject matter, including the particular demands it makes on students and teachers, whether it works towards a single correct answer or entertains multiple interpretations, and its relative stability or volatility, also affects the design of teaching and learning experiences.

3. Teachers also need to take into account both the characteristics of the learners with whom they will be working (for example, their life situations, goals and expectations, relevant prior knowledge, and learning styles) and their own characteristics (for example, their familiarity with the material they will be teaching; their familiarity and level of comfort with various teaching strategies such as leading discussions, lecturing, or flipping the classroom; and their experiences with the processes of and scholarship on effective teaching).

4. Teachers should consider whether there might be any special pedagogical challenges involved in teaching particular courses. There are issues specific to individual courses, such as the number enrolled, the level of the course, the timing and frequency of class sessions, and the format of instruction (for example, online, hybrid, in-person). But there are also certain types of courses that present distinctive challenges. We think here of the issues posed by introductory and general education courses, particularly for a population of college and university students who typically have very little experience with the academic study of religion. We will focus on this fourth situational factor after considering the others in turn.

Our observations are not based on large-scale statistical studies but rather on our research and our combined experience in working with teachers of religious studies in undergraduate programs at scores of institutions. This includes visits to more than seventy-five campuses over the last two decades, largely under the auspices of the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion (2020). There are many interesting questions we cannot pursue here, such as how religious studies curricula have changed over the last decade and how the shape of the field has changed over the same time. We do not aim to present an ideal classroom approach or path going forward, since we recognize the importance of differences in teaching contexts. We hope to draw together disparate indications of the current state of the teaching of religion in undergraduate programs and departments, and the opportunities, challenges, and dilemmas that will confront teachers and students of religion over the next five to ten years. Both of us teach on the "religious studies" side of the sometimes contentious distinction with "theology." We would invite a companion essay could provide insights into the pedagogical challenges specific to a more theologically-focused curriculum and mission.

Our central argument is that by focusing on the broad importance of the study of religion to educated citizens, particularly in the design of introductory or general education courses, teachers can make the case to multiple audiences for the value of the study of religion, attract students to their courses, and, at least indirectly, attract more students to more courses and even to minor or major.

External Factors

Here we focus on the expectations that members of the general public; local, state, and national governments; oversight and accrediting agencies; and parents and families have for higher education. In many instances those expectations have been expressed in public through the news media, as politicians, tech entrepreneurs, and others have questioned the value of a traditional four-year college education (see for example Gravett 2018, 1-7, 29-39). Expectations are frequently both filtered and communicated by institutional and system-wide administrators. Administrators can also exert pressures regarding the number of students enrolled in courses and programs, the timing and frequency of course offerings, the format of courses (face to face, online, hybrid, intensive, and so forth), and uses of technology (such as the mandated use of certain "learning management systems").

Over the last several decades, colleges and universities have been challenged to demonstrate that they are delivering value commensurate with the prices they charge. In many instances, the challenge has taken the form of demanding that institutions demonstrate that they are contributing to the immediate employability of their graduates, providing a measurable return on investment. Students who have learned that lesson, from parents and the general social context, have accordingly voted with their feet and enrolled in majors that they think will help them get a job in their chosen field upon graduation (Donoghue 2018;

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National Council for Education Statistics 2018). That does not necessarily entail lower enrollment in our courses (Hu 2018), but it should encourage a certain thoughtfulness about how those courses are designed.

These cultural shifts have led to changes in the allocation of resources on many campuses. But such redirections of curricular focus are often not fully aligned with either the mission statements or the programs of general education at those same institutions, which often still give prominent places to courses in the humanities, including those in the study of religion. One upshot of that situation is that while introductory courses in the study of religion may satisfy foundational general education or distribution requirements, such courses are increasingly populated with students who expect to derive from them some immediate practical benefits that will help them in their chosen careers. That poses an acute course and curriculum design challenge to which we will return.

Broader cultural attitudes also force many departments or programs to make a compelling case for the value of the academic study of religion. In doing so, departments need to keep multiple audiences in mind: from administrators; to colleagues who may often informally or formally dispense advice that leads students towards or away from the study of religion as part of their college careers; to students and their parents.

Making the case for the academic study of religion may involve not only adjusting the ways in which a program or department presents itself in brochures, on websites, and to admissions officers, and other potential stakeholders: It should also involve concrete changes to both curricula and individual courses. It is not sufficient to have courses that are representative of the best practices of the guild if they do not connect in a direct and substantial fashion to the types of education that institutions are promising students and to the perceived needs of educated individuals in the twenty-first century.

In some cases, programs or departments have responded to the challenge of demonstrating their practical relevance by forging strong relationships with disciplines or programs perceived to be more practical, such as offering cross-listed courses with medical humanities programs or others in the general field of health services. Such cooperative relationships can ensure an influx of students into some courses in the academic study of religion, even if highly prescribed curricula often curtail further opportunities for many students in those programs. Nonetheless, such partnerships have the potential to weave the academic study of religion more effectively into the fabric of an institution and to enlist allies who can help in the process of making the case for the study of religion. Two specific examples indicate the ways departments are doing just that. John Schmalzbauer and Stephen Berkwitz at Missouri State University received a Wabash Center grant on "Teaching Religious Studies to Undergraduate Students in Health-Related Fields" (Schmalzbauer and Berkwitz 2016) which has helped them in developing a new curriculum for undergraduates (Missouri State Religious Studies 2019). Michelle Desmarais, Curtis Hutt, and Paul Williams of University of Nebraska Omaha founded the Spirituality, Public Health, Religious Studies community engagement initiative, which includes a service learning component for students (University of Nebraska Omaha 2016). These initiatives are especially crucial as more than a few departments and programs have been confronted with the possibility of absorption into other academic units or being paired with other departments, such as philosophy.

Directing students towards disciplines that are perceived to have a more immediate connection to post-graduation employment can exert substantial pressure on an institution's operating budget and even its endowment. The shifting of tenured faculty lines towards areas of greater perceived need within an institution is one way of responding to that pressure. But since humanities disciplines, such as the study of religion, frequently retain important roles in delivering general education courses, they are then pressed to teach more students with fewer tenured or tenure-stream faculty. One response has been to rely on contingent faculty, especially to teach at the introductory level. The escalating impacts of the "adjunctification" of the American professoriate have been widely remarked (see Kezar and Gherke 2014). Here, we emphasize that it is essential that contingent faculty hired to teach general education courses receive support to design courses that are appropriate for the institution and program or department (Burroughs 2019; Harrell 2019; Lee 2019; Schenkewitz 2019; Wirrig 2019).

More and more institutions are promoting service learning, internships, fieldwork assignments, problem-based learning, study away, and other "high impact" teaching and learning strategies. These can help move the study of religion outside the classroom and thereby show that the habits of mind; strategies of forming, asking, and seeking answers to questions; and knowledge that is cultivated in courses can have direct relevance in the world (see for example Seider 2011; DeTemple 2012; Seigler 2015; Long 2018; Gravett 2018, 67-71). Requiring such experiences of majors and/or minors has been one way of trying to establish the "practical" benefits of the study of religion and to satisfy student and employer expectations for collegiate internship experience. Other strategies are possible, too (see Gravett 2018, 130-141). Programs that have integrated applied or interfaith elements in their curricula are seeking the same sort of practical student engagement.

Several other trends that affect course and degree delivery, many of which arise from institutional and cultural pressures for expediency, are likely to grow in the coming years. Institutions as different as Utah State and Villanova University, as well as many community colleges, are establishing accelerated or short-term courses across disciplines, a move that caters to non-traditional students and to the need to move students quickly and steadily toward graduation. Institutions are also investing more in instructional design and technology, and the subsequent "deskilling" of the professoriate by this and other technologies (such as packaged assessments for particular textbooks) will need to be monitored carefully over the coming decade (see Poritz and Rees 2017). Finally, some colleges and universities are increasingly devising "stackable" programs that allow students to cobble together various types of credits and certificates from various sources into a full degree; others offer accelerated graduate programs to committed undergraduates. More and more institutions, such as Purdue University and the University of Michigan, are wading into competency-based education, which focuses on and assesses gained skills and knowledge instead of adding up time spent in the classroom. Religious studies may seem less amenable to credentialing its students for specific forms of post-graduation work than many undergraduate majors. But it would behoove religious studies faculty to think about how skills common to the field can be enumerated and assessed, in keeping with institutional mission statements, as explored below.

Nature of the Subject Matter

Fink's reminder (2003) to take situational factors into account in course and program design includes the nature of the field itself, although litigating the boundaries or approaches of the field is beyond the scope of this article. The margins and approaches of the field constantly shift as certain arguments take center stage and others fade. These disciplinary issues should be secondary in introductory and general education courses, as explored below.

There are several issues in the study of religion that do affect the classroom directly. Our field is not generally considered applied or pre-professional, but those of us who teach it believe that it is crucial to any undergraduate's education. This is because we see religion as intimately entangled with the social, economic, and political issues students will have to struggle with in their lives. Courses in religious studies often wrestle in some way, if not centrally, with problems of racism, xenophobia, sexism, power, and violence. Courses focused on climate change, migration, and the socioeconomic disparities that continue to shape our world are considerably less common but perhaps growing in importance. Global conflicts and pressing questions about religious freedom serve to increase the importance of studying religion through the interdisciplinary lens so common to departments of religion.

One of the biggest pedagogical challenges for teaching religion is student expectations. The potential clash between how religion is treated in religious education as conducted by families and congregations and how it is treated in the academic study of religion in higher education, particularly since students typically have little, no, or misleading familiarity with it prior to enrollment, can present particular pedagogical challenges. Broad characterizations of contemporary college students, such as Barbara Walvoord's assertion, based in part on the work of UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute, argue that students enrolled in introductory college and university courses about religion want to pursue "big questions" and cultivate their own spiritual and religious lives (see Walvoord 2008; Astin et al. 2011). Many students consider themselves "spiritual but not religious" or "nones" and thus reject religion as a serious object of study. Students also tend to expect a "world religions" class to provide just the facts about a cafeteria selection of religious traditions, while more and more courses tend to be thematic, following the model of "Religion and Material Culture" or "Religion and Sexuality." Overall, for students, wrestling with complexities seems less important than acquiring more straightforward, personally applicable knowledge.

We know of several innovative approaches to packaging religious studies in individual courses and in departments. Immersive technologies, gaming, and interactive fiction that appeal to many students are creative ways of approaching course design (Johnson 2018; Lester 2018; Zeller 2018). Some departments have turned toward interfaith education or interreligious studies, often on the model of Eboo Patel and the Interfaith Youth Core (2019). But whether such a focus simply supplements or can actually supplant the academic study of religion remains contentious. Other departments, such Georgia State University, have adopted an "applied" (or clinical) religious studies model, but such approaches are generally still in their beginning stages. Efforts to develop curricula that support applied religious studies are now supported by a committee of the American Academy of Religion charged with supporting "alt-ac" careers and exploring competency-based career readiness options (for key competencies see National Association of Colleges and Employers 2019). These examples show how efforts to attract students, promote understanding and tolerance, and link the study of religion to identifiable career paths might help religious studies survive in the changing academy. As of now, however, the jury remains out on each of these initiatives.

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Characteristics of Teachers and Learners

Few teachers would succeed if they ignored the attributes, interests, and needs of their students. These elements are, for many teachers, the keys to crafting a meaningful, productive learning environment, however hard they might be to define. We suspect that most teachers who have been at it for a while have heard some variation of the question, "Are the students different today than when you started?" There is, in fact, a substantial body of literature that attempts to characterize the particular characteristics of contemporary students of traditional college age by generational cohort, even though such generations can be imprecisely defined and in some ways are moving targets. The task for teachers is what to make of such broad generalizations about college students, let alone how such generalizations are inflected by specific intersections with race, ethnicity, gender, social and economic background, prior educational experience, and many other characteristics (see for example Bauman et al. 2014).

Nonetheless, many seasoned teachers would say that students are coming to college with weaker skills in reading and writing but stronger interests in group work and relevant, practical skills they can bring to the workplace. Weaker skills are often blamed on the rise of standardized testing in K-12 schools, a result of the No Child Left Behind policies instituted in the early 2000s that built on widespread testing begun in the 1970s. Recent research has indicated that the situation does not improve greatly during college (Arum and Roksa 2011). The challenge for teachers in the next decade will be to design courses that strive to remedy perceived skills deficiencies, build up established skills, and demonstrate their relevance beyond their particular course or degree.

In part because faculty members have their own training, skills, and concerns, some are resistant, for example, to becoming "writing teachers." Others are wedded to the coverage model they were trained to deliver. Having been trained a particular way, many do not understand how or why to incorporate more "real world" assignments in their classes. Many faculty members have known only the lecture or seminar models of learning, modalities that clearly worked for them but that might not serve their students well. Others feel compelled to initiate all students into the intricacies of the field. Whatever proclivities teachers might have, sustained and increased pedagogical innovation will be a key to making the case for the importance of the academic study of religion, particularly in introductory and general education courses.

Pedagogical Challenges of Particular Courses: Introduction and General Education

The final element of Fink's situational factors concerns elements of particular courses and particular types of courses. For instance, upper-level seminars require skills in generating and steering discussion and tradition-specific courses require attention to nuance and complexity (see DeRogatis et al. 2014; Holladay and Johnson 1998; Cornell and LeMon 2016). Yet perhaps the most difficult pedagogical challenge for teachers of religion will remain the conception and design of introductory courses (see McCutcheon et al. 2016). What students ostensibly want to find out may not be what teachers think that they need to learn. A push-and-pull dynamic, then, can develop between conceiving and designing courses for the students one actually has, and conceiving and designing courses for what those same students may not know that they need. Without dismissing the challenges of offering viable major and minor programs, we want to suggest that institutional structures that direct students toward introductory courses in religion pose the broader and more pressing set of opportunities and challenges for teachers of religion.

Although it is now nearly two decades old, the survey of undergraduate departments and programs in the study of religion undertaken by the American Academy of Religion from 2000 to 2001 still points to some essential characteristics of the undergraduate context. The summary of the results of data analysis presented to the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion (2003) provides a list of courses taught at the surveyed institutions, ranked by frequency. If only the courses that have "Introduction" are counted, they account for some 26.7 percent of the courses offered. Including courses that can plausibly assumed to be introductory, such as "New Testament," "Judaism," or "Ethics," the percentage of introductory courses increases to over two-thirds. Those percentages lend statistical heft to Jonathan Z. Smith's comment that "As college teachers, our primary expertise is introducing" (1988, 727).

The AAR survey numbers (2003), which are unfortunately the only solid data that we have, accord well with our personal observations. Because the study of religion continues to play a sometimes outsized role in general education programs, departments and programs are frequently required to offer multiple large courses and sections at the introductory level that will satisfy the demand for general education courses. This is often to the good, as student credit hours support department needs.

Since the vast majority of students who take a course in the study of religion to fulfill a general education or distribution requirement will take only that one course, course design needs to focus relentlessly on asking what (very) few things such students need to learn about religion during their limited encounter with its academic study (see Gallagher 2009). That is, learning objectives of such

courses in the study of religion need to focus on the cultivation of the types of knowledge, skills, capacities, and abilities that will serve students well *outside of the academic study of religion*, both in their academic programs and for the rest of their lives. The design process must be animated by questions such as "What does a nurse, an accountant, an engineer, or civil servant need to know about religion?" and, perhaps most importantly, "What does a citizen who will likely live into the latter part of the twenty-first century need to know about religion?" Beyond religious literacy, much of which can be learned on legitimate websites, students should be expected to struggle with complexity, with their own biases and assumptions, and with broader issues of prejudice and what constitutes justice. Understanding and living in a pluralistic world requires perspective taking, intellectual humility, and an ability to appreciate multiple interpretations. Fostering those intellectual habits will require a move away from superficially reviewed content toward more depth of understanding through more active learning.

Some time ago, in an essay whose importance remains fully to be grasped and acted on, Jonathan Z. Smith (1988) adumbrated several issues related to our argument. He argued that particularly courses with such a broad purview as "Introduction to Religion" or "Introduction to World Religions" cannot – and should not – aspire to the illusory goal of coverage during a single college term. It is apparent from the Open Syllabus Project (2019) and the Wabash Center Syllabus Collection (2019) that many instructors aim precisely for this, as seven of the top ten assigned books in "religion" are textbooks. What, in fact, would it mean to "cover" the "world's" religions or even "religion" over the course of twenty to thirty total hours of class time? In what ways would such coverage, even if attempted, respond to the educational goals articulated by institutions? Implicit in the goal of coverage is the perception that the transfer of knowledge from teacher to student is, somehow, in itself a worthy goal. At best, in such a model of education, the possession of knowledge – without consideration of how it is made or used – is viewed as valuable in itself. But it addresses only the lowest level of Benjamin Bloom's well-known taxonomy of cognitive skills, "knowledge" in the original form of the taxonomy and "remembering" in the revised version (see Bloom et al. 1956; Anderson et al. 2001).

Instead of aiming for an unachievable coverage, Smith (1988) urges that introductory courses should focus on problems and particularly on the formation of arguments about those problems. Students should be encouraged to attempt the adjudication of various arguments about the same problem so that they may make informed choices about how to understand something and how to defend that understanding. A college education, therefore, helps students *learn why they think what they think* and to entertain the possibilities that there may well be equally persuasive alternative approaches to the same problem. There, in our understanding of Smith's proposal, lies the link between what is taught in introductory courses about the academic study of religion and the broad goals of education sketched out in institutional mission statements. Introductory courses, from that perspective, are first of all introductions to the types of thinking, reading, speaking, and writing – the habits of mind – that are expected in college. Learning about any particular subject matter is therefore subordinate to learning how to think and express, defend, and critique one's ideas. As Smith puts it, "a central goal of liberal learning is the acceptance of (and training in) *the requirement to bring private percept into public discourse and, therefore, the requirement to learn to negotiate difference with civility"* (Smith 1988, 733; italics in original).

We suggest further that introductory courses in the study of religion, particularly as they satisfy general education or distribution requirements, should not be solely, or even primarily, about inducting students into the discipline of the academic study of religion. Such an intention, at least at its worst, can focus on the creation of "mini-mes," undergraduates being molded, explicitly and implicitly, in the image and likeness of their professors so that they, too, can enter graduate school, earn advanced degrees, become religion teachers, and replicate the cycle their teachers had already gone through.

Such a view is myopic for multiple reasons. First, it ignores the professed interests of the students in introductory courses. Since it begins the course with a likely misreading of what students are actually looking for, this view runs the risk of missing potential connections between teachers, students, and material that can reveal the intellectual power and potential of the study of religion for virtually any student. Second, it tends not to take account of the social and economic conditions that make it difficult not only for the few students who may consider it to pursue graduate education but also to complete it with any realistic hope of securing the type of employment that their teachers have. Third, it can contribute to the creation of a disruptive implicit hierarchy in any course that privileges those who "really get it" and those who are, supposedly, just putting in their time. Finally, teaching *to* a certain, imagined, group of students belies the promise of general education. Teaching an imagined audience of potential professors by designing courses with the purpose of beginning their induction into the discipline, with its dominant practices, questions, and conundrums, implicitly runs afoul of any institution's articulated goals for a college education, which are often stated with sweeping breadth in an institutional mission statement.

It is easy to dismiss institutional mission statements as airy platitudes that are filed away virtually as soon as they are finished or that accord little with reality (after all, few institutions list athletics as a key part of their mission even as a large portion of their budget goes to athletic programs). For example, most college and university mission statements profess an interest in preparing students for

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the globalized world of the twenty-first century. Yet such statements essentially constitute a *promise* to students and others about the broadest goals of their education. Those broad goals are to be reached through specific course work, most often those relatively few (types of) courses that all students are required to take. We propose, then, a simple thought experiment. What would introductory courses (and, by extension, programs) in the study of religion look like if they took institutional mission statements very seriously? What would introductory courses look like if they explicitly attempted to contribute to the formation of the types of individuals that institutions say that they are looking to produce? In other words, what if we take seriously Dee Fink's (2003) backward design on an institutional scale, with the mission statement constituting our learning goals?

Such a thought experiment, we suggest, entails a shift in the conception of the students as future professors of religious studies or even religious studies majors or minors. The shadow audience of one's colleagues in the guild and the always looming specter of one's doctoral advisor and committee accordingly fade into the deep background. Instead, an imagined audience of informed and incisive citizens who will face the changes and possibilities of living another fifty or more years of the twenty-first century comes to the fore. How can teaching about religion help such students equip themselves to face both pressing contemporary problems and ones yet to be identified?

Courses that are "mission-sensitive" or "mission-aware" will be inflected differently in different contexts. Public institutions, for example, can be expected to have at least slightly different articulations of their missions than religiously affiliated ones. The College of Charleston, for example, claims that "The College provides students a community in which to engage in original inquiry and creative expression in an atmosphere of intellectual freedom. This community, founded on the principles of the liberal arts tradition, provides students the opportunity to realize their intellectual and personal potential and to become responsible, productive members of society" (2019). La Salle University in Philadelphia, in contrast, claims that their "mission is to educate the whole person by fostering a rigorous free search for truth. La Salle, in affirming the value of both liberal arts and professional studies, prepares students for the lifelong pursuit and exploration of wisdom, knowledge, and faith that lead to engaged and fulfilling lives marked by a commitment to the common good" (2019).

The implications for teaching general education courses in each institution are clear, if very broadly indicated. At the public institution of the College of Charleston teachers are challenged to figure out how, through course design and execution, they can offer students opportunities to realize their intellectual and personal potential and to become responsible productive members of society. That, of course, does little to narrow things down. But it does lead to some potentially productive questions. What, for example, should a productive and responsible member of society know about religion and what should such a person be able to do with such knowledge? What topics in the study of religion might one choose to work on with students in order to practice demonstrating how a productive and responsible member of society might frame, investigate, analyze, and interpret such topics? What characteristic approaches to the academic study of religion might address such topics? Taking such questions seriously should lead directly to the articulation of learning goals for an introductory course that have a solid rationale behind them – one that speaks directly to the broadly articulated goals, what we've called the implicit promises, that the institution has indicated for students' education.

Designing general education courses at La Salle would involve similar challenges and opportunities, but there is another dimension there. La Salle explicitly aims to prepare students for the long-term pursuit of wisdom, knowledge, *and faith* (our emphasis). Implicit in that goal is the idea that course work will not only be personally relevant, (in the way that the College of Charleston focuses on "personal potential") but that course work will also, in some undefined way, be relevant to individual students' (presumed) faith. In important ways, however, the two formulations of the goals of education are not that far apart. What both Charleston and La Salle share is the desire that a college education will somehow shape who students are and will become. In current educational argot, they seek an educational experience that is "transformative." General education courses, because they are required of all students, play a crucial role in that quest for transformative learning.

In their mission statements, both the College of Charleston and La Salle University therefore focus on what Fink identifies as one of the six major categories in the taxonomy of significant learning. The "human dimension" of learning experiences comes into play when "students learn something important about themselves or about others, [which] enables them to function and interact more effectively. They discover the personal and social implications of what they have learned" (Fink 2003, 31). That helps move learning out of the realm of the abstract and into human contexts that are more recognizable and immediate to students, now and in the future.

La Salle's focus on education within a context shaped by the values of the Brothers of the Christian Schools explicitly expresses the hope that their education will have an impact on students' religious lives. Charleston also hopes to exercise a personal impact on its students, although it refrains from addressing directly their religious lives. But both institutions want to have an impact on what Fink (2003) calls the "caring" dimension of learning. That is, they seek to cultivate an experience of learning that "changes the degree to

which students care about something. This may be reflected in new feelings, interests, or values. Any of these changes means students now care about something to a greater degree than they did before, or in a different way" (Fink 2003, 32). Fink argues further that students who care about what they are learning can increase their energy for and commitment to the process of learning, attitudes that can benefit students and teachers by making for more lively and engaged courses. Both institutions explicitly seek an impact on both Fink's human and caring dimensions of significant learning experiences. The devil, or the fulfillment of institutional mission, is, of course, in the details.

To broaden our scope and consider a relevant contemporary example, how can studying religion in an introductory course help students learn how to distinguish credible sources of information from suspect or distorted ones; how can the academic study of religion help students learn how to pierce the fog of obfuscating rhetoric to identify significant underlying issues; how can introductory religion courses help students learn how to dissect and assess competing arguments about what is ostensibly the same issue; how can they learn to spot "fake news" when they see it; how can they figure out how to identify and explain how and why certain statements or stories actually are fake and develop alternative sources that are more trustworthy?

This way of looking at introductory courses suggests that it is not specific material, such as the frequently critiqued survey of world religions, or even theories and methods specific to a discipline or subdiscipline, that need to constitute the focus and substance of an introductory course in the study of religion (see Locklin et al. 2012; Gray-Hildenbrand and King 2019). It is rather a set of problems and questions and a range of opportunities to practice posing and answering them that should constitute the topics focus for introductory courses. The choice of problems and questions should not be solely or primarily defined by whatever issues are perceived to be current in the academic guild but by a teacher's estimation of how those problems and questions can be put in service to the broader goals of such introductory courses as articulated by the institution.

The mission-aware or mission-sensitive approach to course design encourages teachers to think beyond, or through, familiarizing beginning students with the characteristic problems and practices of the discipline and towards the uses to which such disciplinarily formed knowledge can be put in the lives of all their students.

Our emphasis in this section is that broad public statements about the aims of education, contained in institutional, general education, and program mission statements, can provide bridges between the goals which general education courses are purported to serve and the design of courses to fulfill such goals. General education programs drive students toward some courses and away from others. We suggest that when the design of such courses takes seriously the reasons why students might be enrolled, there is a greater possibility that such courses will contribute meaningfully to students' educations. Such a fit between intention and design will help to produce greater student satisfaction – what Fink (2003) identifies as energy and commitment – and therefore can help to make the case for the value of the academic study of religion. But that value cannot simply be presented as inherent and self-evident. It needs to be demonstrated, on a daily basis, to students and other stakeholders. Such effective demonstration is more likely to happen when there is ample alignment between course topics, specific classroom assignments and practices, general course learning goals, and the implicit and explicit promises that institutions make about the contributions that collegiate study can make to the ongoing lives of their graduates.

Conclusion

Dee Fink's influential "backward design" approach to course and program design is also forward looking (2003). The end comes first: a teacher determines course goals in order to craft activities, assignments, and assessments that support those goals. In the context of an individual course, backward design asks us to think about what students should be able to do when they finish the course; in the context of an education, backward design asks us to think about what students should be able to do even after graduation. It is not much of a stretch to ask teachers to do some backward design for the next decade of their work. What do we want the field to look like from the student perspective over the next ten years? What skills will faculty be challenged to learn given the changing landscape of higher education?

Taking the broad aims of an undergraduate education, as indicated in institutional mission statements, carefully into account in the process of course design encourages teachers to take off, for a time, the blinders they appropriately and necessarily put on when participating in their disciplines and subdisciplines. It gives them incentives to consider the broader picture of how they and their discipline can contribute to the common good by offering resources that can support students' ongoing efforts to make for themselves meaningful and satisfying lives.

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If we could choose three pedagogical outcomes to be realized in 2030, particularly in those introductory courses in which we encounter most of our students, what would those be?

As we argue above, one key to rethinking our courses can be found in our institutional missions. This will allow us to better serve the students we have in the contexts, both in school and more broadly, in which we find them. This is particularly true in general education and introductory courses, where we encounter the greatest number of students, most of whom will never take another religion (or even another humanities) course. It is here we will make our greatest contribution, and it is therefore imperative that we think carefully here about what, why, and how we teach. We have argued that the task for teachers of religious studies is not to induct students into the ins and outs of a discipline that very few of them will ever participate in at an advanced level but to show them and help them practice some of the characteristic modes of thought and analysis that the discipline of the academic study of religion can bring to bear on virtually any topic.

Mission statements can help us here, as can attention to the zeitgeist. Broad cultural movement away from attending to evidence and argument should encourage us to forefront these elements in our teaching. Weak student skills, particularly in basic communication, should encourage us to focus more on fostering them, since students will continue to use those skills long after they graduate. This will mean sacrificing some content coverage, a relatively small loss given the availability of information on the internet (see Junior and Edwards 2011). Our jobs will inevitably become, in part, about helping students weed through the surfeit of information to find good information and make good arguments based on that information.

A second outcome could be new ways of conceiving the field pedagogically (for example, applied religious studies, or data science, or digital media, or interfaith studies, or contemplative pedagogy that plays to the spiritually oriented). Issues that will dominate public consciousness, such as climate change, human rights, fake news, and an aging population, could become a focus of our work in the classroom. It is unlikely that any new focus in approach or content will fully replace the more traditional courses on theory and method or comparative, interdisciplinary courses. But we can leverage those established strengths of the field to make our work more relevant across campus and to potential employers. We can also find ways to make room for internship, study abroad, and other high-impact experiences that allow students to experience the many ways religion shapes culture. Perhaps it is time for the American Academy of Religion *Teaching Religious Studies series* (2019) to add volumes on, for instance, *Teaching Applied Religious Studies* or *Teaching Data Science and Religion*. The existing *Teaching Religion and Healing* might be complemented by a new *Teaching Religion for Healthcare Professions*.

The third outcome could be a change in the ways graduate students are trained. Dee Fink's (2003) model of backward design also helps us see that we need to foster an ongoing awareness in graduate education and beyond of the need to be more flexible and responsive to pressures from outside our classrooms. This does not entail compromising rigor or abandoning traditional areas of research, but it does, for instance, reward a focus on skills rather than content coverage. Flipping the classroom might need to be replaced by a focus on actively teaching skills through modeling, for instance, close reading and analysis of shorter texts. Learning facts about traditions might need to make way for more problem-based learning and applied religious studies. Above all, graduate students should be taught how to consider institutional context and limitations, broader cultural shifts and their effects on the classroom, and ways of teaching to promote learning well beyond traditional lecture and seminar.

Such shifts allow us to reconsider the goals for our work in light of institutional values, and they should happen irrespective of changes in technology or student choice of major. If we know that our goals for students are, above all, to teach them how to navigate a complex world as responsible citizens, then our focus in the classroom should be on fostering those skills involved in such navigation. This will require a shift for many teachers, who will have to revise their courses around skills rather than content and think deeply and carefully about the broader implications of what they are actually teaching.

In 2030, we hope to be able to look back and see multiple successful and compelling examples of how courses in the study of religion have earned their places in programs of general education, made clear to all stakeholders how they contribute to institutional missions, and, most importantly, helped to provide students with the skills, habits of mind, and attitudes that will support their efforts to pursue meaningful and satisfying lives in their chosen fields, as members of families and communities, and as citizens.

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JOURNAL ON TEACHING

ARTICLE

Living and Teaching When Change is the New Normal: Trends in Theological Education and the Impact on Teaching and Learning

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ABSTRACT

Theological education is currently undergoing significant changes. These changes are rooted in broader trends within the changing landscape of North American religion and higher education. This article surveys these larger shifts and explores their impact on the Associaton of Theological Schools (ATS), particularly in the changing financial/organizational model of schools, in the educational models and practices, and in the changing demographics of ATS student bodies. These trends point to significant themes that will characterize teaching and learning strategies for the future.

KEYWORDS

change, ATS schools, broader trends in religion and higher education

Change. It is a commonly used word in circles of theological education and in higher education. My journey in theological education is not unfamiliar to the forces of change that many theological schools are confronting; in fact, it illustrates many of the dynamics that schools are facing. My first teaching job stretched for nine years at an Episcopal seminary in the Chicago area. The school fit the image of what one would imagine for a residential Episcopal school through the last decades of the twentieth century. There was teaching, learning, and Anglican formation. There was a lot of worship. In fact, daily worship was part of the core experience for students, faculty, and the broader seminary community. There was antiracism work and cultural transformation, and there was a steady and troublesome decline in the student population. There were no online courses. None of these factors would have seemed unremarkable within the broader ecology of The Association of Theological Schools during this period. However, my experiences within this seminary community would change abruptly in the 2008–2009 academic year; and this change can be summed up in minutes and seconds, 13:45 to be precise.

In the spring of 2008, before the stock market crash, a specially commissioned committee comprised of board members, staff, and faculty, completed their work that resulted in a recommendation to the full board. The school had been facing significant enrollment and financial challenges, and this committee weighed the options in front of the seminary. I served on this committee as a junior faculty person. I was in attendance at the spring board meeting because of two decisions that were going to be made. The first passed unanimously. I was granted tenure and promotion. This was a notable moment for the seminary, since I was the first person of color to receive tenure in the 150-year history of the school. I remember that the bishop of Michigan, an African American, was in tears. The next item on the board's docket was the decision related to the special committee's report. The board had already read the report and had met by phone multiple times prior to its fall meeting. The item on the

agenda was for the board to take official action. I set the stop watch on my smart phone. In exactly thirteen minutes and forty-five seconds, after a brief description of the action to be taken and a time of solemn prayer, the board made the decision to declare financial exigency and terminate the faculty (the faculty would be retained for another year with a reduced teaching load). I am almost certain that this is the shortest time from tenure to termination in the history of the academy.

Later that summer, I began teaching and directing a center for Asian American ministry at a Presbyterian seminary located on the south side of Chicago. This school, which was founded in the early nineteenth century, had built a large endowment over the decades and had relocated in the 1980s in order to better serve urban populations within the city. Over two-thirds of the seminary's students were non-residential commuters. Most were persons of color serving communities of faith on the west and south sides of Chicago. Though there were only a few online courses being offered, the school was able to reach its urban student population by offering many of its courses in the evenings.

In the fall of 2008, after the crash of the stock market, the seminary's president called a special meeting, in which she shared the news of how the market's declines had impacted the seminary's endowment. The endowment had lost over 20 percent of its total value. Significant budget cuts and a dramatically different financial plan were proposed to address the challenges. Even with this sharp decline in financial resources, the school still possessed a large endowment. As news of how other schools were faring during the economic recession began to spread, it became clear that we were living in a new era of vulnerability for theological education. These financial episodes were not isolated incidents. We were living in a new reality, a changed world.

Personal anecdotes aside, there are data and pieces of evidence that demonstrate that my personal stories are rooted in deeper trends that have been at work within theological schools over the past twenty to thirty years. Themes include: mergers; enrollment and financial challenges; the need for new educational models (including the role of digital technologies); the changing nature of faculty work; increased attention on student formation; and the changing nature of student demographics. The forces behind these winds of change come from both broader trends in higher education and the changing landscape of religion in North America. At The Association of Theological Schools (ATS), we see evidence of these changes in every aspect of a school – in its financial and organizational model, in its educational delivery and practices, and in the student bodies whom the school educates.

In my first year as Executive Director at the ATS, I went on a listening tour. Through various meetings and gatherings, I was able to engage administrators and faculty from 86 percent of what was, at the time, 270 member schools.[1] The testimonies from these theological educators pointed to the broad forces impacting theological education named above. The consistent refrain within these gatherings was that schools are changing rapidly and profoundly, perhaps in unprecedented ways; and while these challenges appear daunting, this environment is also generating creativity among schools' faculties. There is no dominant approach emerging among these trends. Ted Smith sums up well the thoughts of my predecessor at ATS: "Daniel Aleshire has said that in these times we are not moving from one model of theological education to another, but from one model to many others. Pluralism is the time signature of the present moment" (Smith, Jewell, and Kang 2018, 9).

These changes within theological education will have obvious effects on how teaching and learning is evolving in theology and religion in the twenty-first century. The purpose of this article is to highlight these broader trends in order to provide a deep context of understanding for the current practices within theological schools. My proposal for trajectories of teaching and learning within this environment is admittedly modest, but it emerges deductively from the institutional and social forces at work within North American education and religion.[2]

Changes in North American Religion

The religious landscape of North America is changing. The often cited report from the Pew Research Center (2015) demonstrates dramatic shifts in the makeup of religion in the United States. Some of the key findings from this report include:

- While seven in ten persons in the U.S. consider themselves to be Christian, that number has dropped by almost 8.5 percent in a seven year period.

1 In 2019, the current total of member schools within the ATS is 276. This number includes accredited schools and schools that are candidates for accreditation.

2 On the changing shape of North American religions, see Chaves (2017), Hudnut-Beumler and Silk (2018). For the Canadian context see Clarke and Macdonald (2017).

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- These declines are more dramatic for mainline Protestants (-3.4 percent) and Roman Catholics (-3.1 percent) than among evangelical Protestants (-0.9 percent)

- The religiously unaffiliated have increased by over 19 million, up 6.7 percent between 2007–2014.

- Millennials make up the greatest share of the religiously unaffiliated. Thirty-five percent of adult Millennials do not align themselves with a religious group, and that number is growing.[3]

- Following broader U.S. demographic trends, U.S. Christianity is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. "Racial and ethnic minorities now make up 41 percent of Catholics (up from 35 percent in 2007), 24 percent of evangelical Protestants (up from 19 percent) and 14 percent of mainline Protestants (up from 9 percent)." (Pew Research Center 2015)

These data lead to an undisputed conclusion – the nature and character of U.S. Christianity and religion, in general, is changing dramatically. These changes can be seen most in the declining influence and attendance within particularly mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic churches in the United States.[4] Over the past decade, the share of Christians who are evangelicals has remained relatively stable; but that share is also down from its peak of 29.9 percent of the population in 1993 to 22.5 percent in 2018.[5] In Canada, there are similar trends, though clear markers and data that suggest that the movement toward secularization has been more pronounced there, leading the authors of a recent study to argue that "Canadian society is entering into a new era, a post-Christian era."[6]

These data point to broader changes in the religious landscape that are captured anecdotally at the local level where congregational attendance is down and "graying" (Hudnut-Beumler and Silk 2018), in which local communities of faith struggle to bridge generational gaps, and where religion's role in U.S. society is having decreasing influence in matters of our common life and the public good. The time where the movers and shakers in a community were church-goers and bound together through common commitments and values has been gone for decades. Denominations and religious traditions are becoming less centralized, and, are instead, increasingly regional and local in their influence. While many scholars continue to argue about the nature and extent of the decline of Christianity in the U.S., it is clear that we are moving into a period where religion's role in the shaping of community norms and policies has changed irreversibly.

Changes in Higher Education

Higher education has also been experiencing tectonic shifts within the past two to three decades. Several years of enrollment declines have led to an increasing number of colleges that have closed or merged. Digital technologies have changed how many schools deliver their educational mission, although distributed learning has not turned out to be the disruptive innovative force that some predicted.[7] The rising price tag of a high fixed-cost model of education has put strain on university boards while dramatically increasing the amount of student debt. For-profit education posed significant threats to student markets in which students sought lower cost alternatives to traditional degree programs. Moreover, the relevance of a college education has been increasingly called into question, citing the well-rehearsed gap between what students have learned and the skills the labor market demands.

Of course, all of these factors impact the students who consider graduate school generally and graduate-level theological education specifically. If the Millennial bubble in higher education – which led to the growth and expansion of colleges and universities over the past three decades – has deflated, and those same students are increasingly unaffiliated when it comes to religion, the impact on seminary enrollments seems inevitable. Moreover, mounting debt accumulated by students prior

3 Among older Millennials, those born between 1981–1989, the percentage of the religiously unaffiliated has grown from 25 percent of the group to 34 percent, an increase of 9 percent in seven years. For a more detailed discussion of Millennials and religion, see Lipka (2015).

4 For the full report, see Pew Research Center (2015).

5 These data come from General Social Survey (GSS) as reported in a recent report from *Christianity Today* (Burge 2019).

6 Clarke and Macdonald look at census and membership data from denominations in their study. They argue that "(d)ecline in Christian affiliation, membership, and participation started in the 1960s and has picked up pace rapidly since then" (2017, 11). Similar to the U.S. data, the one group that has grown during this time is the No Religion group, which went from 4 percent in 1971 to almost 25 percent in 2011 (Clarke and Macdonald 2017, 11).

7 Clayton Christensen (2011) argues that online education has the potential to be a disruptive innovation within higher education. At various public lectures, he has predicted that 50 percent of universities and colleges will close within the next ten to fifteen years. This has not proven to be the case. Online education, however, has proven to be a more sustaining innovation, opening up enrollment streams and providing education at lower cost to students.

to their attending graduate theological education has produced additional pressure on a system that is already financially strained.

There is another way to frame these larger trends. Theological education sits at the intersection of the changes that are happening in religion and higher education in the U.S. and Canada. This is why it should not surprise us when a dominant theme of feedback that we hear from ATS schools is change. However, there is something particular and unique about the changes that we are experiencing. Perhaps we are living in an "Age of Accelerations," as Thomas Friedman (2016) calls it – a period in which converging forces accelerate the depth and pace of change. If our society experiences multiple paradigm shifts in a single generation, and the combined effect of those shifts dramatically changes the way that we live, learn, and work, then the phrase, "change is the new normal," is an understatement. We are living in an accelerated time, where change is not just an addition to our life but is a multiplying factor. Change is happening at a faster pace, increasing our ability to do certain things that were not possible even twenty years ago, and complicating our lives exponentially in other ways. We are truly living in a new world.

These broader forces of change provide the background and context for what is happening in theological schools. We are seeing changes in the organizational/financial model of schools, in the diverse models and practices employed, and in the changing nature of ATS student bodies. It is to these more specific changes within theological education that we now turn.

The Shifting Organizational and Financial Model

At all levels, graduate theological education is changing. As I argued above, the parameters of these changes have deeper currents in the broader forces related to religious participation in North America and higher education. There are many examples of how theological schools are seeking to build economies of scale to better execute their missions in more sustainable ways. In fact, ATS recently received a large grant from the Lilly Endowment to research and disseminate findings related to the changing organizational and financial models of schools. The data that I share is prior to the research phase of this project, but informs some of the guiding questions. These trends and data points illustrate the ways in which schools are shifting their models.

Andover Newton Theological Seminary (ANTS) provides an example of how these changes have played out. In the spring of 2019, the Board of Directors of The Association of Theological Schools voted on the request from Andover Newton to withdraw from membership. Andover Theological Seminary was founded in 1807. It was not only the oldest seminary but the oldest graduate school in the United States. Due to ongoing enrollment and deferred maintenance challenges, the school's board and administration had for several years invested time into the exploration of affiliations and partnerships so that the historical mission of the school could be carried out for future generations in more sustainable ways. Andover's merger with Yale Divinity School (YDS) was made final in July of 2017 after two years of working on the affiliation agreement and implementation. The school is now known as Andover Newton Seminary at Yale Divinity School. It is no longer a free-standing seminary but is now an embedded school at YDS. Andover will continue its distinctive mission, while Yale will be the degree-granting institution. Some within the public view mergers as a next resort to closing. However, this move was clearly a significant advancement for Andover in that it shifted their financial and organizational model in ways that provide a sustainable future for the historical mission of the seminary.

The Andover and Yale merger is more than symbolically important in that it signifies the changing nature of theological schools in the twenty-first century. The fact that the first seminary in the U.S. merged with another prominent academic institution like Yale Divinity School made this agreement newsworthy to the broader public and fed the broader narrative of changes in higher education. Of course Andover Newton, like many other seminaries, was itself the product of a merger in 1965 between Andover Theological Seminary and Newton Theological Institution. The 2017 merger is not a sign of things to come for all theological schools but of an already shifting landscape within seminary education as schools seek greater vitality in their mission and more sustainable financial models for the future.

Since 2009, there have been approximately thirty mergers or affiliations among ATS schools.[8] Over 10 percent of the 276

8 The information on merged schools was originally compiled by Tom Tanner, Director of Accreditation at ATS. The number of schools varies based on two factors: (1) whether the number includes only accredited schools with the Commission on Accrediting (COA); and (2) there are multiple mergers that are almost complete but have not been made public. The number is currently twenty-seven to twenty-eight ATS schools based on public information with at least another two schools that have not gone public with their announcement at the writing of this article.

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member schools have merged in a decade or, on average, a merger every three to four months. Mainline Protestant schools were involved in the majority of these institutional partnerships, representing just over 60 percent of the total. This over-representation (mainline schools represent approximately 34 percent of the membership) is not surprising given the fact that these schools have faced the most significant enrollment declines during this same period.

One could argue that mergers have been part of the history of theological schools for over a century. In decades where student populations and budgets are leaner, schools tend to consolidate. However, the rate at which theological schools are merging within the past decade suggests that this period of consolidation, particularly among mainline Protestant schools, is more extensive than in years past. This merger trend, along with the declines in religious participation, point to a larger consolidation within Christianity in the U.S. and Canada.[9]

Mergers are only one illustration of how theological schools are seeking to shift their financial and organization models. Other examples include: decreasing or shifting the property footprint of a campus; school relocations; centralizing extension campuses; shared-service agreements among multiple schools; shared faculty positions; and even the use of a subscription-based fee structure instead of a traditional tuition-based model.[10]

One other set of statistics points to the shifting character of the membership among ATS schools. For most of its one hundred years, ATS has been a predominantly mainline Protestant organization. Roman Catholic schools joined ATS in the mid 1960s to 1970s, the decade following Vatican II. In the last two decades of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century, evangelical Protestant schools began to outnumber mainline Protestants. Currently, 44 percent of ATS accredited schools are evangelical Protestant, 34 percent are mainline Protestant, and 22 percent are Roman Catholic or Orthodox. There is one Jewish school in the ATS.[11] The total number of schools only paints part of the picture. Sixty-five percent of all ATS students attend an evangelical school. In fact, the top twenty schools by enrollment are all within the evangelical ecclesial family. By contrast, of the twenty schools with the largest endowments, sixteen are mainline Protestant. The endowments within mainline schools and the enrollments with evangelical schools point to differing financial models. In the former, a significant portion of the school's revenue comes from its invested assets; in the latter, the model for this group of schools is predominantly tuition-driven.

The Shifting Educational Models and Practices

If the economic and organizational models of theological education are multiple, the educational practices, with which the schools seek to carry out their mission, are also legion. The ATS, in a landmark study funded through a grant from the Lilly Endowment, surveyed current and emerging educational models and practices within member schools.[12] This project engaged ninety percent of the membership through research, study groups, conferences, and work groups. The findings show remarkable creativity within the schools and point to new modes of educational practice within theological education, including significant ways that schools are thinking about traditional and well-established models of teaching and learning. In one of the phases of the project, schools met in one of eighteen peer groups. These groups included:[13]

- Formation in Online Contexts
- Educational Values of Online Education
- Duration (Reduced Credit MDiv)
- Accelerated Bachelor's/MDiv
- DMin Admission

9 It must be noted that while mergers have increased over the past decade, there have also been more ATS schools accepted into membership. A high percentage of these schools are smaller and have specific missions based on the student populations whom they serve (for example, a seminary on the West Coast that educates in Mandarin). In 2000, there were 243 schools in the ATS. The membership is currently at 276.

10 Sioux Falls Seminary currently uses a subscription model for their tuition. Instead of paying by the unit or hour, students pay a flat fee per month to participate in a competency-based degree program.

11 At its last biennial meeting in 2018, the ATS membership voted to accept the Academy for Jewish Religion into membership. It is currently the only Jewish school within associate membership, the category of schools that can move toward accredited status. By charter, ATS is a Judeo-Christian organization and has had Jewish member schools in the past.

12 For a summary report of the findings, see Graham (2018).

13 For a list of the schools that participated in these peer groups, see Graham et al. (2018).

- DMin Identity
- Permanent Diaconate Program
- Roman Catholic Schools Formation of Laity
- Programs for Latino/a Students
- Global Partnerships (two groups)
- Asian Schools
- Historically Black Schools
- Competency-Based Education
- Programs in Prison
- Students without Bachelor's (Degrees)
- Residential Theological Education
- University Divinity Schools

While most of these peer groups represent theological education to particular audiences (racial/ethnic students, students without a BA, deacons or laity, and so forth), the groups were also brought together by characteristics of their institutional mission (Historically Black Schools and University Divinity Schools), various modalities of educational practice (for example, online, competency-based education, and residential), and different contexts for theological education (global and prisons). In summary, theological schools are finding new and creative models to execute their educational missions as they seek to serve increasingly diverse student populations within various contexts. The schools, through the implementation of these educational models and practices, are generating signature pedagogies based on factors such as the diverse students whom they are teaching, the contexts within which education happens, the use of technology, and the mode of educational delivery. Hence, in a time of significant financial and enrollment challenges, theological schools are becoming increasingly creative and innovative.

To get a better understanding of how schools are innovating their educational missions, it will be helpful to examine two themes, technology and formation, that cut across these various educational models.[14] There are other themes that have emerged from the study, such as the shifting contexts of education, the commitment to differing forms of quality, and the generating of access for non-traditional students. However, the use of technology, particularly in distance education, and the ongoing need to rethink student formation illustrate well the conversations around emerging educational practices. Digital technologies, and their application within distance learning, have certainly had a substantial impact on theological education specifically and in higher education generally. In theological education, these practices have also shifted how faculty and schools think about the formation of their students. These cross-cutting themes illustrate the dynamics of change that are happening within schools at the teaching level and have contributed to increased debate about the means and ends of theological education. While it is tempting to think of the first of these themes, distance learning, as a technical shift and the second, formation, as a more adaptive and developmental process, I will suggest that both lead to greater adaptive processes for faculty as they reimagine ways of structuring education. Moreover, these two themes, like many of the emerging educational models and practices, often work interdependently within a school's broader culture shift.

Technology

In their book, *That Used to Be Us: How America Fell Behind in the World It Invented and How We Can Come Back* (2010), Thomas Friedman and Michael Mandelbaum capture how the world has changed with the advent of digital technologies: "In 2005, Facebook didn't exist for most people. Twitter was still a sound, the cloud was something in the sky, 3G was a parking space, applications were what you sent to colleges, and Skype was a typo" (2010, 59). Less than fifteen years ago, the idea of a president tweeting out thoughts that could impact world economies was not within the realm of possibility. Even this quote betrays how quickly technology changes. Third

14 For a more comprehensive evaluation of some themes that have emerged in the ATS Educational Models and Practices project, see Graham (2018).

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generation networks (3G) were quickly replaced with 4G and now LTE networks, which have speeds up to ten times faster. LTE technology will soon be surpassed by networks that can handle greater speeds and more capacity. Digital technologies are at the heart of the paradigm shift that we have all experienced within the past two decades, and this shift, like many other shifts in the twenty-first century, are accelerating the pace and depth of change in life, business, and education.

Technology, particularly the use of digital technologies in higher education, has changed the ways that teachers teach and students learn. Perhaps the greatest impact has come through online or distance education.[15] Recent data provide a wide-angle glimpse of how these changes are taking root in theological schools. Twenty years ago, the first ATS schools were approved by the Commission on Accrediting to offer degree programs mostly online. Prior to that no accredited theological school had offered a full course through distance learning. A decade ago, no school was offering a degree program completely online. The number of online courses and degree programs has grown quickly in the last ten years. Recognizing this, the standards for accreditation were revised in 2012 to address the increasing demand for distance learning. Currently, almost two-thirds of ATS schools offer courses online. And over 25 percent have degree programs delivered entirely through distance learning. In 2006–2007, there were less than eight thousand students who had taken at least one course online. Today, that number has tripled to over twenty-five thousand. These numbers will increase since over 140 ATS schools (over 50 percent of the membership) since 2012 have been approved for comprehensive distance education (Tanner 2017a).

While these data point to the dramatic increased usage of distance learning among ATS schools and faculty, they do not tell the full story of the impact that these changes have had on the teaching cultures within seminary faculties. While many current faculty members are familiar with the use of digital technologies, most were not trained to teach courses that are exclusively online.[16] Underlying these statistics are countless stories of how individuals, academic deans, and faculties have had to unlearn much of what they knew about teaching in order to meet the obvious demand that a large sector of prospective students have come to expect from education based on their previous undergraduate or professional development experiences.

It is beyond the scope of this present article to outline the various processes that have led to successful implementations of comprehensive distance learning programs. However, research on the topic has pointed to some consensus on some of the outcomes and issues, for example:

- *When online education is done well, it can lead to deeper conversations about pedagogy, instructional design, and desired student outcomes* (Miller and Scharen 2017, 27-28). Case after case within faculties demonstrates that one of the biggest positive outcomes of implementing distance learning within a curriculum is the pause that faculty take to reassess the "why" of their teaching. This has led to more robust and successful online courses and programs while enhancing the teaching that takes place in a traditional face-to-face classroom environment.

- *Intentional professional development for faculty is key.* One conclusion that came from the Educational Models and Practices project (Association of Theological Schools 2018) was that faculty, often viewed by boards and administrators as resistant to change, demonstrated remarkable adaptability when the right processes and investments were made into training them to do this new type of teaching and learning well. Faculty were educated and trained within an intellectual, expert model of professionalism. They were not taught to experiment, to "try things on," or to relearn how they teach. Having the right resources and processes in place to structure these culture shifts for faculty is critical to the success of any new program, online or otherwise.

- *Development of online courses and programs takes time.* When they incentivize online teaching, academic deans often resource their faculties to take courses on how to teach in distance learning formats and/or offer course releases to allow for the development of a new online course. Teaching an online course usually takes about 50 percent more time both to design it and to teach it (Miller and Scharen 2017, 28-29).

15 I am using the terms "online" and "distance" interchangeably, though there is a distinction between these terms in the literature. Online education focuses on any form of educational practice that utilizes online resources. Thus, the use of a learning management system with digital resources is technically online education. Distance education is a form of learning that seeks to overcome geographical distance between teachers and students and between students and other students. Another often used phrase, "distributed learning," uses multiple forms of media so that learning can take place independent of both space and time (for example, synchronous and asynchronous models or self-paced courses). The ATS Standards of Accreditation, in the Educational Standards, employ the language of "distance education" (2015).

16 When academic deans were surveyed about the challenges with online learning, the most frequent response (60 percent of those surveyed) was the adaptive challenge to train faculty for online teaching (Tanner 2017b). See also Miller and Scharen (2017).

- *Because of the attention to design, pedagogy, and learning objectives, the student learning outcomes from distance learning is equal to or better than traditional, residential models of education*. This is not to say that learning online is superior to learning in the classroom. However, what we might be learning about distance education is that it, like any educational innovation, has the potential to improve the quality of teaching and learning with proper attention to design and rigorous assessment of the ends of education.

This is not a defense of or advocacy for distance learning in theological education. However, it is hard to emphasize enough that theological education is in the middle of a major shift in the way that teaching and learning happens in schools. The data bear out that distance learning is an increasingly used educational modality among ATS schools. Moreover, best practices suggest that this form of education is not simply a technical fix for schools to increase enrollment but is an adaptive shift for schools as they re-evaluate the purposes and ends of the education that they provide.

Formation

Dan Aleshire has argued that theological education is currently undergoing its third significant shift in emphasis and identity. Theological education, in the early colonial years of the United States, was primarily developed around two models, the learned clergy or formal education model and the apprenticeship model. In the twentieth century, with the growth of free-standing, mainline Protestant seminaries, the professional model became the dominant form of training for religious leadership. This model, equipped with theological fields of expertise, stressed the professional development of mostly young men in order to equip them to serve in the vocations to which they were called. Aleshire believes that we are currently in a third wave, formational theological education, which has precedent in Roman Catholic priestly preparation (2018, 25-37). This is not to say that this theme of formation will take on a single, dominant form. As I argued earlier, one of the things that characterizes twenty-first century theological education is its diversity. However, the theme of formation is emerging in many forms and contexts, across the theological spectrum, and among all of the ecclesial families. With the fragmenting and de-centralization of religious institutions, the need to emphasize the multiple dimensions of religious formation generally and vocational formation specifically has become critical to the work of theological schools.[17]

The theme of formation came up in most of the peer groups that met to discuss current educational models and practices through ATS' most recent initiative. Stephen Graham, who directed this Lilly Endowment funded project, concluded in his summary that the groups, representing these various educational practices, "argued that theological education is 'inherently formational,' perhaps in ways that exceed the formational aspects of other forms of graduate professional education" (Graham 2018, 7-9). Tom Tanner concurs from his perspective as an accrediting director:

> while formation may defy simple definitions, it is still held in high regard by the membership, regardless of delivery, degree, or student demographic. Since their initial implementation in 1938, our standards have tended to treat theological education primarily as a profession. As ATS enters its second century, the next set of standards may need to focus more on formation as an overarching goal of theological education. (2018, 2)

Whether in online formats, residential models, or in modes of education like competency-based education, the theme of contextualized formation is central when discussing the objectives of theological education.

The topic of formation becomes more important and complex when one takes into account the ways in which religious vocations have shifted in recent decades. With the de-centering of religious institutions in North American public life, communities of faith are no longer carrying out the same functions within society. For this reason, graduates of ATS schools are increasingly serving in more diverse contexts that handle work that used to be located in communities of faith. A recent survey of ATS alumni/ae found, that while the plurality (41 percent) still serves in congregational settings, the majority (59 percent) serve in a variety of contexts outside of congregations. Sectors, in which ATS graduates are serving, include: education (38 percent of those serving outside of congregations); faith-related organizations (14 percent); health care, for example, chaplains and counselors (12 percent); community service (8 percent); denominational administration (7 percent); and other (15 percent). Another 6 percent were either unemployed or had an unknown vocational setting. From these data, Jo Ann Deasy concludes:

> ATS schools. . . will need to wrestle with the relationship between theological education and these diverse work settings. They will need to redefine or reconfirm mission and consider the implications for curriculum and

17 For a discussion of the four classical areas of Roman Catholic formation – human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral – rooted in the ecclesial vision of Pope Francis, see Senior (2019, 62–65).

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> degree programs. And they will need to continue listening to their students and alums as they navigate the changing landscape of ministry in the United States and Canada. (2018, 4)

Thus, formation of students must take into account the diverse roles and contexts in which seminary graduates are serving. We are seeing the decentralization of religious vocations as graduates of theological education are moving into areas of work and service beyond the walls of the traditional congregation. We are witnessing the redefinition of ministry.

In all of these vocational settings, the competencies required for graduates to effectively do their work is also becoming more diverse and complex. The same alumni/ae survey asked graduates for the competencies required for them to best fulfill their work responsibilities (Gin 2018). While a cluster of the top responses reflect current emphases within theological curricula and traditional ministry settings, there are an increasing number of competencies that relate to the diverse contexts in which graduates now do their work. For example, the most frequently named competency listed in the survey was administration. While administration is certainly a significant part of congregational leadership, its place at the top of listed competencies represents a shift in emphasis for religious leaders. Along with competencies such as spiritual disciplines, theology, pastoral care and counseling, and preaching, alums also named interpersonal competency, finance, conflict resolution, intercultural competency, active listening, and having difficult conversations (Gin 2018, 1). This list demonstrates not just a shift in the character of work that theological graduates carry out, it also points to the changing character of work within congregations. In the context of formation, Debbie Gin reflects on how a school can attend to the competencies required for twenty-first century religious vocations: "Finding out where alums are working, with what job titles and contexts, and connecting with those who partner in preparing students for those jobs are two great places to start" (Gin 2018, 4). In other words, theological schools must think about their specific role within the longer journey of a student's spiritual, intellectual, human, and vocational formation.

Both distance learning and formation point to the broader cultural and adaptive shifts that are currently at work within theological schools. Digital technology, and its implementation into theological curricula, is not simply a new platform to do education as we have traditionally understood it. The building of a distance learning program is better viewed as an adaptive process that seeks to improve the quality and accessibility of education for the twenty-first century student. Formation is not just the practical side of the more theoretical theological disciplines, relegated to courses in field education. It is a larger developmental process that will require a school to adapt its practices and engagement with students and alums in such a way that helps them to succeed within the diverse vocations that they seek.

These two themes within emerging educational practices also intersect with each other. For example, one of the peer groups for the Educational Models and Practices project looked specifically at the idea of formation in online contexts (Graham et al. 2018).[18] While the question of student formation is at the top of the list of challenges for distance education programs, this peer group also named substantial benefits that online education provides for formation. For example, distance education opens up the opportunity for the student's current ministry and life context to become a fertile ground in which learning can take root. Online learning also can facilitate cross-cultural engagement, particularly with international students, while eliminating or dramatically reducing relocation costs. Students frequently comment about how an online degree program provides increased flexibility and greater access to education. Thus, distance education is broadening and deepening the contextual nature of theological education. Context has always mattered in the training of religious leadership; but online learning has expanded the possibilities for a learning community and has foregrounded the need to engage the multiple contexts in which students live and serve.

The Shifting Student Populations

If the educational models and practices of theological schools are becoming increasingly diverse and interdependent, so too are the students that theological schools are serving. This increase in student diversity is a driving force behind many of the educational innovations described above and points to an important emerging edge for the future of theological pedagogical practices.

Demographers believe that by the year 2040, or somewhere in the middle decades of the twenty-first century, the United States will have no single racial-ethnic majority. This does not mean that racial prejudice or institutional racism will cease to exist. In fact, if the past decade is any indication, racial tensions and social unrest around the issue of race, especially in the United States, will continue to increase. We see evidence that these demographic changes within the broader population are tracking within ATS schools.

African American, Latino/a, Asian and Asian North American, and international students have increased collectively from 30 percent to 45

18 On formation in online contexts, see also Hess (2007) and Blier (2007).

percent of the total of ATS students over the past twenty years. Moreover, more than 20 percent of ATS schools already have a majority of racial/ethnic presence in their student populations. Thus, at the current rate of growth, ATS schools will have 2040 demographics among their students decades ahead of the general population. Faculty diversity is also growing but at a slower rate than that among students. Twenty percent of full-time faculty in theological schools are faculty of color, which is up from 10 percent twenty years ago. These demographic realities are also represented differently among the ecclesial families. Historically, the largest group of racial-ethnic students in mainline Protestant schools are African Americans, in evangelical Protestant schools, Asian and Asian North Americans, and in Roman Catholic schools, Latino/a students.

To address these growing demographic realities, many ATS schools have shifted their educational practices. One of the major themes from the previously mentioned Educational Models and Practices project was student and institutional development in cultural competency "to serve increasingly culturally diverse communities, both in North American and around the globe" (Graham 2018, 2). In Canada, which understands the construction of race differently than the U.S., some theological schools have sought to respond to the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This Commission issued ninety-four calls to action that sought to address the harmful legacy of Canadian education on indigenous peoples and to provide specific ways to move toward reconciliation.[19] In this way, theological schools are both looking backward and forward. They are seeking to address the legacies of racial injustices from the past, while they are developing pedagogical and formational practices for their more diverse student populations in the present and future. All of these practices suggest that demographic diversity is not enough. Schools are engaging in practices and processes to adapt to new realities and to address harmful legacies.

Through most of the twentieth century, a seminary student was typically white or European American, male, younger, full-time, residential, in an MDiv degree program, and was attending a school of the same denomination in which the student was raised. A denomination or a local congregation usually supported this seminarian financially, and the student would go on to serve a congregation within that same denomination. The twenty-first century theological student is different on almost every front. He or she is increasingly a person of color, older, part-time, a local commuter, an MA student, and is often attending a school that is closer in geographic proximity and not necessarily of the same religious heritage. The student is primarily responsible for financing his or her theological education and is often already engaged in a local ministry context while working on a degree. This characterization of the twenty-first century student emerges from the larger social and educational trends discussed above. Moreover, the educational innovations that have fueled the creative work of theological schools within the past two decades are directly related to these changes in the makeup of their student populations. If the whole ecology of religious and theological education is shifting due to broader social forces, then the themes provided in this article are descriptive effects of a system that is dynamic and decentralizing. In other words, change is the new normal for theological schools.

Conclusion: Contours of Teaching and Learning for the Present and Future

In this article, I have sought to provide the larger contexts of change that are affecting theological education. In order to explore the possible implications of these dynamics on teaching and learning, I will briefly propose four themes, which have emerged from the presentation above, that will inform teaching and learning in theology and religion both now and in the decades to come. Those four themes are diversity, context, formation, and the changing nature of faculty work.

The future of theological education will be defined by its *diversity* or plurality. There are many components to this diversity. There is a descriptive component. That is, no one model of teaching and learning will dominate the landscape. Moreover, the students are more demographically diverse, the contexts from which they come are increasingly culturally complex, and the modes in which they are learning are multiple. The implications for teaching and learning are clear. There is no one-size-fits-all model for education. Future teaching strategies must be able to account for the increasing diversity of students while engaging in multiple forms of education to better achieve appropriate learning goals. As argued above, the process of developing these new forms is just as important. Attention to what counts for good education, identifying the assumed value that emerges from particular educational practices, and focusing on the desired outcomes will help to shift the teaching cultures of theological faculty.

Related to the multiple diversities among the students of theological education is a renewed emphasis on the importance of *context*. Context has always been an important factor in theological education; but the nuances have shifted in recent decades. For example, among theological schools, and within the current accrediting standards, there is an assumption that formation is tied to a residential mode of education. Certainly, formation and educational community can benefit from being in one place. However, students are increasingly doing their theological education while they are already serving in ministry or other vocational contexts, and a larger percentage of students are

19 For more on the Calls to Action, see Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015).

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local commuters. Moreover, in distance learning contexts, the student's community is often removed from campus life. In these cases, faculty and on-site mentors often use the local ministry or community context to enhance the educational experience of the student. In competency-based theological education, schools have engaged with local congregations and/or denominational bodies to explore the contextual leadership capacities required to serve in these communities. Competencies are identified and curricula are developed with deep engagement to the context of congregations and communities of faith. These examples share the common theme of pedagogical practices that take into account the importance of context, even when students' contexts are increasingly multiple and complex.

Theological schools will continue to invest in the *formation* of both students and faculty. The need to attend to students' ongoing spiritual, human, intellectual, and pastoral/vocational formation will be a continual emphasis in the pedagogies of the next decades. With the decreasing amount of broader religious formation happening in the earlier stages of human development, theological schools will continue to play a vital role in forming the religious leadership and practitioners of the future. Because education is in such a dramatic period of change, faculty formation will also continue to play a strong role in the future of theological education. Doctoral programs contribute most to the forming of future faculty as scholars, and to a smaller degree, as teachers. Increasingly faculty will have to be trained to utilize new technologies, to rethink teaching strategies, and to structure learning outcomes in new ways for twenty-first century students. In this way, both faculty and students will be formed for the religious institutions of the future, which will be more dynamic and in various stages of change.

The increasing portfolio for religious faculties points to another dynamic in the current landscape – *the changing nature of faculty work*. In a recent presentation to a group of ATS schools, Debbie Gin shared the results from a survey of theological school faculty.[20] In this survey, faculty were asked for the most important aspects of their work, how well their doctoral programs trained them for these aspects, and how adequately their current institutions provided professional development for these areas. Three of the top five responses – teaching, research, and service – were typical, and both doctoral programs and current school employers provided some training in these areas. However, two of the five – formation of students and administrative work – were graded negatively by faculty, meaning that their doctoral work and their institution do not provide enough support in these emerging areas of work. Administratively, faculty are increasingly called upon to develop new programs, to run centers, and to provide administrative support for the school's educational mission (for example, student learning assessment, administration in a field education program, oversight of a degree program, and so forth). In this way, the vocational identity of faculty is changing. Faculty are not just scholars and teachers. They can also be administrators, formentors, and program developers.

The changing nature of work described above will require a different set of skills and dispositions from faculties of theological schools. Two are worth mentioning: *adaptability* and *experimentation*.[21] In a time when institutions are more dynamic, faculty members are better positioned to succeed when they foster habits of adaptability. Being adaptable is a discipline as fields such as improvisational comedy or jazz performance demonstrate. A quality lead on the saxophone does not just happen spontaneously. Thousands of hours of practice with one's instrument and colleagues goes into that improvisational moment. Jazz musicians learn to listen deeply and agilely to their fellow musicians, to the music as a whole, and to the energy in the audience. Being adaptable can be an innate quality of an individual, but it can also be an acquired skill. The ability for a school to be able to pivot quickly in response to its changing environment is directly related to the ability of its faculty and administrators to be adaptable.

Similarly, experimentation is a process that most faculty have not engaged in consistently. For example, in new program creation, schools have tended to over-develop programs without much engagement of the intended audience. In this way, new programs are thought up in ways similar to the writing of a book. Much of the process is internal to the creator(s) without sustained feedback from those outside of the development process. In his book *The Lean Startup* (2011), Eric Reis, who comes from the technology startup world, encourages the use of MVPs or minimally viable products. An MVP is a prototype, which captures enough of a vision of the product so that users see its potential. More importantly, part of the developmental process includes the testing out of the developer's assumptions as individuals use the product in tests or experiments to accomplish work (or play). The MVP process creates a learning loop that then helps the designers to better develop their product for the end user based on feedback from experiments.

Experimentation could inform the teaching and learning process within theological schools. For example, before a degree program is approved for accreditation and marketing, faculty could develop certificate programs (ATS does not accredit certificates) based on inputs from prospective student audiences. The certificates could also experiment with technology or an under-utilized modality of education to see if it provides greater access, quality, or engagement to learning communities. As assumptions get confirmed or challenged through feedback, the pilot can be further designed to improve its potential to deliver a quality educational experience.

20 Deborah Gin was one of six presenters from ATS staff in the presentation, "Top Enrollment Schools, ATS Schools: A State of the Industry"(Gin et al. 2019).

21 Juan Martinez (2018) argues that an important aspect of the future of theological education involves the preparation of leaders to be more adaptive and experimental.

Dan Aleshire, who served as Executive Director of ATS for two decades, used to say that theological schools are conservative by nature. They are not institutions that are primed to be agile in times of challenge. The research on ATS schools and faculty over the past two decades both reaffirms this truism and challenges it. Theological schools may change with difficulty, but they are changing in rapid and profound ways. We are seeing evidence of these changes in every aspect that makes up a school – the organizational model, the educational practices, and among the students whom they serve. Schools are adapting within the broader shifts of the changing landscape of both religious communities and higher education in North America. These are the larger forces of change that will determine the future work of faculty; and it is these trends that provide the context and will determine the future shape of teaching and learning in theology and religion.

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THE WABASH CENTER
JOURNAL ON TEACHING

ARTICLE

Arguing the Mystery: Teaching Critical Thinking in the Theology Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This article argues that critical thinking and theology belong together. Noting the need for such a combination in the breakdown of conversation between seminary students, the article justifies such a move in a theological anthropology. The author then describes several years of revisions to a Theology 1 course as he attempted to bring together the two goals of teaching theology and teaching critical thinking. The result was a syllabus that demonstrated two central transformations. The first is a "flip" of the classroom, or using the class time entirely for active learning. The second change is the creation of an assignment that walks students from theological conviction to theological argument. The author gives anecdotal and evaluative (grades, student evaluations) evidence to demonstrate the success of these revisions.

KEYWORDS

constructive theology, systematic theology, critical thinking, flipped classroom, theological questions

Background

I began teaching the systematic theology classes at Seminary of the Southwest, an Episcopal institution in Austin, Texas, in 2004. One of my first discoveries was that many students lacked a clear idea of what a good theological debate was. To be precise, they lacked a clear notion of how to structure such a debate so that it did not bring out the vicious aspects of people's characters and so damage relationships. This may sound overly dramatic, but it is worth remembering that the first decade of the twenty-first century was a particularly tumultuous time in the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion, as convictions about marriage and human sexuality were, in fact, bringing out the worst in us and often damaging or ruining relationships. Alongside teaching that first year I served on a task force, commissioned by our then Dean, to write a "Conversation Covenant," a framework for critical and charitable dialogue across campus. The document, which the faculty still includes in each syllabus, reminds us that, while "avoiding the issues around which passion and disagreement reside might well be an easier path," still "commitment to remaining in conversation with one another despite our differences is part of our calling as disciples of Jesus Christ" (Seminary of the Southwest 2019).

Remaining in conversation, however, appeared to be difficult for the students in my classes. They liked each other well enough, but somehow discussing the meaning of the cross felt to them a little like showing a colleague your tax return. To borrow language from Howard Stone and James Duke, their theological commitments were deeply "embedded," too deeply for them to find it easy or pleasant to work them out as "discursive" or discussable ideas (1996, 13-21).

In light of this discovery, I began to suspect that part of my role was to teach future priests and others in my classroom how

to have rigorous, charitable, stimulating, and fun theological arguments. Southwest's Master of Divinity program goals use phrases like "generous intellect" and "self-understanding," alongside proficiency of knowledge and preparedness for leadership, to name qualities we consider essential for ordained ministry. Though I may not have put it this way at the beginning, I have come to see self-understanding and intellectual generosity as keys to proficiency in theological language. That embedded sense of the *mysterium tremendum* must come out into the connective tissue of thoughtful speech, so that it can offer us more than a haunting backdrop of tacit conviction, opening space for engagement and charitable dialogue.

This meant, I quickly realized, I was going to have do some of my own work in teaching critical thinking, which I, like many graduate students in the humanities, had picked up as a skill without ever being formally taught how it was done. Kathleen Fisher, herself a theologian, defines critical thinking as an "interior process that shapes information into knowledge and then exams it for wisdom" (2017, 10). This captures nicely what I wanted for my students: to gather new theological ideas and shape them into coherent articulations, using tools I could give them, so that they could inhabit these ideas as sources of wisdom in their lives, friendships, and vocations. I might only add to her definition that the process is often at least as exterior as it is interior, involving dialogue, the writing out of ideas, and diagraming and revising diagrams.

In my first syllabus drafts, I captured this goal with the following learning outcomes: "Students will produce creative and well-supported arguments for particular Christian beliefs" and "assess contemporary expressions of Christian belief through their encounter with the central teachings of the church." Later, as the goals of generosity and self-knowledge took clearer shape in my theological pedagogy, I revised this to, "Students will formulate multifaceted responses to complex theological questions," and do so "in dialogue with other theologians" (Baker 2018).[1]

Theological Rationale

I introduced students to these goals with a theological rationale: God makes us to be creatures who grow in the knowledge and love our Creator. While shrugging off the knowledge and opting only for the love might seem simpler, it in fact is a recipe for failure, since, as Augustine teaches, love and knowledge are mutually supportive human energies. We cannot love if we are not concurrently seeking knowledge of what we love, and we cannot know what we do not in some sense love. Further, as I remind my students often, humans are invited to share in the life of God without ceasing to be humans: grace perfects human nature, rather than destroying or replacing it, as Thomas Aquinas puts it. That means that we relate to God with the best human tools we have. One of those tools, though certainly not the only one, is human reasoning. It follows that God invites us to use the same discipline of critical reasoning to know God that we use to know plant cells and jet engines. We know human things with human ways of knowing; we also know the divine one with human ways of knowing. Yes, God is uniquely mysterious; at the same time, God invites us to participate in a path of understanding so that we can both love and know God without ever fully comprehending the one we know and love.

Developing the Course

Over the years my goal for that first course, of teaching theology as inclusive of "well-supported arguments," has not changed, though my experiments in achieving it have gone through many iterations, with varying degrees of success. Early on I tried some episodic fun: a debate with the same Dean at a bar near campus, with thirty or so students gathered around, over the viability of a doctrine of original sin. (I got a little excited at one point and suggested that he could not coherently believe in Easter if he did not believe in original sin. That may have gone too far, professionally speaking.) In class I assigned medieval style disputations a few times a semester, often held out in the central lawn of campus so other students, faculty, staff, and occasionally trustees or visitors could listen in. For these events, I would assign a yes/no question, and then pick students to argue both sides. I would then come to the front, try to rehearse the best exchanges I heard, and then offer my *respondeo quod*, an answer crafted to do justice to the arguments aired for and against.

Through the several years that I used this tool, I found that I kept searching for ways to make the disputations more useful in practicing (for students) and assessing (for me) the necessary skill of arguing well. This meant, in part, minimizing the sense of spectacle. We left the lawn and stayed in the classroom. I banned costumes (yes…). I assigned more of them, so that we were eventually doing them nearly once a week. I even altered the syllabus rather drastically, inserting a two-week unit on the

1 The syllabus for "Constructive Theology" Spring 2018 (Baker 2018) is available at https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/selected-resources/?post_ids=229353.

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logic of argumentation. We read chapters from Nancey Murphy's excellent book *Reasoning and Rhetoric in Religion* (2004), and I assigned the exercises. We diagramed arguments on the white board during class. For those two weeks, had you walked into Theology 1, you may have heard the occasional reference to resurrection and ascension, but the energy of the classroom gathered around words like "warrant," "backing," and "internal rebuttal."

Over time I began to discover, both through student responses and my evaluation of their work, that I was asking too much and therefore not achieving enough. It is hard enough to get a basic grasp of theology in a semester course; I was asking them – many for the first time – to also get a basic grasp of the grid of concepts and practices of critical thinking. I wanted to give my students the freedom to recognize and articulate good theology, and I also wanted them to have all the tools they needed for the job. The weeks on critical thinking began to feel isolated from the rest of the course, and I would notice that those terms and structures were less and less present, both in the students' oral and written work and in my own classroom pontifications. And when I did draw attention to them I had an ominous sense too often of abandoning my subject matter. The beauty of theology, after all, is not "good argument," even if good argument is part of what makes theological language beautiful. My own theological rationale, rehearsed above, had made this clear from the first day of class: discursive reasoning is the path but not the destination. As Pavel Florensky put it, the understanding that faith seeks requires a "free act of ascesis," or a self-renunciation of human rational control in light of the discipline's goal, which is always earthly knowledge of the one who is defined as transcending earthly knowledge (1997, 45). Philosopher William Desmond refers to this intellectual deferral as the epistemic confrontation with an excessive "mystery of ontological generosity" (1995, 263). Well-crafted logic that loses track of the mysteriously generous God is no longer good theology. Was I fully conveying the beautiful mystery that had first drawn me to the discipline?

From Conviction to Theology

This line of questioning began what to date has been the biggest overhaul of that introductory theology course, which resulted in the flipped classroom experiment and new foundational assignment I describe below. My journey toward these experiments began, in fact, as I kept my eye on another goal of the class, which was to discover a new path toward integrating different voices into a discipline designed around a unified "system" of theology. Though describing this process fully would take a separate essay, I can summarize it easily enough. The discovery I eventually made, combining an insight from nineteenth century theologian John Henry Newman with a methodical tool of Thomas Aquinas, was that my teaching of both theology and critical reasoning needed to begin with the convictions that students were already bringing into the classroom.

This may seem like an obvious discovery, and for some no doubt it would have been and has been. I found myself in those early years battling for theological turf in classes where people had many firmly set and embedded theological convictions. For many, it seemed, a theologian was one who could "politely but firmly argue for the irrefutability of personal opinion" (Fisher 2017, 9). My notion early on was that in order to teach theology, which Augustine, Anselm, Florensky, and Barth all agree is a process of faith seeking understanding, I needed to make a distinction between these personal convictions students brought with them and the communal understanding we would be spending the semester seeking. I still teach this distinction, with an important difference: whereas before I said to the class that convictions are good in their own place, but that place was not theology class, now I say that convictions are the place to begin in theology, but not the place to end. More self-knowledge, more generosity.

When a student responds to a theological idea, for instance, with "I just don't think that God is like that," I once would have reminded her that "I just don't think" is a marker of a conviction, whereas an argument has to be a movement from a ground to a claim that the rest of us can follow. This is arguably a mild version of what Richard Crane (2016) calls "shock and awe" pedagogy, a mode of engagement common to many new professors, especially in disciplines like political science and theology where there is bound to be a lot of conviction entering the room on the first day of class. Better to disabuse them of these opinions, or at least bracket them outside the classroom space, so that new learning can happen.

The more time I spent trying to separate these two layers of language, however, the more I began to realize the importance of moving more fluidly between them. Rather than just bracket these convictions, I needed to invite students, as Stone and Duke put it, to give "serious second thought to their embedded theologies" (1996, 21). I began asking for more information. Why do you think that God isn't like that? What does it imply for other beliefs if God is or is not like that? This helps me reconfigure their conviction not as "their theology" (since theology is a communal language I avoid that phrase entirely), but rather as their theological "home." I then challenge them to see the theology classroom itself as a journey beyond that home,

where their native way of articulating an idea meets with the ideas of others, and changes as a result of the journey. As Fisher noticed of the students in her classroom, "the irrefutability of personal opinion" is often the thing that keeps students within any discipline of thought from "leaving home" (2017, 10).

For a couple of years I dropped the disputation altogether, and instead tried to begin each class session with a disputation-style question. I would then attempt to walk the ones who volunteered answers through some "leaving home" steps, even if in the end they returned to the same conviction: they would now hold it more "deliberately." Or so my thinking went. What we were in fact practicing, of course, was the application of critical thinking to our ideas, making our convictions into theology. Still, though, I needed to free up some classroom space to teach my students how to make such inquiries, and how to answer them, so that they could become not just defenders of their convictions but self-aware theologians. And how to do this, when I also felt the need to exegete class readings and demonstrate the character of good theology, to the best of my ability, in lectures? As the program's systematician, I felt myself to be the last line of defense in ensuring that our graduates went into their vocations with proficiency in a classically formed and contemporarily attuned language of theology.

Flipping the Theology Classroom

This was the point at which I decided to try an experiment in flipping my systematic theology class. Flipped classrooms are those in which activities "that have typically and traditionally happened inside the classrooms now occur outside of the classrooms and vice versa" (McNally et al. 2017, 282). Characteristically,

a. students learn content before coming to class,

b. are evaluated based on their learning, and

c. this frees up class time to "focus on higher-level cognitive activities involving active learning, peer learning, and/or problem solving." (McNally et al. 2017, 282)

I came to this idea through conversations with my colleagues, through studying the online materials of a pedagogy institute based just across the street from me (University of Texas at Austin 2019), and also through conversations with a facilitator of an innovative learning collaborative housed at my seminary.

The background for flipped classrooms in the philosophy of education stems from socio-constructivist models of learning, in which students learn while, rather than before, doing (Steen-Utheim and Foldnes 2018). The literature often contrasts the teaching-centered lecture model with the learning-centered engagement model, a contrast that in my experience can be overstated. For instance, one article characterizes the lecture-based (teaching-centered) mode as "transmissive and passive, with little room for student participation" (Steen-Utheim and Foldnes 2018, 308). This has not been my experience. Coming out of graduate school in the early 2000s, and beginning my first full-time job in 2003, I was given several resources for beginning my work not only in research but also in teaching. I first heard the term "learning-centered classroom" in my first job, a full-time visiting lecturer position in the religious studies department at Indiana University-Purdue University of Indianapolis, where a major Lilly grant had given the university the resources to overhaul their entire curricular framework. A professor in the department, who came to review me in my first semester, suggested that I not try to engage students by offering verbal fill-in-the-blank questions, but rather through open-ended ones that would air their insights and allow them to give some shape to the classroom conversation. A year later, when I arrived at my current institution to begin building a theology syllabus, I had already begun practicing an interactive style of lecturing in which I watched carefully for learning-cues from students, and in which interruptions and student questions could revise and redirect the content covered on any given day.

I would not say, then, that my lecture-based classroom was deficient in student participation. Still, I had begun to diagnose a lack of learning, as described above. Somewhere between the active participation of students, which my format made space for, and my revised learning objective to help students "formulate multifaceted responses to complex theological questions," a rift had opened.

The flipped model in fact goes beyond student participation and aims at giving students ownership of their learning (Steen-Utheim and Foldnes 2018, 308). Among other things, this ownership involves a meta-layer to actual learning: students not only learn new material, they learn about learning that new material. This is the pedagogy I was searching for. As an aid to con-

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necting their embedded convictions to deliberative theological reasoning, I wanted to bridge their already substantial participation in class with my aspirational goal of seeing them grow as self-aware theological reasoners. So I turned to a new pedagogical model as an experiment in this double bridge-building.

The innovative collaborative mentioned above was a great help to me. Our seminary recognizes the need for education and formation of priests who cannot, for various reasons, uproot and attend a residential seminary. What we offer them is a hybrid of distance learning and local facilitation. Professors from campus, myself included, design courses in our various fields, record lectures, and provide written discussion guides which we send to participating dioceses across the United States. Local teachers and facilitators then lead students through the material and foster the classroom discussions and other activities which facilitate student learning. In essence, the model relies on the "flip" described above, as students review and study the recorded lectures and discussion questions between classes and then engage the material together with their local facilitators when the class convenes.[2] In a conversation with the instructor[3] from one diocese, a veteran of the classroom who also happens to be a former student of mine, he explained the exercises and activities that he used to help students get the most out of my recorded lectures. I then began reflecting on how I could imitate and adapt what he was doing in the hybrid version in my campus-based classroom.

The entire process took several years. At first I wrote my lectures out and posted them for students to read before class. Only after several attempts to get students to engage deeply with the material did I come to the conclusion that they were missing key theological content by skimming or simply failing to comprehend the lectures. In a systematic theology course with no text book other than the primary readings I used to enhance and complexify my lecture, this felt like a crisis. I began to observe the learning dynamic that so often reveals second rate pedagogy: the clever students and self-starters were learning really well, while the others were basically confused. No one, yet, was learning about their own theological learning.

So, in conversation with a particularly creative teaching assistant, I finally completed the flip for the Spring of 2018, which is the semester I describe in what follows.[4] My final product, coordinated to the criteria for a flipped classroom listed above, looked like this:

a. I recorded a lecture on each theological topic and made viewing it, along with readings, part of the assigned work prior to class time.

b. I included an assignment in the syllabus called "Pop Interpretations," which involved a three-minute summary of the lecture by one student, followed by a brief response from another student. Responses could include disagreement, additions, or varying interpretations of the main themes.

c. After the interpretation and response, I opened the floor for discussion, and this generally was about both the theological ideas and the structure of the arguments in the lecture. Early in the semester, during the "prolegomena" unit on faith and reason, I framed human reasoning as a theological topic in the way I outlined above, and gave an introduction to the parts of an argument. As the semester went on I returned to this periodically. I could pause in the midst of, say, a discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity and invite students to identify grounds, warrants, claims, qualifiers, and internal rebuttals in what I or one of their classmates had said. And I could do this without worrying that we were missing essential theological content, since not only had I given this to them in the recorded lecture, but I had assessed their facility with the information in the Pop Interpretation exercise.

Good Questions

The second innovation I made was to alter the content within this altered form. As I said, I had shifted from thinking of faith convictions as non-theology to thinking of them as pre-theology. I did some work with a colleague who has read more deeply in pedagogy than I, and together we began shaping something I called the "Good Question" assignment, drawing especially from work he had done in cofounding a new model for a business school at the University of Texas.[5]

The assignment came to the students in an algorithm in which how they answered one question about a faith conviction would de-

2 Rev. Dr. John Lewis is, among other things, the Director of the Iona Collaborative (the learning initiative I describe above) at Seminary of the Southwest. I am grateful for his suggestions on how to better describe the Collaborative for this article.

3 Rev. Robert Pace, rector of Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church in Amarillo, Texas, is the instructor I describe above, and was generous in sharing his teaching resources and creative materials with me.

4 My pedagogical shifts, along with the research for this article, owe a great deal to Andrew Green, Seminary of the Southwest MDiv class of 2018.

5 Steven Tomlinson is the Associate Professor of Leadership and Administration at Seminary of the Southwest, and cofounder of the Acton School of Business.

termine how they answered the next. The point was to allow them to work their way to a point of perplexity, what Alisdair MacIntyre calls an epistemological crisis (1988, 362), and what I called "the frontier of your theological understanding." The crisis is the collision of incoherencies that leave the thinker with the sense of being stuck, or acknowledging that "there seem to be insufficient or no resources within the established fabric of belief" for moving toward a unified and coherent idea (MacIntyre 1988, 362). My explanation suggested that when a professor responds, "That's a good question," what it usually means is "I'm a little confused on how to answer that." It was that point of confusion, I said, that I wanted their convictions to reach.

The first step was for the student to identify a question. I suggested, though did not require, that they follow the *disputatio* methodology and ask a question that requires a yes or a no. For example, one student identified the question, "Can humans influence God?"[6]

The second step was to determine if the question matters. That is admittedly a broad and subjective criterion, but the point of the assignment after all was to put their convictions into motion, so I began with the assumption that they felt some energy or pressure around whatever they were asking. If they answered no, I suggested they find a better question. If they answered that they were unsure, I asked them to break the question down into parts, and see if any of them called up convictional energy. In our example, the student decided that it did: "It matters whether or not we influence God because our ability to influence or not helps define our relationship with God."

In the third step the student was to observe and name the answer they felt some initial pressure to give, the embedded or "gut level" response. This was the context for the articulation, and perhaps discovery, of a conviction. In our example, the student's gut response to her own question was: "I want to think that humans influence God. Humans influence each other in relationships, and in general, the stronger the relationship, the greater the influence."

A fourth step was to notice if they felt, or could imagine someone feeling, some pressure to answer in the opposite way. This was key. Many students initially turned in questions that were crafted as rhetorically stylized assertions, for which only one answer could be morally or theologically defensible. "Should Christians be members of hate groups?" is one imaginary example. I suggested that the ability to observe this opposing pressure is essential to the asking of a good question.[7] In our example, the student noticed that "The problem here is that God is God, not just another human being. Since God doesn't change, it would seem like humans cannot influence God, since influence implies at the very least a change of heart or mind or emotion as a result of another."

Finally, I asked students to put both their initial conviction and the opposing conviction into argument format. I adapted the ground-warrant-claim model from Murphy (2004) into an if-and-then format. So "If God created people so we can be in relationship with God, and influence is a part of all relationships . . . , then we can influence God." On the other hand, "If God is changeless in all ways . . . and influence produces change as a result of the actions of another, then we cannot influence God."

The initial assignment ended with this statement of conflicting arguments. The next ones picked it up from there. I asked students to take notes from the texts of other theologians who had commented on their issue or a related one, and I asked them to formulate a "Good Answer" that dealt sufficiently and creatively with the conflicting arguments they had discovered. (Actually, I made this latter due prior to the research notes, but as several students pointed out both during the semester and in course evaluations at the end, this did not make much sense, as the Good Question assignment ended in too much perplexity to answer cogently without first bringing other voices into the conversation.) Finally, I asked them to put all the parts together in a constructive theology research paper: Ask a good question motivated by your own convictions, show why it is difficult to answer, engage with sources to show what shifts or "loosens" in the discussion and so allows a new response, and use the argument structure to make a good answer that responds to the complexity.

Results

The grades for these assignments indicated that it was no longer just the most able students who were benefiting from the changed format. Ten of the fourteen students received an A or B on the Good Question assignment, which came in the first half of the semester. While there were fewer A's on the final paper, which integrated their Good Questions, research notes, and Good Answers, the overall learning increased, with only two students falling below the B range.

6 In what follows I have selected excerpts, with the author's permission, from the Spring 2018 class paper of Bryn Cadell, MDiv class of 2020 at Seminary of the Southwest.

7 The "ability to temporarily suspend one's own convictions is a hallmark of good actors," as a text on academic writing reminds, and it is a hallmark of good argument as well (Graff and Birkenstein 2014, 31).

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Course evaluations demonstrated some mixed feedback. The numerical data from the learning outcomes is included here as an appendix. Some of the negative feedback seems attributable to the strangeness of the flipped experience. There was some frustration with the videos and preparation, and also some complaints about the anxiety raised by the Pop Interpretations assignment. The three "partly achieved" scores I received (one for the first learning outcome and two for the second) correlated to confusing and disconnected assigned readings. This was an issue I noticed as well, early in the semester. I had not anticipated how the flip would necessitate a change in the readings. The syllabus still contained some texts each week that, while on theme, were not connected in any obvious way to the salient points of my recorded lectures. These were the kind of readings that professors sometimes put in just because "it's good for you." Where my old interactive lecture model could wander in and out of these readings as students asked questions about them and then lead back to my salient points, now the non-interactive video format, combined with class discussion steered entirely by students' commentaries on that video, meant that anything I could not coordinate clearly within my lecture was simply going to be confusing.

In the evaluation comments, responding to "If you were teaching this course, what would you do differently?" a student wrote, "The videos were helpful but excessive. I think we spent too much time reading, watching videos, and preparing for pop interpretations." Another commented that the videos were helpful because you cannot pause and go back over select parts of a live lecture.

In response to "What was most surprising about this course?" one student said, "How challenging it is to build arguments." If understanding the challenge is a step toward accomplishing it, then I read that as significant of theological growth. Another said, "How theology seemed to bring out creativity in some of my classmates. And how much fun it was." Those are the ones we like to read. Another said, "The pop quizzes – but, I was always prepared to get up and present, so, very effective." My reading there was that the student was initially surprised to be given pop quizzes in a graduate school classroom, but still conceded their usefulness. Another student answered, "That the course was focused on our own theologies a little more than studying historical ones." I took this, perhaps, in a more affirmative way than the student meant it, having so carefully constructed my course to make it more about the constructing of theology than the study of theological history (though I cringed a bit, I admit, at the phrase "our theologies").

In response to the question, "What will you take away from this course?" a student said, "How to play with questions." Another said, "The ability to engage in theological discussion with appropriate reasoning." Responses to "What you would change?" brought some critique of the varied length of videos, the Pop Interpretations, and especially the complexity of some of the readings.

For me, however, the most meaningful evidence, as is often the case, was anecdotal. In the Pop Interpretation exercise with which the first day of class each week began, students were more or less capable of summarizing the video lectures early on. Sometimes they would point to theological formulations they found interesting or confusing, sometimes they would home in on what seemed like a key argument. Less often, they could do both. In the final weeks, however, there was a kind of soft mutiny taking place in the classroom. Rather than waiting for me to show up and appoint someone to summarize, students began arriving early and, one by one, taking the initiative to appoint themselves the day's interpreter. Each of the last three weeks I walked in to a white board full of phrases, diagrams, and sometimes theological cartoons. They made it a game to see if I could guess from the board which student had done it. That was a lot of pressure, and I think I was zero for three.

What I observed in those weeks was an integration of a semester's worth of material into careful discernment of the lecture's theological and critical structure. They were mapping my lectures on Ecclesiology and Eschatology onto previous lectures on Trinity and Christology, and doing so by means of grounds, claims, and warrants. In doing so, they demonstrated for one another how carefully structured reasoning can become a human way of thinking toward a divine and transcendent mystery. They were discovering that a faith seeking understanding is not necessarily an attempt to congratulate God on being so reasonable.

Moreover, they were discovering that this act of understanding is also not necessarily an attempt to shut down conversation. These interpretations generated arguments about such themes as the viability of claims for universal salvation and the presence of Christ in the bread and wine. In other words, I was hearing difficult and potentially anxiety-producing topics rendered into generous discussion by future leaders of theological communities. It was an explosion of deliberative theology like I had not seen before in my fifteen years of teaching.

Comparison with earlier semesters is difficult, since not only had I made changes over the years in the learning outcomes, our faculty also made changes to the course evaluations. So I was asking new and more focused questions about my changing course. For this reason, I consider this "Year One" of the experiment, and will evaluate future semesters against this one. In the meantime, the anecdotal evidence combined with the grades and evaluations leads me to conclude that the course was a successful step toward achieving the goals in student learning as I articulated them. My growing edges are largely about perfecting the model: next steps include

re-making videos of uniform length (no more than thirty minutes), and editing readings so that they are in a more introductory vein unless I plan to take class time to exegete them carefully and integrate them into the course content. But the success was evident. I was watching students learn theology, and also learn about their own theological learning. They were more prepared to be creative and insightful and even spontaneous practitioners of theology, in my estimation, than any single class I had previously taught. And they were some having fun doing it.

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APPENDIX

Course Learning Outcomes, Constructive Theology Spring 2018

Learning Goal	Achieved	Mostly Achieved	Partly Achieved	Not Achieved
Articulate and explain the key topics of Christian theology	3	10	1	0
Critically and charitably analyze complex theological questions	4	8	2	0
Formulate multifaceted responses to complex theological questions	4	10	0	0
Formulate and respond to a theological question in dialogue with other theologians	5	9	0	0

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THE WABASH CENTER
JOURNAL ON TEACHING

CONVERSATION

Conversation with Maryellen Weimer

Maryellen Weimer
Penn State University, Emerita

Thomas Pearson
Wabash Center

Kwok Pui Lan
Episcopal Divinity School, Emerita

Eugene V. Gallagher
Connecticut College, Emeritus

ABSTRACT

The launch of the new online open access *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* provides the occasion to reflect on the legacy of *Teaching Theology & Religion*, which our editorial team has been publishing through Wiley for 22 years. The editors had a conversation with Maryellen Weimer, who has known the journal well through her work on *The Teaching Professor* (a newsletter published by Magma that provides summaries of articles that appear in disciplinary-focused journals on teaching). Our conversation focuses on how *TTR* has fit within the broad range of genres and journals that constitute the scholarship of teaching, the value of articles that describe practical teaching techniques (such as our signature Teaching Tactics which will continue in the new journal), opportunities for making research on learning available to busy faculty, and the challenges authors face when contributing to this literature.

KEYWORDS

scholarship of teaching, disciplinary-focused journals on teaching, resources to support teachers, teaching religion, teaching theology, *The Teaching Professor*

Pearson We're happy to speak today with Maryellen Weimer, professor emerita of teaching and learning at Penn State University, whose lifelong work has been disseminating various and sundry materials on teaching and learning, through books, journal articles, and *The Teaching Professor* newsletter.[1]

Over the years, your articles in *The Teaching Professor* have called out a number of articles published in *Teaching Theology & Religion (TTR)* – the journal our editorial team has been publishing through Wiley since 1997. We're now ending our relationship with *TTR* to launch a new open access online journal, *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching*, where this Conversation will be published in the inaugural issue. I've often forwarded your newsletter to our authors when you've summarized and commented on one of their

1 Publications by Maryellen Weimer include *Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice* (2013), *Inspired College Teaching: A Career-Long Resource for Professional Growth* (2010), *Enhancing Scholarly Work on Teaching and Learning: Professional Literature that Makes a Difference* (2006), and *Improving Your Classroom Teaching* (1993). She has edited *The Teaching Professor* newsletter since 1987. In 2018 the newsletter transitioned to a website. Her popular blog first published as "Faculty Focus" is now a column called "For Those Who Teach." It appears regularly on the *Teaching Professor* website.

articles, which is a nice boost for them to see that their work was being noticed and commented on. We're curious if you could tell us something about how you discovered the journal, and what you found of value in it? How do you see it fitting into the broader landscape of the scholarship on teaching?

Weimer

I've edited the *Teaching Professor* for over thirty years, and I quickly learned that there are aspects of teaching and learning that are of interest to faculty pretty much across the board. For example, I have yet to find a faculty member who isn't interested in getting more students participating in class, in providing feedback that improves performance, in promoting academic integrity, in wanting more students coming to class prepared – it's a long list of shared interests in teaching and learning. When I'm looking for material to include in the newsletter, I'm after strategies and approaches that can be used with lots of different kinds of course content and ones that are easily adaptable. I'm also looking for strategies that are to some extent based on learning theories or are supported by research.

A lot of the teaching journals today don't focus on instructional strategies, but I think that most faculty have a real love affair with teaching techniques. They can never get enough. For example, I recently wrote about a *TTR* Teaching Tactic, Reid Locklin's "The (Mostly) Unmarked Quiz" (2019), that fits my criteria: it's a very creative way of using quizzes. A lot of faculty use quizzes to see whether or not students are coming to class prepared. Locklin's quiz accomplishes this, but it does so much more. He promotes deep thinking about quiz answers by facilitating a discussion of them after students have finished the quiz. It's a discussion that requires students to take notes about the various answer options and it's those notes that they're mostly graded on. It's not just a clever strategy. It's based on solid research in cognitive psychology on test-enhanced learning. A strategy like this not only improves performance on exams, it promotes the kind of deep learning necessary for long-term retention.

Kwok

Would you say that most journals or publications do not include teaching tactics or actual strategies. Can you tell us why?

Weimer

A bit of background can provide context for my answer. I look at about seventy-five to eighty discipline-based pedagogical periodicals on a regular basis. (Many disciplines have multiple journals on teaching.) We've had journals on teaching and learning for a long time. *The Journal of Engineering Education* and the *Journal of Chemical Education* have been published continuously since the early 1900s. But most of the pedagogical journals came into being in the 1960s or '70s. A lot of them started out as "mom and pop" publications overseen by a faculty member with a strong commitment to teaching. Publication in these journals didn't count for promotion and tenure so faculty weren't expected to write articles. Those who did, wrote because they cared. But the result was scholarship of mixed quality. The easiest articles to write were those that described experiences using a particular teaching technique. It was very much a how-to kind of literature with little or no attention paid to assessment.

When the scholarship of teaching was born in the 1990s, mostly in response to Ernest Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered* monograph (1990), that kind of technique, how-to scholarship was criticized. Many times assessment was a matter of the professor's opinion. Did the technique work? "Yes, it worked! My students really liked it." I'm exaggerating a little bit, but it wasn't particularly robust scholarship. Since then there has been a real move away from articles that report strategies and techniques. If they appear in journals now, they must be assessed in more rigorous ways and that usually means some sort of empirical analysis.

But I think the way *TTR* has handled techniques in Teaching Tactics is really excellent. They're not presented as articles. They're nice, short pieces that have their own section. You've provided a template that requires authors to respond in several areas. I think that's a great way to share good teaching ideas. It plays well to faculty's ongoing interest in teaching techniques.

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Gallagher When we invented that section we had in mind different ways of giving faculty access to the journal. Teaching Tactics were designed as the lowest barrier and quickest read. Often people say when they get the journal that's the first thing they turn to. You can read them in a couple minutes, and often enough you find something that's useful.

Weimer Yes. If you wanted to push that section a little bit you could have authors include some mention of the learning theory or educational research that undergirds the effectiveness of the Tactic. A lot of faculty think that these techniques work almost by magic. But the good ones do rest on empirical bases – they are evidence-based practices. There are reasons why they effectively promote learning.

Kwok This is a very important issue. Often the authors writing a Tactic or article on teaching may not be knowledgeable about learning theory. They are scholars of religion, but they may not read many theories on teaching.

Weimer I agree. Most discipline-based faculty don't know a lot about learning theory or educational research. But this is an area where I think there is reason for optimism. Starting with Barr and Tagg's article on learner-centered teaching (1995), faculty have been learning about learning. Up until that point faculty focused on *teaching*. The objective was to improve learning by improving teaching. If you use the components of effective instruction, your students were going to learn better, and there's research that supports the impact of good teaching on learning outcomes. But what's happened since the 1990s, it seems to me, is that the paradigm has really shifted. Pretty much across the board the interest now is in learning and the kind of teaching that promotes it.

Out of that interest in learning and the attention being paid to the learning sciences has emerged the recent interest in evidence-based practice – those strategies and techniques with documentable positive effects on learning outcomes. At this point, if faculty are using or considering use of a particular technique, they want to know if there is evidence to support it. That's the right question to ask, but faculty are looking for straightforward answers and this is social science research so definitive answers are few and far between.

In sum then, most faculty still have a pretty superficial understanding of the science (theory and research) of learning, so I wouldn't expect them to be able to name the learning theory that supports their favorite teaching technique, but I'm hopeful because they're motivated to look for evidence. One thing we know for sure about faculty: they're good at finding evidence and assessing it.

Pearson "Describe the learning principles that undergird the teaching tactic" is a helpful rephrasing for our current prompt "Why is it effective?"

Weimer Yes, but I don't think you want to require a Teaching Tactic author to articulate three learning theories or cite educational research, because then people will stop writing them and as I said, this is a strong section in a journal. Perhaps in this new iteration of the journal it could be expanded. If someone reads and decides to use one of the tactics, could they write up their experience using it? How did they adapt it to their course content? What student response did they observe? Did it have any unexpected benefits? Any advice they might have for others interested in using it? You do need to work to maintain the high quality of the section. It could be a part of the journal that brings even more readers to it.

Kwok You've said that *TTR* did not include very much educational or psychological theory. Can you say more about how *TTR* has compared to other journals?

Weimer I'd love to convene a conference of editors of these journals. I don't think there's much communication between them even though their goals are the same and I'm sure they have some of the same struggles. The journals have different strengths and approach things in different ways. There's so much that they could learn from each other.

One of my suggestions to the three of you as you're making this transition from *TTR* to *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching*, would be to take a look at some of these other journals. I'm very impressed with *Life Sciences Education* (which used to be called *Cell Biology Education*). It features some of the very best educational research being done by non-education researchers, most of it's done by biologists of various sorts. The research is strong, well-designed, with interesting analyses, but it's a good example of why faculty don't read educational research. It's not terribly accessible, if you aren't doing educational research. I don't know how many practitioners are reading that journal. If I had to guess, I'd say not many. Now, I do need to point out that *Life Sciences Education* has a section called Recent Research in Science Teaching and Learning that contains easy-to-read summaries of research on science teaching and learning that is being done in fields other than biology. I'm always finding good material there. I think that kind of section is a great addition to a discipline-based journal.

In terms of quality scholarship, another journal I'd recommend is *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*. It contains a special feature called the "Teacher Ready Research Reviews." They're reviews of research written for practitioners. They succinctly summarize lots of research and they focus on the practical implications –on what teachers should do, based on the research. There's one that brings together all the research on multiple choice exam questions in an organized, accessible way (Xu, Kauer, and Tupy 2016). There's another that reviews the research that's relevant to accurately interpreting end-of-course rating results (Boysen 2016). Another recent one by Bill Cerbin (2018) says that we should stop arguing about lecturing versus active learning – the fact of the matter is that lecture prevails. It would behoove us to look at the research and discover the ways we can use lectures to promote learning. He explores three areas where the research identifies actions that teachers can take before, during, and after the lecture – that promote better learning from the lecture. It's a wonderful piece.

Other journals that I think are consistently good include *Teaching Sociology*, *Teaching of Psychology*, and the *Journal of Management Education*. These are well-established journals. The quality of the scholarship is consistently high. And in all of these journals there's work that's relevant in many other disciplines. There's a great study in a recent issue of *Teaching Sociology* that asks a question of interest to lots of faculty: Do students have to like what they're doing in order to learn from it? (Monson 2019). It's a creatively designed study that looked at students working in groups on research projects.

There are several interesting cross-disciplinary journals as well. For example, the *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching* has been edited by by Milt Cox and Laurie Richland for many years. It's published by the University of Miami, Ohio. They publish a nice variety of articles with a good balance between more empirical articles and what I would call personal narrative essays. Teresa Delgado's (2015) metaphor for teaching in *TTR*, "Good Teaching is like Good Sex," is a great example of a personal narrative essay. I always use it as an example because I get a good laugh when I point out that it's published in a journal on theology and religion. There are also some good topical journals. For example, two British journals, *Active Learning in Higher Education* and *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, which publish lots of good work on those topics.

One of the things that is really interesting when you read all these different journals is the way in which each journal reflects their discipline. The protocols and conventions of the field are frequently superimposed on the study of teaching and learning. One of my favorite examples of this is an article in *The Journal of Economic Education* that does a cost-benefit analysis of a particular teaching strategy. Given *Wabash Center Journal on Teaching*'s home in religion, I would expect to see fewer quantitative studies. That's not how knowledge is advanced in the discipline. So *TTR* has been different from other disciplinary journals in that it doesn't preference empirical inquiry. It's like *Teaching Philosophy*, which publishes exploration kinds of essays, well embedded in the content of the discipline, with advice and suggestions on the best ways to teach content topics like dualism or logic, for example.

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Kwok What trends do you see in scholarship of teaching today?

Weimer I've already implied that much of the scholarly work on teaching and learning is now empirical, some sort of quantitative, qualitative, or descriptive study. You can't get something published in a lot of journals unless it's a study. I think that's too bad, not because I'm opposed to research, but because I think faculty need a range of resources on teaching and learning. I always say that most of us learn how to teach in the school of hard knocks by the seat of our pants. So we all have a very eclectic, individualized knowledge base for teaching and learning. Some of it is real wisdom; some teachers really do come to a good understanding based on their experiences. But faculty can draw some pretty serious misunderstandings from their experiences, so they do need to know more about learning theories and empirical research. But they also need teaching tactics. They really benefit from hearing how different people are handling quizzes, for example, and the feedback mechanisms faculty are using to improve student performance, and how faculty are keeping students' attention in class (and off of their devices). So they need a very pragmatic, how-to stream of literature.

But, they also need essays where faculty are raising challenging assumptions about teaching. My good friend Larry Spence wrote an article called "The Case Against Teaching" (2001) – which is the case *for* learning. It's an amazingly provocative, stimulating essay. It's the sort of thing that faculty really like to talk about. They need resources that challenge their thinking and their assumptions about teaching. I think they also need inspirational essays. Teaching is an energy draining profession. I think a lot of teachers get tired. They teach a lot and teaching sometimes becomes a relentless grind. They need to be able to read something that reminds them why they do this. The *Journal of Management of Education* published a wonderful article by Krista Walck called "A Teaching Life" (1997), written from a mid-career perspective, that asked a lot of questions about what she was doing and why she was doing it. I have given that article to so many faculty; they find it such a source of inspiration.

I don't think that anyone has really cracked the nut in terms of the kind of pedagogical journal that faculty really need. If you look at the history of these journals, the number of faculty who read them is really very small, even though more are reading them now than used to. When I wrote my book *Enhancing Scholarly Work on Teaching and Learning* (2006), I didn't find a single journal with a subscriber base of more than ten thousand. This was true, even for really large disciplines and disciplines where the price of the journal was partly or totally covered by association membership fees. Now the number of article downloads appear on most journal sites and I'm always amazed that really excellent articles might only have three to four hundred downloads, again, even in very large fields. I think one of the lessons we should have learned by now is that journals are not a particularly effective way of disseminating information about teaching and learning. But the online, open access platform of *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* has lots of potential and makes it possible take the journal in some different directions, including things that you don't see in the more traditional published journals.

Pearson That's right. There's the genre of teaching resources that appear on university teaching and learning websites, for example, which could include short videos, how-to slides, or rubrics of one sort or another. These are not a scholarly article, but they may be a valuable resource for teachers.

Weimer Yes, exactly. I wish we'd open up the definition of what counts as scholarly. A well-designed assignment and an interesting way of providing students feedback, those can be thoughtfully constructed and written about in ways that I think could be considered scholarly. Our thinking about scholarly work on teaching and learning is too narrow and exclusive, I believe.

What a journal has going for it is scholarly credibility and reputation. Magna Publications has been able to get lots of teachers to read *The Teaching Professor*. I think we've learned a lot about how to format materials so that faculty will read them. But we're a newsletter, for goodness sake; how can that be scholarly? We have no credibility at all and an article published in *The Teaching Professor*

doesn't count in most places because it's not peer reviewed, even though our rejection rates rival those of the best pedagogical publications. You're starting with a well-established journal, making a transition, and I think that gives you the opportunity to push the envelope, to try some new ways of formatting and presenting good content. You're asking the right questions: how do we get busy faculty to read this?

Pearson We're talking about the value of these resources for teachers, but it's occurred to me that an undersung value of the journal is the impact it has on the *authors*. Requiring them to do the hard work of analyzing the choices they made as they were teaching has a huge impact on them as teachers. Even if no one ever reads their article, I think it's still very valuable for that reason.

Weimer Absolutely. We just published a piece in *The Teaching Professor* that starts out with the line, "I just received the worst teaching evaluations of my career" (Haave 2019). It's a thoughtful exploration of why and how that happened; the author figured it out, and writing about it was no small part of the solution.

But these personal narratives have great value to those who read them because they are operational models of critical reflection. Donald Schön's work, *The Reflective Practitioner* (1992), became one of those trendy things in higher education, but I don't think faculty ever understood what it means to really critically think about your teaching. It's a deep, personal confrontation, often with an experience. Those who read see an example of how it's done, but they also learn from the experience. Most faculty do not respond constructively to negative student ratings. Here's an example of different, more constructive way of dealing with not-very-good feedback from students.

Pearson We find that because faculty haven't learned to write scholarship on teaching in graduate school that it's a new genre that we need to teach them how to write. We spend a lot of time coaching authors in this process. Have you done any of this work? Have you helped authors develop articles? How do you go about that?

Weimer Well, it is a labor of love. I find teachers need a lot of encouragement, hand-holding, and editing. They also tend to devalue what they're doing. They've developed really creative ways of getting students to confront how they prepared for an exam with how they performed on the exam. "Oh, you've got to write this up," I tell them. "Nah, it just a simple thing, no big deal. Nobody would publish it."

Shorter writing options, like your Tactic section, can help. But also short essays; publish a prompt or a short scenario and invite seven-hundred-word responses. I think a lot of faculty find writing long, thousands-of-word articles incredibly daunting. They're much more likely to get going with writing if it's a smaller piece. And of course, if it's a smaller piece then the editorial job is a lot less daunting as well.

I haven't looked to see what sort of advice you give authors, but there are some journal websites that include samples of writing in that deadly, passive, academic prose, followed by a contrasting example in a more succinct and discursive style. Side-by-side examples make the differences very clear.

Pearson One strategy I've used that you might find interesting is coaching a potential author who wants to write about a particular teaching experience to adopt the prompts we use for our Teaching Tactics. What is the context? What was your pedagogical purpose? What was the strategy you tried? How did it work and why was it effective? Take those prompts and write a five-thousand-word essay instead of a five-hundred-word Teaching Tactic. It seems to provide them a way to approach an article about teaching.

Weimer Yes, exactly. There could be a kind of query letter that provides a brief synopsis of the topic and then the editors respond with some suggestions as to how it might be developed, or some references to articles they consider examples of how they'd like to see the content formatted. Faculty are good

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at learning from examples. And they're not like students who have a tendency to just copy the examples.

I think faculty worry that if they write in a clear, accessible way, it's too easy and not scholarly. That's a misconception, I think. When I write a seven-hundred-word condensation of a twenty-page research article, I strive for an accurate summary of the study using simple, straight forward language. Believe me, that is an intellectually challenging task. I sweat bullets over those research highlights and I've been writing them for years. They're not easy to write. I think we've forgotten the scholarships of application and integration that Boyer described in *Scholarship Reconsidered* (1990). It's not the scholarship of discovery, but a different kind of intellectual work. If it's done well, it's scholarly work.

Gallagher Tom, Pui Lan, and I have been running Wabash Center colloquies on writing the scholarship on teaching. We meet for about a week in the first summer, placing participants in writing groups to develop their articles. Then we gather again to review each other's work over a weekend the next winter, and then a final couple of days in the following summer when the articles are completed. Have you had any experience with doing things like that? We keep jiggling around the design of the colloquy to help participants get over the hump of writing about their own teaching.

Weimer I think that's wonderful. I'd love to participate in one of those colloquies. What a great opportunity for peer feedback and real revision. And you're right: Faculty don't talk or think about their teaching in the way writing requires them to do.

I was at a conference a couple months ago and somebody asked the audience, "What's the best thing you've read on teaching and learning?" Of course the first thing mentioned was *The Courage to Teach* by Parker Palmer (2017), which is truly an amazing book with great content but is also well-written. It has voice, it's personal, but it also has substance. It's a book that makes you think about teaching in ways you never have. Bain's *What the Best College Teachers Do* (2012) is another example of a superbly well-written book. I think the kind of things that make scholarly writing on teaching and learning readable are not rocket science, meaning they can be learned.

Have you had much success, Gene, with getting people to write good stuff in the colloquies?

Gallagher I think the hardest thing for them is finding conversation partners in the scholarship of teaching. Authors will say, "I've discovered I have this round thing, and if we put four of them on a vehicle the vehicle would move." And we say, "Yes, that's a wheel, and other people have talked about wheels." We have exhausted a lot of energy trying to help people figure out with whom they can be in productive conversation.

Weimer Oh very good.

Gallagher The language that we tend to use is "transferability." Can you reach exit velocity from your own experience in a way that renders it accessible to others so that they can learn from it?

Weimer Yes. There is very little that is new under the pedagogical sun, in my view. It's interesting to me that people continue to publish pieces that claim that something is a new discovery, when it's not. Lots of other people have written about that already. So I think having authors "join a conversation" is a good way to describe it.

Pearson I want to find those "Teacher Ready Research Reviews" you were talking about earlier in the journal, *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*. It seems they could be a tremendous resource to hand to potential authors to help them find out who their conversation partners might be.

Weimer Yes, absolutely. That's another problem with the discipline-based scholarship: the articles primarily cite other articles in the same journal. They don't cite articles written in other fields. I suppose

we can't really blame the author. Who has time to read *The Physics Teacher* if you teach theology and religion? But those of us who care about teaching and learning can do a better job of asking what are the aspects of teaching and learning that transcend disciplines? I think that Lee Shulman (1986) started that a bit by identifying something that he called pedagogical content knowledge. When you're teaching differential equations you want to talk to somebody else who's teaching differential equations so you can get some good problems to demonstrate those equations. But when you're talking about promoting academic integrity, you can talk across the disciplines. If we were better at listing those topics, or those areas, then it seems to me we could border-cross with other fields. Cross-disciplinary collaboration and conversation should be a part of a faculty member's professional development activities. Sometimes it's really good to talk to somebody who teaches something totally different than you do. Not because you're going to do what they do, but because by seeing how knowledge lays out in their field you can understand how knowledge is transferred in your field. I have always worked in this space between disciplines, and it often feels like a no man's land. We're not all that great at border crossing.

Kwok

As a final question, how can we encourage faculty to write for the journal when the scholarship on teaching is not generally well-rewarded for tenure and promotion at many institutions, and is often not given high status in the disciplinary guilds?

Weimer

I think the scholarship of teaching and learning still counts at some kinds of institutions, but I think that wave has crested. At research institutions and the highly selective colleges, I don't think that scholarly work on teaching and learning counts nearly as much as discipline-based research scholarship does.

Beyond that we still haven't articulated very clear standards of what counts as good scholarly work on teaching and learning. Faculty on promotion and tenure committees aren't used to assessing it and that makes it easy to fall into using disciplinary standards as opposed to thinking about teaching and learning as phenomena in its own right that should be assessed by criteria which are relevant to its own characteristics and features.

But the question was how can you encourage faculty to write when it's not rewarded. The lack of reward and recognition isn't a new phenomenon and that hasn't prevented faculty from doing work in this area. They've been writing about teaching and learning for a long time.

I think you encourage faculty by building on their commitment to teaching and to student learning. If you ask a faculty member, "Are you interested in improving your teaching?" you may not get an enthusiastic response. But if you ask, "Do you care how much and how well your students learn?" it's hard to say no. If you are encouraging people to write about teaching and learning because it's going to improve student learning and improve their effectiveness as a teacher, I think that provides some motivation. If you've got a quizzing strategy and you want to know how and why that works, you're going to learn a whole lot more about it if you spend time writing about it.

Pearson

How do you get them to write it, though?

Weimer

I think you get them to write it incrementally. You let them write shorter pieces first. You let them write a variety of different kinds of things. You let them be respondents to essays, or curated collections of comments about an essay of some sort. You let them write short reviews. Once people start writing, it can build. I've gotten people going by asking them to explain what they're doing, why, and with what results, in an email. Sometimes it's simply the idea of writing an article that gets in the way. I think having good content in the journal is motivating to people. They want to contribute to something that's good. I think your colloquies are an amazing way to encourage writing. I haven't heard of another discipline trying to encourage writing that way. I think that sounds wonderful.

My thanks to the editorial team at *TTR*. It was an honor to be invited to do this interview and I've enjoyed our conversation. Best wishes for great success with this new version of the journal. I expect I'll continue to be an avid reader of *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching*.

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Maryellen Weimer is a professor emerita of teaching and learning at Penn State Berks and won Penn State's Milton S. Eisenhower award for distinguished teaching in 2005. She has consulted with more than six hundred colleges and universities on instructional issues and regularly keynotes national meetings and regional conferences and has edited *The Teaching Professor* newsletter since 1987. In 2018 the newsletter transitioned to a website. Her popular blog first published as "Faculty Focus" is now a column called "For Those Who Teach." It appears regularly on the *Teaching Professor* website.

THE WABASH CENTER
JOURNAL ON TEACHING

SPECIAL TOPIC

Introduction: Threshold Concepts in the Undergraduate Biblical Studies Classroom

Thomas Pearson
Editor

ABSTRACT

This Special Topic section of the journal includes an essay by John Van Maaren, "Transformative Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge," followed by three companion essays by Richard S. Ascough, Tat-siong Benny Liew, and Jocelyn McWhirter, each of which describes a particular teaching strategy the author uses to address a key threshold concept in biblical studies courses.

John Van Maaren remarks that "many experienced teachers can identify particular disciplinary concepts that, year after year, present the most formidable barriers to student understanding and disciplinary progress." His lead essay in this Special Topic section reviews the literature that has identified and analyzed the challenge of these "threshold concepts" in a variety of academic disciplines. But there has been little work on threshold concepts in religion and theology. His essay suggests a preliminary set of threshold concepts in undergraduate biblical studies classrooms, intended as a first step in this conversation.

The journal invited five-hundred-word companion essays from Richard S. Ascough, Tat-siong Benny Liew, and Jocelyn McWhirter, to identify a central threshold concept encountered by their students, unpack their students' challenges with this concept, and briefly describe some teaching strategies the authors have used to facilitate their students' learning.

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THE WABASH CENTER
JOURNAL ON TEACHING

SPECIAL TOPIC

Transformative Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Toward a Threshold Concept Framework for Biblical Studies

John Van Maaren
McMaster University

ABSTRACT

Threshold concepts (TCs) are conceptual gateways that students must pass through in order for learning to progress, but which are often navigated with considerable difficulty. They are therefore both transformative and troublesome for student learning. While individual TCs have been identified in related disciplines, no study has addressed TCs for ways of thinking and practicing in biblical studies. After introducing the TC framework, this essay takes a first step toward developing a TC framework for biblical studies by proposing a set of TCs for the discipline. In conclusion, this essay provides guidelines, with practical examples, for integrating TCs into the biblical studies classroom. Also published in this issue of the journal, see three short essays by Richard S. Ascough, Tat-siong Benny Liew, and Jocelyn McWhirter, each describing a particular teaching strategy they use to address a key threshold concept in their biblical studies courses.

KEYWORDS

threshold concepts, biblical studies, threshold characteristics, troublesome knowledge, student learning

Introduction

Many experienced teachers can identify particular disciplinary concepts that, year after year, present the most formidable barriers to student understanding and disciplinary progress.[1] One reason that these concepts may be consistently troublesome is that most students cannot easily accommodate them within their existing frame of meaning. Rather, students must reformulate their meaning frame in order to integrate the new concept. While such concepts – designated *threshold concepts* (henceforth TCs) – may be troublesome, they are also transformative for student meaning-making insofar as the new perspective occasions a new understanding of the subject – a transformation essential for student progress.

The potential contribution of TCs to enhance student learning has prompted organizations such as the Higher Education Academy (Mossley 2017) and the American Library Association (Association for College and Research Libraries 2015, 2) to promote TCs as a key pedagogical tool. While studies have identified TCs in as many as 259 disciplines (Land, Meyer,

1 Previous versions of this paper were presented in the Teaching Biblical Studies in an Undergraduate, Liberal Arts Context program unit of the annual meeting of the *Society of Biblical Studies* in Denver, Colorado (Van Maaren 2018b) and the *Pedagogy of Bible Education* conference hosted by the Mofet Institute, Tel Aviv (Van Maaren 2018a). I thank the participants for the constructive feedback which significantly improved this paper. The idea for this paper developed while working on two teaching and learning research projects with the Paul R. MacPherson Institute for Leadership, Innovation, and Excellence in Teaching at McMaster University. I especially thank Janette Barrington and Arshad Ahmad for their encouragement and constructive feedback.

and Flanagan 2016, xii), and their value for theology and religion has been noted (Killen 2011), no study has identified TCs in biblical studies.[2]

In this paper, I identify five concepts that may function as TCs for the discipline of biblical studies. I first introduce the TC framework by summarizing the common characteristics of TCs and discuss their potential to enhance student learning. I then outline a preliminary list of TCs for biblical studies by appealing to related disciplines, especially history and literature, where significant work identifying TCs has already been done.[3] This list is meant as a first step toward developing a TC framework for biblical studies.[4] Lastly, I illustrate the contribution of TCs to student learning by providing practical examples for how these five TCs may be integrated into course design, assignment choices, presentation strategies, classroom activities, and assessment.

Threshold Concept Characteristics and Their Contributions to Student Learning

Since TCs were first introduced (Meyer and Land 2002; 2003), a vast scholarly output has developed around their conceptualization, identification, and implementation in classroom settings.[5] TCs have "emerged as a set of transferable or portable ideas across disciplinary contexts, which offer new insights into teaching and learning, and as a theoretical framework that is both explanatory and 'actionable'" (Land, Meyer, and Smith 2008, xi). After extensive scrutiny, the basic concept has remained stable: A TC is "akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something. It represents a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learning cannot progress" (Meyer and Land 2003, 412). Here I summarize TC characteristics and identify their contribution to student learning.

Threshold characteristics

TCs tend to have four characteristics.[6] First, a TC is *transformative* in that, once understood, it "occasions a significant shift in the perception of the subject." This is the non-negotiable characteristic of TCs (Baillie, Bowden, and Meyer 2013, 229; Meyer et al. 2016, xii) and, in terms of the conceptual change literature, constitutes "profound" rather than "basic" conceptual change (Davies and Mangan 2007, 713–715). Basic conceptual change involves reworking or building upon prior concepts such as when a single concept is differentiated into multiple concepts, or two existing concepts are seen to be the same. In contrast, profound conceptual change involves a transformed perspective on the subject that may involve integrating overarching concepts so that the whole is greater than its parts, or the acquisition of organizing models that allow students to construct arguments according to disciplinary ways of thinking and practicing.

Whereas the acquisition of core concepts – conceptual building blocks that advance subject knowledge – involves basic conceptual change, learning TCs requires profound conceptual change (cf. Barradell 2013, 2). For example, on the one hand, the center of gravity – the point from which the weight of a body may be considered to act – builds upon and advances subject knowledge and so represents a core concept in the physical sciences that requires basic conceptual change. On the other hand, gravity – the idea that any two bodies attract one another with a force that is proportional to the product of their masses and inversely proportional to the distance between them – occasions a shift in perception of the natural world and exposes the interrelatedness of apparently disparate things. Therefore, gravity represents a TC in the natural sciences and, once understood, occasions profound conceptual change (Meyer and Land 2006, 6–7). While exclusive focus on transmitting core concepts to students represents a teacher-centered/information transfer approach

2 The closest is Rachelle Gilmour's study, which identifies the exodus event as a TC for the biblical writers, but does not address TCs for the discipline of biblical studies (2016). Individual TCs in the related disciplines of religion and online theological education have been identified (Morales and Barnes 2018; Mudge 2014).

3 This study aligns most closely with the type of scholarship of teaching and learning that Killen and Gallagher label "'Philosopher's Stone': Pedagogies and Theories" (2013).

4 See also three brief companion essays published in this issue of the journal. Each analyzes a particular threshold concept the authors have identified in their biblical studies classroom and describes a teaching strategy they have developed to address this challenge to students' learning: Richard S. Ascough, "Crossing the Threshold by Unlearning the 'Truth' in Biblical Studies"; Tat-siong Benny Liew, "Teaching the Bible as a Threshold Concept in a Liberal Arts Context"; and Jocelyn McWhirter, "All Interpretations Are Subjective."

5 Mick Flanagan's extensive bibliography (2019) lists 1726 TC publications by 1997 authors as of March 17, 2019.

6 These four characteristics, along with a fifth (*bounded*), are outlined by Meyer and Land (2003) who later added three more to the initial five: *liminal*, *reconstitutive*, and *discursive* (2005). For our purposes, we will focus only on the primary four characteristics.

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to teaching and may encourage passive learning, an emphasis on TCs in course syllabi and classroom pedagogy aligns with a student-centered/conceptual change approach to teaching (Saroyan and Trigwell 2015) – shown to encourage deep learning (Trigwell, Prosser, and Waterhouse 1999; Gibbs and Coffee 2004) – helping students to transform their conceptions of the phenomena they study (Trigwell and Prosser 2004, 413).

Second, a TC is often *integrative* in that "it exposes the previously hidden interrelatedness of something" (Meyer and Land 2003, 4). By integrating concepts that previously appeared unrelated, the existing concepts may be redefined in terms of relations to other concepts rather than by a list of isolated characteristics. This accumulative effect may gradually impact all aspects of one's perception of the world. Third, acquisition of a TC is probably *irreversible*, insofar as the student may unlearn the changed perspective only with considerable effort. Whereas factual knowledge such as core concepts must be rehearsed in order to be retained, knowledge that restructures or integrates concepts like TCs impacts student understanding of the nature of knowledge. The effort required to unlearn TCs is confirmed by experts (those who have long-since crossed a conceptual threshold) who report difficulty understanding the trouble students have encountering a TC for the first time (Meyer and Land 2003, 415).

Finally, a TC is most often *troublesome*, as navigating the threshold may be done with difficulty and may cause an uncomfortable shift in identity. Meyer and Land identify six types of knowledge that may be troublesome (2003, 416–420; cf. Perkins 1999). (1) *Ritual knowledge* is existing knowledge that lacks meaning. It has a routineness to it, functioning as a ritualized response to, for example, a classroom question or examination prompt. Mathematic formulas often function this way. For example, calculus students may know how to find the derivative of an equation by memorizing formulae. However, without grasping how the derivative indicates the rate of change and describes a feature of the real world, the knowledge remains ritualized. (2) *Inert knowledge* is existing knowledge that is not activated. While the knowledge may be memorized, it is not integrated into students' perception of their lived experience. For example, students may learn and bemoan past societal injustices. However, without connecting knowledge of the past with their present reality to enable reflection on possible contemporary forms of injustice, the knowledge remains inert. (3) Foreign or *alien knowledge* is knowledge that comes from a perspective in conflict with one's own. For example, North American students of religion may have trouble understanding the sincerity of the Yazidi belief in an angel that appears in the form of a peacock and is venerated as an emanation of God – a belief that may seem radically foreign to many forms of western religiosity. Students may easily disregard alien knowledge by appeal to "common sense," short-cutting student learning. (4) *Tacit knowledge* is existing knowledge that is implicit and personal even as it may be shared by a community of practice. For example, expected gender roles within a community of practice may be learned by observation and imitation, and may remain tacit and unexamined. Meyer and Land note that tacit knowledge may override alien knowledge that students encounter in classroom settings (e.g., alternative gender roles) and that appears counter-intuitive. (5) In addition, some content knowledge may be experienced as *conceptually difficult knowledge*. This is especially prominent in STEM disciplines. In the humanities and social sciences, data analysis or the interdisciplinary use of theoretical models may be especially conceptually difficult. (6) Finally, discipline-specific discourses may constitute *troublesome language* as students encounter sometimes-familiar terms used in new ways. Examples include the term "culture" in social anthropology, and "religion" in religious studies. Troublesome language constitutes a specific type of conceptually difficult knowledge and is especially prominent in the humanities and social sciences as discourses develop to represent and privilege particular understandings.

In summary, the superordinate characteristic of a TC is its transformative potential. To the extent that a TC is also integrative, irreversible, and troublesome, it is more assuredly identified as a TC and may be integrated into course design and classroom pedagogy to increase student learning and disciplinary progress.

The contribution of threshold concepts to student learning

The importance of identifying TCs lies in the fact that they are essential for student progress, navigated with difficulty, and often presented only implicitly in course syllabi and classroom activities and presentations. Teachers, as experts in the discipline, likely acquired threshold capabilities long ago (crossed the disciplinary thresholds by learning the TCs) and may now perform the TC mental operations subconsciously. In the classroom this means that these disciplinary ways of thinking and practicing are often assumed, leaving students to discern, or perhaps guess, the essential mental operations required for thinking like a biblical scholar. Therefore, by identifying TCs, these implicit concepts may be made explicit and used to structure course design, assignment choices, presentation strategies, and classroom activities, (Timmermans and Meyer 2017, 5–6).

Students enter the classroom with different relationships to a given TC. Some may have already acquired the threshold capability, some may not have, and some may be in the liminal space of navigating the threshold (Vidal, Smith, and Spetic 2015, 516–517). This variation in student learning may manifest itself in a bifurcation between "those who get it" and "those who do not." The difference may not be intelligence or effort, but relationship to a conceptual threshold which has been crossed only by "those who get it." Meyer, Land, and Davies (2008) outline four stages in the process of navigating a TC (each of which is experienced differently by individual students). (1) During the subliminal stage, before encountering the TC, the student possesses a tacit assumption about the content. (2) The pre-liminal stage begins when the student first encounters the TC and forms an initial impression. (3) During the liminal stage students enter and navigate the threshold. Leaving behind their previous understanding, they struggle to reconstitute their understanding by integrating the new concept. (4) Finally, in the post-liminal stage the student transcends the liminal space and arrives at a transformed understanding of the subject matter. Awareness of individual student relationships to the TCs enables teachers to pinpoint the particular needs of specific students and more equitably adopt a student-centered approach to teaching that is responsive to student needs.

Toward a Threshold Concept Framework for Biblical Studies

Method

To date, much of the work identifying TCs has been done in STEM disciplines such as medicine, mathematics, and engineering. This is partly because the more clearly-defined body of content knowledge in STEM disciplines makes a consensus set of TCs appear more feasible. However, within the social sciences and humanities, "ways of thinking and practicing" may also function as TCs (Meyer and Land 2006, 15). For example, opportunity cost is fundamental to thinking like an economist and is a TC in economics, a discipline fundamentally concerned with choice and scarcity (Reimann and Jackson 2006, 116; cf. Davies and Mangan 2007). One popular economic textbook identifies it as the first TC of economics and defines it as follows: "The opportunity cost of any activity is the sacrifice made to do it. It is the best thing that could have been done as an alternative" (Sloman and Wride 2009, 8). Crossing the threshold of opportunity cost represents a transformation from understanding changes as predetermined to seeing two sides of each choice. It expresses the basic interrelatedness of scarcity and choice, two fundamental concepts in economics (Shanahan and Meyer 2006).

A potential pitfall of identifying TCs is the power dynamics of creating normative sets of TCs which may have a totalizing or colonizing effect on disciplinary boundaries and content (Meyer and Land 2006, 16). This raises the question "Whose TCs?" and is especially relevant for the humanities and social sciences which have less agreed-upon content knowledge and therefore a wider spectrum of possible TCs.

In order to counteract bias, numerous scholars have advocated a "transactional curriculum inquiry" for identifying TCs (Barradell 2013; Cousin 2009, 201–212; Timmermans and Meyer 2017, 4–5). This approach draws upon various stakeholders in the educational process in order to ensure that the selected TCs are the most important for student learning. First, an initial list may be compiled for one's own discipline by consulting the existing literature on TCs in related disciplines. This cross-disciplinary approach allows the identification of TCs that may be shared across disciplinary boundaries as well as TCs which mark the boundary between disciplines, distinguishing, for example, biblical studies from history. Second, empirical data may be collected from teachers and students through interviews, focus groups, concept mapping, and so forth. On the one hand, teachers, as experts in the field, have acquired the disciplinary TCs and also have a first-hand perspective on which concepts students find troublesome and transformative year-after-year. On the other hand, students can report on their experiences encountering and navigating TCs (Barradell 2013, 269; Male 2012, 15). Finally, these three sources of data (TCs in other disciplines, teachers, and students) can be further refined through consultation with educational developers.

The list of TCs outlined below was developed by consulting the existing TC literature, especially in the related disciplines of history and literature. As a theoretical list, it represents the first step toward the development of a TC framework for biblical studies through a transactional curriculum inquiry. At the same time, the preliminary list is practical insofar as each individual TC may be used ad hoc in developing assignment choices, presentation strategies, and classroom activities that aim to make explicit the disciplinary ways of thinking and practicing in biblical studies.

In contrast to religious studies, whose content knowledge is notoriously difficult to define, the subject of biblical studies

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is a bit more straightforward. I take the content of biblical studies to be texts considered "biblical" by different religious traditions, whether the Tanakh, Old and New Testaments, Apocrypha, or additional texts included in other canonical lists and considered authoritative by their respective traditions. I take the study of these texts to include their interpretation, historical setting, origin, transmission, and reception history. While the term "biblical" most often refers to canonical texts of Jewish and Christian traditions, these TCs are transferable to any disciplinary boundaries focused on authoritative texts within religious traditions. As a set of TCs for biblical studies, I mean for this list to be useful in any course that includes any of the above aspects of the biblical texts as a primary focus whether in a biblical studies department, religious studies department, seminary curriculum, or elsewhere.

My approach to developing this preliminary list is by appeal to related disciplines, especially history and literature, where significantly more work on TCs has been done. I understand ways of thinking and practicing in biblical studies to overlap with history most directly in the use of the biblical texts as historical sources and in the re-creation of a historical context for textual interpretation. I understand biblical studies to overlap with literature especially in the ways of thinking and practicing related to creating meaning from the written text. I take biblical studies to differ from both history and literature most basically in the authoritative status accorded the biblical texts. While a distinction could be made between the discipline of biblical studies as taught at an institution with a commitment to the authoritative status of these texts (as seen, for example, in a statement of faith or core values) and institutions without limitations on academic freedom (cf. American Association of University Professors 1970), I focus only on the authoritative status as a feature of the biblical texts' reception.

Threshold concepts in the discipline of history

The identification of TCs in the study of history draws on empirical research about what it means to think historically (esp. Wineburg 1991, 2001). Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke identify "five C's" of historical thinking: "Change over time, causality, context, complexity, and contingency" (2007, 32). Lendol Calder identifies six cognitive moves students must learn to think like expert historians: "Questioning, connecting, sourcing, making inferences, considering alternative perspectives, and recognizing limits to one's knowledge" (2006, 1364). Michael Coventry and colleagues discuss five inter-related themes: Approaching evidence contextually, confronting the constructed nature of any source, connecting evidence and scholarship; grasping the limits of different media (writing, and so forth) for representing history, and becoming "citizen historians" by connecting personally to history and making it public (2006, 1377). Arlene Díaz and colleagues identify "bottlenecks" for students learning to think historically. These include recognizing the variety of primary sources and interpreting them; recreating historical context and connecting it to a document, identifying and empathizing with people from another place and time, dealing with ambiguity and contradiction in historical sources, recognizing major points in primary and secondary sources, and producing some sense through connecting multiple sources (2008, 1222; cf. Lévesque 2008; Pace 2008).

Paul Sendziuk synthesizes the scholarship on ways of thinking historically and identifies two primary TCs for the study of history that I suggest also function as TCs for biblical studies: (1) "the past is a foreign country" and (2) the constructed and contested nature of historical understanding (2014; cf. Díaz et al. 2008). On the one hand, the radical otherness of the past (TC 1) requires historians to engage with the past on its own terms and includes ways of thinking that emphasize connecting imaginative recreation of historical context to document interpretation and empathy for historical characters from another time and place. On the other hand, the constructed and contested nature of historical understanding (TC 2) requires historians to contextualize and interrogate sources of historical evidence. This involves cognitive processes such as questioning, corroborating evidence, distinguishing and relating primary and secondary sources, and synthesizing multiple sources through mechanisms like causality, inference, and creativity. It also involves acknowledging the complexity of historical reconstruction through ambiguous and contradictory historical sources, the reciprocal relationship between artifact and interpreter, the limits of our knowledge and media of communication, and the contingency of history.

Sendziuk argues for a third TC, the contemporary relevance of studying history (2014, 178–179). While the value of historical study does not relate to ways of thinking historically, he argues that it represents a TC because the relevance of historical study is not immediately obvious for students, the vast majority of whom will not go on to a career as a historian. Sendziuk identifies the value of studying history to be the development of transferable critical thinking skills. I would add Coventry et al.'s emphasis on becoming "citizen historians" by having one's identity shaped by personally engaging historical persons and events, and making historical knowledge public (2006).

Threshold concepts in the discipline of literature

Important work identifying threshold concepts in English literature has been carried out by Gina Wisker, Stuart Cameron, and Maria Antoniou at the University of Brighton, UK (2007). Their study used a transactional curriculum inquiry approach that included educational developers on the research team, consulted the existing TC literature from related disciplines, partnered with English literature lecturers to identify TCs in syllabi and conceptions of English literature, and conducted semi-structured interviews with students (Wisker, Cameron, and Antoniou 2007, 8–9, 11).

Their project identified four primary TCs for the discipline of English literature: context, interpretation, representation, and formal expression (Wisker 2015, 7). Wisker defines context as "the engagement of the literary work with [the] time, place, people's world views and values – and with the time, place, world views, and values of the reader." The first half of this definition – the original historical context – corresponds to the TC in the discipline of history that Sendziuk labels "the past is a foreign country." The second half – the reader's historical context – overlaps with Sendziuk's identification of the relevance of history as a TC insofar as the text/historical event is engaged through contemporary "world views and values." Further, though not included in Wisker's definition, the various historical contexts of past readers as part of the context finds a parallel in the study of reception history as part of biblical studies.

Wisker defines interpretation as when "readers, learners, [and] writers, interact with the text in context opening up new perspectives and ways of looking at the text and the world," (2015, 7). This second TC for English literature corresponds closely to the second TC in history – that is, the constructed and contested nature of historical understanding.

A third TC in English Literature – one that Wisker, Cameron, and Antoniou suggest is shared by all arts and humanities disciplines – is representation. For students to cross the representation threshold, they must grasp that the signifier in the text is more than the signified in the "real" world. The distinction between signifier and signified enables students to recognize that "elements in a text represent an argument, ideology, world view and that they function symbolically, metaphorically, in excess of their mimetic qualities" (Wisker et al. 2007, 9). Grasping representation is closely related to understanding what the writer's purpose is in composing a text.

A fourth TC for English literature is formal expression. This refers to the way that the formal, structural, linguistic, and generic choices enable aesthetic pleasure and communicate emotion, feelings, meaning, and perhaps a message (Wisker et al. 2007, 9). Formal expression in English literature overlaps with the emphasis in historical thinking that considers the limits of different media (writing, and so forth) for representing history.

The disciplines of history and literature provide a useful starting point for identifying TCs in biblical studies because of the overlap in ways of thinking and practicing with biblical studies, and because significant work identifying TCs has been done in each. Other related disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, geography, and classics have less developed TCs and so are less useful (Flanagan 2019). In the following section, I identify and illustrate five TCs for biblical studies and note additional TCs in disciplines outside history and literature that may be useful for certain biblical studies courses.

A Preliminary Set of Threshold Concepts for Biblical Studies

This study identifies five foundational TCs for the discipline of biblical studies. These are (1) the biblical world as a foreign country, (2) the constructed nature of biblical understanding, (3) the concept that everything is an argument, (4) the relevance of the academic study of the Bible, and (5) the effects of treating the biblical texts as authoritative. These are derived from TCs in history, literature, and what I take to be a distinguishing feature of biblical studies from history – the authoritative status of biblical texts among communities of practice. I will discuss each of these five in turn, explaining and showing how each may be transformative, integrative, and troublesome. I do not discuss irreversibility because, as I understand, this would require empirical data collection from students after having crossed the threshold. The essential characteristic of TCs is the transformative perspective shift on the part of the learner. The other characteristics are usually, but not always present. For example, not all economics students will experience opportunity cost as conceptually troublesome. However, to the extent that this preliminary TC set possesses each attribute, the justification for treating them as TCs becomes stronger. Table one below summarizes the threshold characteristics of each TC.

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TABLE 1: Threshold Concepts in Biblical Studies

	Transformative	**Integrative**	**Troublesome**
Biblical world as foreign country	grasp that personal beliefs cannot be assumed for biblical writers and characters	illuminates the effect of societal factors on contemporary biblical understandings	confronting alien knowledge exposes tacit knowledge and enables it to be examined
Constructed nature of biblical understanding	adopt evidence-based approach that considers authorship, language, context, textual integrity, etc.	shows the reciprocal relationship of historical reconstruction and textual interpretation	converting inert knowledge into evidence-based contingent knowledge
Everything is an argument	approach texts as artifacts produced by real persons for specific purposes	connects textual features with context by considering purpose of textual composition	confronting alien knowledge exposes tacit knowledge and enables it to be examined
Relevance of biblical studies	view academic approach to the Bible as asset for personal meaning-making	links textual interpretation with reception history	exposing the relevance of ritual knowledge creates identity vulnerability
Effects of biblical authority	analyze authority as a contingent historical factor	embeds authority within the exploration of historical contingencies	moving authority from tacit knowledge to *explanandum* can destabilize identity

The biblical world as a foreign country

A first concept that I suggest functions as a TC for the discipline of biblical studies is that the world of the Bible is a foreign country – that is, the radical otherness of the life experiences, practices, beliefs, motivations, and so forth of biblical characters and writers. This TC takes its name from the corresponding TC in history and is also shared with literature (context). An example of datum that may prompt students to navigate this threshold is the idea that many biblical writers assumed the existence of many deities (Heiser 2008). Take, for example, the decalogue injunction that "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3 NRSV) or the psalmist's tribute that "the Lord is a great god, and a great king above all gods" (Psalm 95:3).

The perception shift that crossing this threshold prompts – that is, the student's *transformation* – is an awareness that personal beliefs cannot be imputed to biblical writers and characters and consequently that the student must engage the past on its own terms. This involves "ways of thinking" that include imaginative recreation of the past, linking a reconstructed historical context to textual interpretation, and empathy for historical characters. An awareness of the radical otherness of persons in antiquity may also be *integrative* insofar as the gap between ancient and present-day worldviews illuminates the impact of other societal factors on students' encounter with the biblical text. So, for example, a student may ask what historical processes caused a decrease in henotheism (allegiance to one deity) as seen in some biblical writers, and an increase in monotheism or atheism, or they may inquire about the implicit assumptions that guide their reading of the text. In this way, an awareness of the radical otherness of the biblical world links reading biblical texts with western history, reception history, and interpretive approaches. Finally, the radical otherness of the biblical world can be experienced as *troublesome* for students as their encounter with alien knowledge exposes tacit knowledge that is then vulnerable to critical examination. As discussed above, alien knowledge comes from a perspective that is not one's own while tacit knowledge remains personal, implicit, and often unexamined. When students encounter the idea that the decalogue, or perhaps Paul, believed in the existence of other deities, their existing tacit knowledge (for example, that all biblical writers were monotheists) may override the alien knowledge, preventing the transformed perspective. For others, the encounter with the radical otherness of biblical characters may expose tacit but deeply engrained assumptions that may now appear vulnerable, causing an uncomfortable shift in identity.

The constructed nature of biblical understanding

A second TC that I suggest biblical studies shares with both history and literature is the constructed nature of the subject knowledge. That is, through interpretation, the sources are used to create new knowledge for today. I use "biblical understanding" as a catch-all for what students know about the Bible – especially its content, history, historical setting, origin,

transmission, reception history, and meaning for understanding the world and how to live in it. By "constructed" I mean put together based on evidence, assumptions, paradigms, and agendas by present-day readers as well as an awareness of competing reconstructions and the presence of multiple perspectives in the biblical texts.[7]

The *transformation* that crossing this threshold prompts is the adoption of an evidence-based approach to biblical understanding that includes consideration of authorship, context, language, accuracy, textual integrity, and so forth, and an acceptance and appreciation for the contested and contingent nature of biblical knowledge. Students who have developed this threshold capability will understand the different ways that, for example, Pauline authorship of the letter to the Galatians may be used when constructing the early history of Jesus-followers. Further, grasping the constructed nature of historical understanding may be *integrative* in that it links history and text. It exposes the reciprocal relationship between historical reconstruction and textual interpretation as text informs historical context and reconstructed history provides a setting for interpreting the text. In the case of the letter to the Galatians, Paul's polemics against opponents within the early Jesus movement help construct a historical setting that includes conflicting understandings of the place of gentiles among Jesus-followers.

Finally, the constructed nature of biblical understanding may be conceptually *troublesome* as students are challenged to convert inert knowledge into evidence-based contingent knowledge. As discussed above, inert knowledge is knowledge that a student can recall for a test, but that the student does not actively connect to other knowledge (Meyer and Land 2003, 416–420). Students may know that Paul wrote Galatians and that he had opponents among the earliest followers of Jesus, but without integrating this into their understanding of early Christian practice and belief – that is, if this remains inert – they may mistakenly take Galatians as standard for all early Jesus followers. Whereas the first TC is troublesome for students' identity by highlighting their tacit knowledge, this second TC may be troublesome as students are pushed to activate inert knowledge.

Everything is an argument

A third concept that may be an especially important TC for the biblical studies classroom is the recognition that "everything is an argument."[8] By "everything," I mean all elements of the biblical texts as well as these same elements present in the reception history of the biblical texts, including the immediate classroom. In terms of the biblical texts, the TC that everything is an argument emphasizes the way that features of the text such as language, genre, structure, rhetoric, word choice, and so forth, are shaped by the interests, ideology, and worldview of the authors/redactors/transmitters. It thereby combines elements of the TC's representation and formal expression in the discipline of literature as well as the recognition of the limits of particular media in the discipline of history.

Crossing this threshold is *transformative* as students learn to approach the biblical texts as artifacts created by real persons for specific purposes. The awareness that everything is an argument enables students to avoid simply equating, for example, the historical books of 1–2 Kings with "real" history and approach them as historical sources that present Israelite history from a Judean perspective, with an interest in cultic centralization, and structured by a deuteronomistic understanding of divine reward and punishment (see for example, Collins 2018). This awareness enables students to make sense of attempts to reconstruct ancient Israelite history and prepares them to critically compare competing reconstructions. This TC is also *integrative* insofar as textual features (such as repetition) are seen to reflect the specific interests of real (and often unknown) authors, redactors, and transmitters, which are themselves shaped by historical context. In the case of 1–2 Kings, elements such as the emphasis on the centralization of the cult, and the reforms of Josiah as the narrative climax, enable scholars to suggest probable dates and provenance, and historical forces impacting the writer and redactors. The awareness that everything is an argument may also be *troublesome*, especially for students with a flat understanding of the biblical texts as authoritative and directly applicable to their life circumstances. For students with this (often tacit) approach to the Bible, consideration of the ideological motives of the writers of 1–2 Kings and the possibilities of historical distortion or inaccuracy may represent alien knowledge (knowledge coming from a perspective in conflict with one's own).

7 For example, Margaret Mitchell writes that interpreting Paul "is fundamentally an artistic exercise in conjuring up and depicting a dead man from his ghostly images in the ancient text, as projected on a background composed from a selection of existing sources. All these portraits are based upon a new configuration of the surviving evidence, set into a particular, chosen, framework" (2002, 428).

8 This phrase is inspired by the title of a popular introductory writing textbook, *Everything's an Argument* (Lunsford, Ruszkiewicz, and Walters 2018).

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The relevance of the academic study of the Bible

The fourth concept that I suggest represents a portal opening previously inaccessible conceptual space is the contemporary relevance of the academic study of the Bible. While the relevance of history may be the acquisition of the critical thinking skills needed for the super-complexity of present-day life, I see the relevance of biblical studies to be its role in student meaning-making. The Bible's relevance for students with a commitment to it as a normative, authoritative text may be self-evident. For other students, the Bible remains important for meaning-making because of its impact on contemporary culture. Shiela McGinn notes four reasons students in a North American context should know something about the Bible: (1) It is a classic of Western literature, (2) it has been formative for American culture, (3) it shaped Western law, and (4) it continues to be used in contemporary politics (Webster et al. 2012, 273). The relevance of biblical studies falls outside disciplinary "ways of thinking and practicing." However, like TCs in general, without grasping the relevance of subject significance, deep learning will not occur (Zull 2002). Further, it is arguably transformative, integrative, and troublesome and therefore can be usefully treated as a TC in biblical studies.

First, the *transformation* involved in crossing this threshold involves a shift from viewing the subject as inconsequential, or even threatening, to a perspective that sees an academic approach to the Bible as an asset for personal meaning-making. I see a two-fold relevance to the academic study of the Bible, distinguished by two different student perspectives. Some students feel threatened by the investigative questions that are central to an academic study of their sacred texts. For these students, navigating the threshold involves gaining an appreciation of what an academic approach to their sacred texts offers their own meaning-making processes by opening new avenues of inquiry and advocating dispassionate evidence-based argumentation. Other students may see the Bible, and religion more generally, as increasingly irrelevant for contemporary life. For these students, navigating the threshold involves grasping the impact of these texts on societal factors shaping their own experience.

Second, an understanding of the relevance of biblical studies is *integrative* insofar as it connects textual interpretation with reception history and invites the student to see their own process of meaning-making as participating in a long history of other persons reading the same texts in foreign cultures for different reasons. Finally, engaging in the academic study of biblical texts can be *troublesome* for students as ritual knowledge is infused with meaning, making their student identity vulnerable. Ritual knowledge is knowledge that lacks meaning – for example, the knowledge that there are four gospels (Meyer and Land 2003, 417). When students realize the *significance* of the four-fold gospel for contextualizing the earliest traditions about Jesus and the historical Jesus – for example, by demonstrating the literary relationship between the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and the role of the writer in placing the same story in different narrative and historical contexts – this ritual knowledge becomes meaningful, yet potentially troublesome for student identity as they realize that the gospels cannot be read as straight historical accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus.

The effects of treating the biblical text as authoritative

The final idea that I suggest represents a TC in biblical studies is the impact of the Bible's authoritative status. This includes its impact on textual interpretation, as well as its elevated impact on culture and society due to this status within communities of practice. Like the other TCs, this final TC is arguably transformative, integrative, and troublesome. In addition, it is bounded (a fifth TC characteristic), insofar as it demarcates the disciplinary boundary between history and biblical studies.

First, the *transformative* perception shift that this concept occasions is for students to view the idea of textual authority as a contingent factor in their analysis of history, regardless of whether they themselves have a commitment to the authoritative status of the biblical text. So, for example, reading the New Testament as authoritative and normative may cause students to read Matthew's gospel in light of Pauline statements such as "no one will be justified by works of the law" (Gal 2:16). However, without this assumption, Matthew may be understood to teach righteousness by Torah-observance (especially Matt 5:17–20; Saldarini 1994, 124–164). The perception shift is not that students adopt one or the other assumption, but that they realize the impact of the status they accord to the Bible on their understanding of the biblical texts.

Second, this approach *integrates* the authoritative status of these texts for communities of practice into students' biblical understanding by highlighting its impact on textual interpretation, reception history, and so forth. To continue the above example, the dominant reception history of reading Matthew 5:20 ("unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven") to call for an alternative type of righteousness,

can be explained by the authority accorded to the text by nearly all early interpreters (Runesson 2016, 62). This can then raise questions about the impact of communities of practice on the transmission, selection, and editing of the texts, and hence on reconstructions of the earliest history of the Jesus movement. Finally, integrating the concept of authority into students' analysis of the Bible can be *troublesome* because it investigates a particular piece of tacit knowledge (the Bible is/is not authoritative), making students' relation to the Bible's authority vulnerable, potentially altering student identity.

In addition, this final TC is also *bounded*, a fifth TC characteristic outlined by Meyer and Land. The characteristic of boundedness refers to the way that many TCs explain only part, but not all, of the subject area, and may serve to demarcate disciplinary boundaries (Meyer and Land 2003, 416). The authority conveyed to the biblical text by communities of practice demarcates the discipline of biblical studies from that of history. Biblical studies may also share this TC with the discipline of classics insofar as select works of Greek and Latin writers have been treated as quasi-canonical classics for Western culture.

Threshold concepts in other disciplines

In addition to history and literature, other related disciplines have identified TCs. While these did not factor into my list of TCs for ways of thinking and practicing in biblical studies, they may be useful for individual topical courses in biblical studies. Some of the more interesting possibilities are noted here. In gender studies, the TCs of equality (Dyer and Hurd 2018), privilege, oppression, and social construction of gender (Launius and Hassel 2015) may be used to structure a course on gender and the Bible. The TC of othering from cultural studies (Cousin 2006) may be usefully applied in a course on, for example, postcolonial interpretation of the Bible. In addition, linguists have suggested that second language acquisition may function as a TC (Carson 2017). This may provide new approaches to teaching biblical Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek to first-time language students.

Classroom Implementation

Identifying TCs for the biblical studies classroom matters only insofar as they may be deployed in the classroom to enhance student learning. Fortunately, significant work has been done developing strategies to assist students in successfully navigating thresholds (for example, Land, Meyer, and Flanagan 2016). Threshold concepts may be integrated into the classroom at a variety of levels from a full curriculum restructuring to individual activities that assist students navigating a specifically troublesome TC. The following guidelines maintain an explicit focus on TCs and take into account variation in student learning. I address course design, presentation strategies, classroom activities, and assessment and provide practical examples from the biblical studies classroom.

Course design

At the level of course design, comprehension of TCs may be listed as intended learning outcomes in the course syllabus (Timmermans and Meyer 2017, 8). Developing a threshold capability often occasions other types of transformation related to ways of being or knowing. Therefore, additional learning outcomes may include, for example, "thinking like a biblical scholar." For courses structured around TCs, sufficient time should be allotted for students to navigate the threshold. Sally Male suggests separating TCs by at least one week and revisiting them throughout the course in order to give students time to navigate the liminal space of the threshold (2012, 37). Students can learn concepts that are not troubling outside of class in, for example, reading assignments or written responses. This focus on TCs at the course level represents a "less is more" approach that avoids the information overload that triggers surface approaches to learning (van Merrienboer, Kirschner, and Kester 2003).

I find Jason Davies's trifold approach (2016) of framing, struggle, and integration (for teaching TCs in ancient religion) easily transferable to biblical studies. He advocates a structured approach that, after introducing a TC (framing), provides students multiple opportunities to experiment with the new concept (struggle), before asking students to apply the TC in practice (integration). In the subsequent sections, I follow his structured approach and provide practical examples meant to help students navigate TCs in the biblical studies classroom.

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Presentation strategies

Teaching TCs differs by disciplinary context, course level, and student relation to the TC (Meyer and Land 2007). Therefore, there is no single approach to presenting material, designing classroom activities, and assessing student learning. However, some guidelines have been shown to be effective. For example, while presenting material, the teacher may model the mental operations for students. Middendorf and Shopkow (2017) suggest introducing a TC by using an analogy from outside the discipline to show students which "mental muscles" to activate (Davies's "framing" [2016]). For example, I introduce the TC that "everything is an argument" by analyzing Nike's Colin Kaepernick banner advertisement, an image that students immediately recognize and, as an advertisement, clearly makes an argument. This recent, well-known image consists of the text "Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything," superimposed on a close-up of Kaepernick's unsmiling face with the Nike swoosh and slogan "Just do it" running along the bottom (Kaepernik 2018). Alongside the advertisement I list three questions: (1) "What is the argument of this ad?" (2) "What did Nike hope to accomplish?" and (3) "Why did Nike run this ad?" After giving students time to discuss the questions with classmates, I walk through each, making my mental operations explicit by relating the components of the advertisement to its cultural and corporate setting. We begin addressing the first question by considering the relationship between the superimposed text and the former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick. We note that the first part ("Believe in something") alludes to Kaepernick's activism for racial justice and, most prominently, protesting police brutality and racial inequality by kneeling during the United States' national anthem. We then note that the second part ("Even if it means sacrificing everything") alludes to the widely held belief that Kaepernick was unable to find a job in the National Football League because of his protests. We then consider Kaepernick's direct, unsmiling gaze into the camera, suggesting that this expression was chosen to portray him as sincere rather than opportunistic or selfish, as argued by critics. Finally, we address what new resonances Nike's multivalent slogan "Just do it" takes on in this context, concluding that it is not just about motivation – such as going out for your first run – but also activism. The answers to the second and third questions quickly follow: students voluntarily note that Nike sought to position itself on one side of the United States' cultural and political wars and agree that Nike ran the ad campaign to boost merchandise sales, betting on the long-term payoff of racial justice.

The assignment for the following class period is to read the book of Ruth and write a one-page response to the same three questions, tailored to Ruth. Ruth is a useful discipline-specific example of the TC "everything is an argument" because it is short and has a number of good candidates for the writer's argument (another more complex example is Jonah). Most students discern an argument similar to "God looks out for the vulnerable." After discussing themes and scenes that support this type of narrative argument, I note that God only directly acts once in Ruth (4:13), and ask whether anyone found different arguments. We eventually agree that a defense of the Davidic line (noting the Davidic genealogy [4:17–22] and divinely-assisted birth [4:13]) and a defense of exogamy (noting Ruth's willing assimilation [1:16–17] and reception of all the people's blessing [4:11]) are other possible arguments. We conclude by noting that, unlike Nike's Colin Kaepernick advertisement, Ruth's unknown writer(s) and provenance make conclusions about authorial argument tentative, but it does not mean that the writer makes no argument.

Classroom activities

Classroom activities enable students to experiment with the new concept (Davies's "struggle" [2016]). They should be designed to take into account variation in the TC and in student learning, and to require students to make the mental operations explicit (Nicola-Richmond et al. 2018, 106). Online interactive tutorials may help account for variation in student learning by allowing students to navigate the threshold at their own pace (Khawaja et al. 2013). Making the mental operations observable enables immediate feedback that can guide students' continued practice (Timmermans and Meyer 2017, 11). Semi-structured activities such as debating, explaining, and sketching enable students to experience variation in the features of the concept, its manifestation in different contexts, and its application (Male 2012, 39–40).

In order for students to experience the effects of treating the biblical text as authoritative (TC 4), I find the following combination of activities useful over the course of three class periods. In a first class period, I project Matthew 5:17–20[9] and ask students to answer two questions on the classroom whiteboard: According to Matthew's Jesus, (1) "Why will the scribes and Pharisees not enter the kingdom?" and, (2) "What might the scribes and Pharisees do to gain kingdom en-

9 Matthew 5:17–20: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

trance?" By making all answers visible I can tailor discussion to responses as students compare their answers with those of their peers. In our discussion, we focus on those answers to the second question that represent some variation of "accept Christ" or "accept Christ's righteousness," an answer that seems self-evident to many. One volunteer then writes the logic of this proposed answer on the whiteboard in order to make the mental operations explicit. After asking students to point out where an alternative form of righteousness is noted in Matthew 5:17–20, I write Romans 3:21–22[10] alongside the student's logic, emphasizing the influence of (one understanding of) Paul in this reading of Matthew 5:17–20. We then note elements in the text that suggest another answer to this second question: scrupulous Torah observance. I characterize reading Matthew in light of Paul as reading "canonically" and trace the logic of how a canonical approach to reading may be seen as a natural implication of the authoritative status of the biblical texts.

As a follow-up example to illustrate how the authoritative status of the biblical texts manifests itself in different contexts, I ask students to consider the meaning of "freedom" in Galatians 5:1,[11] first without, and later with, the epistolary context. After having worked through one previous example (Matthew 5:17–20), students more readily see how "freedom from sin," although contextually inaccurate, may be a common misunderstanding of Galatians 5:1 and how the personal relevance of biblical texts may be an assumed implication of the authoritative status of the biblical texts for some readers. By illustrating another way that treating the biblical text as authoritative may manifest itself, this second example helps students avoid equating biblical authority with reading canonically and raises the question of what other ways this TC may manifest itself.

Before the following class period, students read the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (1978) in preparation for a class debate. Four students represent the signees and argue in favor of the premise that "Recognition of the total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture is essential to full grasp and adequate confession of its authority" (*Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*, 1978). Four other students argue against this premise, while still adopting the assumption of biblical authority for the sake of the debate. Students are encouraged to take a position they do not necessarily hold in order to focus learning on why or why not inaccuracies may seem permissible in authoritative texts. The students who are not part of the debate submit a two-page peer review response evaluating the quality of the arguments. This activity, while introducing another manifestation of the effects of biblical authority (inerrancy), forces students to focus on variation in this TC and the thought processes associated with moving from adherence to biblical authority to its implications. After the debate, we briefly address Origen's three senses of scripture as an alternative manifestation of the Bible's authority, noting how Origen positions the impossibilities and immoralities in the biblical text as necessary pointers to the deeper spiritual meaning (Ludlow 2013, 87–91).

In a final, third class period, we do two activities meant to allow students to apply their understanding of the effects of treating the Bible as authoritative (Davies's "integration" [2016]). First, I ask students to collaboratively sketch the historical scenarios that may have resulted in the two different explanations for the name Akeldama ("field of blood") in Matthew 27:3–8 (bought with blood money) and Acts 1:18–19 (Judas's blood spilt there) and address what effect treating the biblical text as authoritative may have on the choice of a preferred explanation. This activity links the interpretation of possible textual inaccuracy with the role of biblical authority in historical reconstruction. The final activity involves students in small groups comparing and contrasting the depiction of the centurion's reaction to Jesus's death in Matthew 27:50–54 and Mark 15:37–39. Students are asked to list significant differences between the two accounts and answer two questions: (1) "In what way do the differences allow or restrict different characterizations of the centurion's response?" and (2) "How might treating the biblical text as authoritative impact these interpretive options?" This order of operations requires students to practice moving from textual features to interpretive options – in Matthew the centurion is sincere, while in Mark he may be sarcastic (Eubank 2014, 267) – and then to consider the effects of biblical authority on their interpretive choices (for example, two different depictions of the centurion; a presumed first confession of gentile faith as, instead, mockingly sarcastic). These two final application activities revisit different manifestations of the effects of biblical authority from previous activities in order to provide repeated exposure to the TC and require students to demonstrate their ability to analyze the effects of treating the biblical text as authoritative as a contingent factor.

10 Romans 3:21–22: "But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe."

11 "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."

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Assessment

A wide variety of tools have been used to assess whether students have crossed a threshold (Nicola-Richmond et al. 2018, 107–108). Formative assessment should be dynamic and ongoing, providing the teacher repeated opportunities to evaluate student learning and provide immediate feedback. In addition, self- and peer-assessment have unique potential to increase student awareness of their own learning and their location to the TC (Meyer et al. 2016, 199–200). If class-size permits, I like making learning visible on white boards, discussions, and debates, as discussed in the examples of classroom activities.

In general, summative assessment should require students to demonstrate the mental operations required by the TC (Davies's "integration" [2016]), rather than simple information recall (Male 2012, 40). This may involve explaining or justifying an answer, or solving a new problem by the same mental operations practiced in class activities. For example, in a New Testament introductory course, I assign a final take-home assignment response to *When Christians Were Jews: The First Generation* (Fredriksen 2018). This final project allows me to assess students' grasp of the constructed nature of biblical understanding (TC 2). This short (182 reading pages, assigned over the last three weeks of class), accessible, and engaging reconstruction of Christian origins presents the earliest Christ-followers as a temple-centered Jewish movement awaiting the immanent restoration of the Davidic monarchy. As an account of Christian origins that contrasts with most students' preformed understanding and that clearly distinguishes historical evidence from reconstructed history, Fredriksen's book allows students to evaluate the plausibility of her reconstruction through reference to the book and historical sources, demonstrating their grasp of the constructed nature of biblical understanding and ability to perform the associated mental operations.

Conclusion

This paper introduces a preliminary list of five TCs for the discipline of biblical studies: (1) The biblical world as a foreign country; (2) the constructed nature of biblical understanding; (3) the concept that everything is an argument; (4) the relevance of the academic study of the Bible, and (5) the effects of treating the biblical text as authoritative. The identification of TCs in biblical studies enables teachers to emphasize potentially troublesome concepts that are essential for student progress and to aid students in navigating these thresholds by proven strategies developed in other disciplines and transferable to biblical studies. By engaging TCs in the disciplines of history and literature this preliminary set provides a theoretically informed basis for further investigation that awaits refinement through empirical data from teachers, students, and educational developers through a transactional curriculum inquiry.

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THE WABASH CENTER
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SPECIAL TOPIC

Teaching the Bible as a Threshold Concept in a Liberal Arts Context

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ABSTRACT

This short essay describes a teaching strategy that addresses a key threshold concept in introductory biblical studies courses – that the Bible itself is a construct. It is a companion essay to John Van Maaren's, "Transformative Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Toward a Threshold Concept Framework for Biblical Studies," also published in this issue of the journal.

KEYWORDS

Bible intro course, threshold concepts, constructed nature of the Bible, Diego Velázquez, Titus Kaphar, US Constitution

John Van Maaren describes threshold concepts as conceptual gateways through which students need to pass if they are to make further meaningful progress and optimize their subsequent learning within that discipline (2020). Threshold concepts are transformative, integrative, irreversible, and troublesome. A threshold concept in my undergraduate biblical studies classroom is that of the Bible itself as a construct.

Is the Bible a magic eight ball that addresses or advises a reader's personal and immediate concerns (such as which school to attend or whom to date), a timeless blueprint or set of rules that dictates how we should live, a documentary of history that provides factual information, a constitution for the church, or something else altogether? Students need to think about this, because how they read the Bible is tied to what they think the Bible is and is not.

I want students to learn that the Bible is a library of ancient books from different time periods, by various human authors, with multiple or even contradictory perspectives; that "the Bible" or the canon as they know it did not exist for early Christians for almost three centuries; that there is an evolution, elasticity, or even instability about this library because of the manuscript transmission and translation process; and that the Bible is complicit in erasing or dismissing the presence or contributions of some people. I want them to decenter the Bible as an absolute authority, but still value it as a resource with which they can think and reconsider (as we see various biblical writers did within this library of writings we call "the Bible").

I employ different strategies to help students understand the nature of the Bible, but let me share what I did in the last class session of my introductory course in the spring of 2019. I showed students Diego Velázquez's *Kitchen Maid with the Last Supper at Emmaus* (1618) and, without giving them the painter's or the painting's name, asked them if the painting reminded them of a biblical passage we had looked at before in class. Whether they could mention Luke 24:13-35 or not, I asked them to compare the "Road to Emmaus" passage with the painting, to bring out Luke's failure to acknowledge

that someone needed to prepare that supper for Jesus and the two disciples. Then I engaged them in a brief conversation about how the US Constitution is viewed by some as an ultimate authority — a secular or legal Bible, if you will — and showed them a one-minute video clip of two Supreme Court Justices espousing opposing views of this Constitution: Antonin Scalia insisting that we need to know and follow the original intentions of the Constitution's authors, and Ruth Bader Ginsburg arguing that the Constitution is an imperfect step in our continuous commitment to strive for a more perfect union. After listening briefly to students' opinions on which viewpoint they preferred and why, I showed students Titus Kaphar's Ted-Talk video, "Can Art Amend History?" (2017). In this twelve-minute video, Kaphar explains how his work — he paints well-known masterpieces with strategic revisions — aims not to erase the past but only to highlight or give focus to black people who had previously been ignored or minimized so we can better evaluate the impact or implications of representations, and how his attempt is comparable to making amendments to the US Constitution without expunging any parts of the Constitution. As Kaphar puts it in his talk, his art "wrestles with the struggles of our past, but speaks to the diversity and the advances of our present" (2017).

With these activities, we had a lively discussion and I felt at the end of the course that students had genuinely struggled with the Bible as a threshold concept regardless of whether they agreed with my views about the Bible. [1]

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Tat-siong Benny Liew is the author of *Politics of Parousia* (1999), and *What Is Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics?* (2008). He also edited the *Semeia* volume on "The Bible in Asian America" (with Gale Yee; 2002), *Postcolonial Interventions* (2009), *They Were All Together in One Place?* (with Randall Bailey and Fernando Segovia; 2009), *Reading Ideologies* (2011), *Psychoanalytical Mediations between Marxist and Postcolonial Readings of the Bible* (with Erin Runions; 2016), *Present and Future of Biblical Studies (2018), and Colonialism and the Bible: Contemporary Reflections from the Global South* (with Fernando Segovia; 2018). Liew is also the Executive Editor of Brill's *Biblical Interpretation* and the Series Editor of T&T Clark's *Study Guides to the New Testament.*

1 I am indebted to Sonja Anderson for the exercise with Velázquez, and to Laura Nasrallah for introducing me to Kaphar's work.

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THE WABASH CENTER
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SPECIAL TOPIC

Crossing the Threshold by Unlearning the "Truth" in Biblical Studies

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ABSTRACT

This short essay describes a teaching strategy that addresses two of the threshold concepts named by John Van Maaren in his essay "Transformative Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Toward a Threshold Concept Framework for Biblical Studies," also published in this issue of the journal.

KEYWORDS

Bible intro course, threshold concepts, constructed nature of biblical understanding, unlearning, historical Jesus

In response to John Van Maaren's insightful framework for threshold concepts in biblical studies (2020) – transformative, integrative, irreversible, and troublesome concepts which students must grasp in order to make further disciplinary learning possible – I will describe a strategy that addresses at least two: "the constructed nature of biblical understanding" and "everything is argument." The strategy focuses on students unlearning their uncritical assumptions about the veracity of biblical texts and thus crossing content thresholds.

The primary learning outcome in "New Testament Introduction" is comprehension of how historical, literary, and archaeological evidence can be used to understand and (re)construct the social development of religious groups in antiquity. The course begins with Paul, moves to the gospels, and only towards the last quarter of the semester turns to the historical Jesus. By this point, students have already encountered much to destabilize their notions of the reliability of the biblical narratives. They are thus in a liminal stage of having to rethink many of their presumptions and presuppositions.

In order to provoke this further, I begin my mini-lecture on the "Historical Jesus" by saying without preamble, "He was born into poverty in a small town, and although many people thought of him as the king, others saw him as a corrupting element of society." The use of the opening personal pronoun with no antecedent is key. I go on to briefly note that he was accused of being a "glutton and a drunkard" and ended up being betrayed by those closest to him. He died an ignoble death, yet post-mortem appearances were reported, leading eventually to veneration, icons, shrines, and liturgies. I conclude by saying, "Today we can still hear on the radio songs he sang while he was among us." Surveying their looks of puzzlement, I finally tell students that I have been talking about Elvis. Who did they *think* I was talking about?

We then unpack the claims and evidence used and learn what we can from the "Elvis cult" as a social phenomenon. One key point is that Elvis died in 1977, currently forty-two years ago. In comparison, there is a thirty-seven year gap between the generally accepted date of Jesus' death around 33 C.E. and the writing of Mark's gospel around 70 C.E. We then

ponder what this indicates for the "accuracy" of stories about Jesus, given students' own knowledge of and generational distance from the life of Elvis. The conversation raises issues of memory, story, historiography, and hermeneutics – things that have been considered in previous classes but which seem to land more concretely in this moment.

The cognitive disruption caused by the Elvis discussion is a strategy that forms part of the unlearning of theological or cultural assumptions about the "truth" of the Jesus stories. More broadly, unlearning is a key part of student engagement in religious studies. The unlearning disrupts pre-course assumptions and allows students to engage with biblical texts as historical sources within the discipline of religious studies.

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THE WABASH CENTER
JOURNAL ON TEACHING

SPECIAL TOPIC

All Interpretations Are Subjective

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ABSTRACT

This short essay describes a teaching strategy that addresses a key threshold concept in undergraduate biblical studies courses – how an interpreter's location within a particular tradition influences that interpreter's understanding of biblical texts about gender, sex, and sexuality. It is a companion essay to John Van Maaren's "Transformative Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Toward a Threshold Concept Framework for Biblical Studies," also published in this issue of the journal.

KEYWORDS

biblical studies, threshold concepts, feminist hermeneutics, biblical interpretation

John Van Maaren describes threshold concepts as gateways that students must pass through for further learning in a discipline (2019). In my upper-level course "Gender and Biblical Interpretation," I want students to learn how an interpreter's location within a particular tradition influences that interpreter's understanding of biblical texts about gender, sex, and sexuality. I therefore draw the course's main threshold concept from Mary Ann Tolbert's article "Defining the Problem: The Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics." Tolbert writes, "*All* interpretations are subjective, that is, all readings are influenced by the vested interests and concerns of the interpreter" (Tolbert 1983, 118; emphasis original).

Early in the course, I invite students to cross this threshold by assigning excerpts from her article. In class, I ask them to write (but not to share) a brief paragraph of a personal experience that made them think, "I don't belong here." They might reflect on being a Methodist in a Catholic high school or being Black in a historically white college. I then point out that such experiences highlight how we see the world differently from people who do "belong." The implication is clear: women (especially feminists) and men interpret the Bible differently, as do Jews and Christians, Protestants and Catholics, liberals and conservatives.

As the course progresses, we take care to define the traditions and social locations that influence each interpreter we encounter. Students discuss such questions as, "In what sense can Mary Ann Tolbert claim that the Bible is God's eternal Word?" "Most feminist scholars are highly-educated white women. To what extent can they speak for all women?" "Contrast Conservative Rabbi Howard Handler's conclusions about the *halakha* of homosexual relationships with those of Orthodox Rabbi Nachum Amsel. How would you describe Amsel's hermeneutic? How would you describe Handler's approach?" "Compare the interpretations of Charles Ryrie and Jane Schaberg concerning Mary and motherhood with those of Pope Paul VI." For the last question of the final exam, students explain their agreement or disagreement with Tolbert's statement that "all interpretations are subjective" (1983, 118) and describe what their standpoint implies about the objective truth of the Bible.

Sociologists Christian Smith and Patricia Snell write that "most emerging adults in the United States today" agree that "everybody's different" and "*all* cultures are relative" (Smith and Snell 2009, 48–51). I have found this to be true for my students. Since most have already crossed this threshold with regard to their personal beliefs, it is easy for them to cross it with regard to biblical interpretation. It is more challenging for them to see that, in doing so, they have entered a world in which John Van Maaren and Mary Ann Tolbert can say, "Everything is an argument," and, "All hermeneutical perspectives are advocacy positions" (Van Maaren 2020, 61–78; Tolbert 1983, 118). The next time I teach "Gender and Biblical Interpretation," I will try some new strategies for opening students' eyes.

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THE WABASH CENTER
JOURNAL ON TEACHING

FORUM

Introduction: The Teaching Legacy of Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon

Kwok Pui Lan
Associate Editor

ABSTRACT

This Forum publishes five short essays by former students of Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon, reflecting on how their mentor influenced their development as teachers and educators.

When Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon died on August 8, 2018, we lost not only a preeminent womanist thinker and ethicist, but also an influential and inspiring theological educator and teacher. She was the Annie Scales Rogers Professor of Christian Social Ethics at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, and before that she taught at Temple University and other schools. As a well-respected and beloved teacher, her pedagogy has touched the lives of many of her students. To honor Dr. Cannon's teaching legacy, this journal invited several of her former students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds – Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, Karen K. Seat, Miguel A. De La Torre, Angela D. Sims, and Edwin David Aponte – to share their experiences of studying with her. We asked them to reflect on Dr. Cannon's contributions to womanist pedagogy and provide examples of how she modeled this inside and outside of the classroom. We also invited them to comment on the ways Dr. Cannon's womanist pedagogy has affected their development as teachers and educators.

Dr. Cannon was the author or editor of many articles and seven books, including the groundbreaking volume *Black Womanist Ethics* (1988) and *Teaching Preaching: Isaac Rufus Clark* and *Black Sacred Rhetoric* (2002). Throughout her teaching career, she stressed the need to dismantle white supremacy and combat ignorance about the experience and struggles of black women. She pointed to the importance of creating womanist pedagogical styles and urged "African American women [to] design new modes of rigorous inquiry to teaching critical consciousness in our various disciplines" (Cannon 1993, 29). She wrote articles sharing her teaching philosophy, classroom practices, and vision for theological education in the twenty-first century (Cannon 2003, 2011, 2014).

As a transformative teacher devoted to her students, Dr. Cannon received prestigious awards in recognition of her teaching. She received the 2011 Award for Excellence in Teaching given by the American Academy of Religion and the Award for Excellence in Theological Education, the highest award from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for those who teach, lead, and support theological education, in honor of her outstanding lifetime contribution.

In her teaching statement for the teaching award from the American Academy of Religion, Dr. Cannon wrote, "As a Christian womanist liberation theological ethicist embodied, mediated knowledge is a fundamental component of my pedagogy. I bring my biotext and students bring their existential stories, rooted in remembering, to the common, centering point in each course of study" (2010). Many faculties have looked to Dr. Cannon for insights in developing their teaching strategies. She was very generous with her time in mentoring the next generation. One of her last publications was on womanist mentoring: she discussed the politics of being a black woman in the classroom, the need to challenge racism and androcentric patriarchy,

and ways to demystify white knowledge production and academic ethos so that African American women could survive and thrive (2018).

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THE WABASH CENTER
JOURNAL ON TEACHING

FORUM

Teaching the Canon and Cannon Formation as Incarnation and Conjure: Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon as Womanist Mentor and Muse

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ABSTRACT

Written by her first doctoral student, this essay is a tribute to the legacy and lessons of Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon (1950-2018), the progenitor of womanist ethics. The author embraces Cannon's signature womanist embodied pedagogy, which takes embodiment as a Black woman seriously and serves as a paradigm for those who purposefully and poignantly live intersecting roles of race, gender, and class. Through both a personal account of the grief experienced by the passing of her mentor and a critical reflection on lessons learned by Cannon's legacy, the author exposes the daunting challenges faced by womanist scholars as they navigate the front line of the classroom and the frequently death-dealing and dismissive terrain of higher education. See companion contributions to this Forum written by Edwin David Aponte, Miguel A. De La Torre, Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, Karen K. Seat, and Angela D. Sims.

KEYWORDS

embodied pedagogy, womanism, intersectionality, critical pedagogy, teaching race and gender

I am proud to say that I knew Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon for well over twenty-five years. As the first doctoral student enrolled to study with her at Temple University's graduate department of religion, I was determined and thrilled to have the opportunity and good fortune to work with Dr. Cannon, whose work and research as a Christian Social Womanist ethicist had provided me a sense of refuge, rigor, and reassurance that one could do ethics – "by hitting a straight lick with a crooked stick" (Cannon 1987), to invoke her womanist definition of thinking while Black and female – without inhabiting the body of one of the "canonical boys." I was legitimately awed by her presence as a Black woman who took seriously and unapologetically both her confession as a Christian and profession as an ethicist. Moreover, I knew without a second thought that I had to study under her tutelage and guidance as a doctoral student. But when I experienced her for the first time in the classroom, her words became flesh and I was blown away.

The first and foremost lesson that Dr. Cannon taught me was, in her words, "to teach, read, and write, even when the lights are out." For her, there could be no losing sight of my life's goal by compromising my integrity in any fashion. As a graduate student who aspired one day to be a professor, my goal was to achieve academic excellence, and she set an incredibly high standard. Whenever I felt overwhelmed and drained by what she demanded of me as her student, she would look at me with compassion and authority simultaneously and then say to me "Stacey, you have to remember who you are and what you're here for. You have to continue to read and write, even when the lights are out." Early in my career, I understood Dr. Cannon's

indoctrination regarding academic excellence in a more limited way simply to mean putting studies before socializing. But, as the Pauline injunction warns us, "we gaze through a glass darkly." Having lived a little bit longer and having seen a lot more in academia, what I now think she was trying to impart to me was that this calling to the "life of the mind" was supposed to be my paramount concern, over and against any external force. It was by excellence, she stated, that I ultimately would be regarded, judged, and evaluated, rather than by any grace or mercy extended by kinfolk or "skin-folk" by virtue of my color, gender, or pedigree.

What many people who have only known her as scholar and colleague might be surprised to know is that it was clear that her first priority was the classroom. Dr. Cannon was rigorous and tough when dealing with students, holding them accountable and responsible in their own intellectual growth and development. Furthermore, her love of the interdisciplinary field of African American thought and womanism, alongside her brilliance as a Christian social ethicist, was so compelling and contagious that her students were left wanting more and more of her instruction and scholarly guidance, which blended meticulous attention to detail with patient mentoring in ways that brought out the best in her students.

Furthermore, Dr. Cannon's teaching was also marked by a continuous quest for more effective methods of instruction and more compelling modes of presenting information. Drawing from family lessons, women's literary narratives, social history, and critical theory in a manner that was equally innovative and inspiring, Dr. Cannon's pedagogy emphasized a deep concern with seeing every moment of interaction as potentially transformative. It was through her sensitivity to both the formal and informal moments of learning that she was able to develop a rich synergy between academic rigor, cultural sensitivity, and character building in ways that clearly benefited her students while also encouraging her colleagues to want to be better teachers.

During my time at Temple, I worked on research projects with her guidance, enrolled in every course she taught at the graduate level, served as her teaching assistant, and discussed pedagogy with her on numerous occasions. In light of this, I can say with full confidence that Dr. Cannon truly exemplified excellence in teaching. On both a philosophical as well as a practical level, her teaching represented a delicate balance between conscientization (as she said, "unmasking, debunking, and disentangling the myths that create death-dealing realities for the least of these") and patient guidance (helping her students realize that "doing the work their soul must have" is a labor to which we must attend "morning by morning and day by day"). Ever mindful of this, Dr. Cannon masterfully utilized literature, case studies, historiographies, and self-inventories of her students in order to address various ways of learning and to provide students with rich resources. Dr. Cannon's work entails an impressive blend of traditional and classic concerns in ethics as well as more contemporary developments in womanist thought. In addition to sophisticated methodological and theoretical considerations, careful planning and meticulous preparation formed the core of Dr. Cannon's teaching, a fact that was quite evident even from a mere glance at her syllabi.

Her commitment to pedagogical concerns – in the form of what she called "high-impact moral ethics" taught using a "pedagogy of possibility" – was further expressed not only by the numerous courses she developed over more than two decades but also by the institutions across the nation that clamored to have her as a visiting professor, guest lecturer, and scholar-in-residence. For most scholars, the teaching moment ends as soon as class is over. However, Dr. Cannon continued the teaching/learning process long after class time had ended, and, indeed in many cases, after the degree had been received. To this point, most of her graduate students were well-equipped and motivated, inspired and prepared for creative approaches to career and ethical living through the fostering of productive relationships in more general terms. In short, Dr. Cannon had a unique ability to urge "embodied greatness" in her students and push them to maximize their potential. Her students gladly accepted this nurturing motivation.

Discovering the power and necessity of embodied pedagogy is the outcome of a teaching career in which I have continued to be challenged by ideas and practices that transform the teaching-learning process. Writings such as Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2018), bell hooks's *Teaching to Transgress* (2017), Carter G. Woodson's *Mis-Education of the Negro* (2008), Katie Cannon's *Teaching Preaching* (2007), Charles Foster's *Educating Clergy* (2006), and the anthologies *Being Black, Teaching Black* (Westfield 2008) and Gutiérrez y Muhs et al.'s *Presumed Incompetent* (2012), have become scriptural for my sacred practice of teaching. In fact, their research and testimony have caused me to publish and share my own insights about teaching that transforms society at large.

In my own quest for knowledge and classroom competency, I have also learned that, as a Black woman, I must negotiate the contested space of the classroom, because my very presence causes dissonance in what is largely considered an elitist, Eurocentric, and middle-aged space. My ability to overcome the teaching challenges encountered in such a context has been

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aided by those who have designed, implemented, and experienced the power of transformative pedagogy in their own ways and experiences.

I'll share here the perennial challenge and continuous confrontation that Dr. Cannon faced and most Black women academics still weather in the classroom and academy writ large; namely, "What shall I call you?" Without question, this is the most asked query to a Black female professor by her predominately white students, whether they are enrolled in undergraduate, seminary, or graduate courses. Dr. Cannon would always respond, "call me by the same title you call any white man to whom you confer scholarly/religious authority: "Dr.," "Professor," why you can even call me "Bishop!" Invariably, they would sheepishly laugh as if to wonder "Why does she have a chip on her shoulder?" But always, without fail, they would let "Katie" roll off their tongue and slip out of their mouths.

They missed the lesson of respectability politics in post-Jim and Jane Crow America, wherein *all* people should be afforded the same respect in naming and reference as white people, despite the deferential ways in which "Mister" was treated as "Master." The hierarchy of race, then and often now, regarded Blacks only as valuable in as much as they could be seen as property on the one hand, or human in as much as they could be deemed in an obligatory or infantilized way, on the other. Therefore, Black women were familiarly treasured as "Mammie" or "Auntie" by those whites for or to whom they nursed, coddled, cooked, served, and provided greater care to than their own family. Or they were called out as "girl" or "gal," undeserving of anything else because they had no name or significance by which to be considered more than a minor entity. Under no circumstances would a Black woman signify a title reflecting her authority and autonomy. To call a Black woman respectfully by her station in life, "Miss," "Mrs.," "Ma'am," "Ms." was unheard of, but to call her by a title denoting authority and autonomy like, "Dr.," "Professor," or "Reverend," well that was completely unfathomable. Such was and still is the implicit bias and implausible reality of most of my colleagues. This practice of addressing Black women by disrespectful or inferior nomenclature reduces the Black people to non-persons. Black women are continuously traumatized and violated by the microagressions of *misogynoir* by being called out of their named authority much like their grandmothers and mothers who were always insulted by those infants and infidels who sought to "put them in their place" of service and submission to them. Just as I often answer my office door to a newly admitted and naïve student requesting to see "Dr. Floyd-Thomas" and observe their shock when I respond, "Yes, how may I help you," their shock may ignite a sharper sting to so many of my Black female colleagues.

Caught within what Dr. Cannon called a "superwoman-villain dichotomy," Black female professors are forced into ill-fitted and ill-named boxes that serve as either a means to professional suicide or real-life coffins. When a Black female professor refuses to assume stereotypical social roles and insists on being taken seriously as doctor, professor, scholar, author, and colleague, by focusing explicitly on the formal tasks of her job and remaining rigid in her avoidance of personal involvement by isolating herself and making herself unavailable for informal contacts, she's deemed and labeled a "villain," carrying the image of a cold, inflexible authority and "Bad Earth Mother." Her lot is to deal repeatedly with student covert and overt fear and rage, as she becomes deluged with petty, unceasing requests for clarification by students who find the simplest tasks on her syllabi too difficult to understand and her teaching style far too cold. When she's not besieged with hostile challenges in and out of the classroom from the students, she is spending the remainder of her time defending her authority, autonomy, and academic freedom in the dean's or president's office.

Or, as Dr. Cannon tells us, we can go the other route and become superwomen – veritable carbon copies of the maids depicted in the film *The Help* (2011), subjected to numerous entitled students turning our classes into virtual talk shows wherein they are captivated on their virtual couches in our classrooms claimed as their livings and they believe that regaling us as their most regaled postmodern nanny/mammie in Oprah Winfrey instead of their professor. And in so doing, they lay claim to our Black bodies instead of embodied pedagogy to be the surrogate for their every need, to comfort the weary and oppressed, to intercede on behalf of those who feel abused, to champion the cause for every student at our own expense, to compensate for the deficits of the inability or unwillingness of other colleagues to teach, to speak up for those who are unwilling or unable to speak for themselves, and to make demands on their behalf, to do more than our share of work to make up for students and colleagues who refuse to complete their assigned task or teach any lesson. In effect, we are expected to become Mother Confessors to all and to counsel and advise students on matters unrelated to the tasks at hand, always willing to use our bodies and lives to protect the seemingly innocent and dampen the aggression of others.

Dr. Cannon resorted to including a statement in her syllabi on the first day of class – objectively stated, subjectively solicited, and with a touch of internalized indignation – proclaiming that, "We will address our colleagues in our classroom by name in recognition of their humanity and individuality. We will refer to our professor by her appropriate title in recognition of her

training and position." I, too, now include this in my "Terms of Engagement" in my syllabus, but somehow it still eludes the desperate need of many students to make us other than what we are in our *real* and *right* relationship to them.

Dr. Cannon made her final transition a few days before my fall semester classes started. Stunned, shaken, and still in shock, I can remember every second that passed on the first day of my "Liberation Ethics" class when a student, like clockwork, asked me, "What would you like me to call you?" Hearing this refrain anew while in the midst of my grief, I heard Dr. Cannon clearly remind me as she did in every class, "The time we have now we shall soon have no more… [so] carpe diem!" Hearing her voice, mourning the loss of her life but also being emboldened by her plight to be her embodied *theos* in the classroom, I channeled her lessons infused with the gall of my grief and said:

> I am an African American Christian woman. As such, I believe I have received a double portion of sacrality in my religious formation. That is to say, African Traditional Religion and Black Baptist sensibilities are inculcated in my very being. Thus, I take conjure, *nommo*, and naming seriously. The word indeed becomes flesh. So, call me by the name of the persona you would like to invoke and engage you. "Dr. Floyd-Thomas" teaches, advises, tutors, writes letters of recommendation, advocates on your behalf to the various constituencies from whom you seek graduation, ordination, adjudication, promotion, and certification. "Stacey" is the indulged youngest sibling of four, pampered wife, and celebrated friend. "Ma'am" is the person who is being helped, catered to, and assisted by a minor. And as for any other stereotypical expletive with which Blacks and women have often been referred, well, only your worst nightmare can articulate what she might do to you. So, in that I believe in the power of conjure and incarnation, I am confident that what you call me will summon the very embodiment which you call out of me.

Since outlining this taxonomy, I have *never* encountered such a slip of tongue from my students again. In fact, "Dr. Floyd-Thomas" often peppered the sentences that came from their mouths, as a way to insure that only the professor was present, and no other iteration that I previously introduced to them.

Channeling the grief of my loss of Dr. Cannon was the ethical context that provided me the agency to do what she always did well: challenging and integrating pedagogical approaches that take my embodiment as a Black woman seriously despite the fact that it creates both cognitive dissonance and even cultural shock for most of my students. Instead of shying away from this reality, I use this conflict and dissonance in my teaching by chipping away at the external façade of many of my students' identities and their expectations of the teaching-learning process. I have found the pedagogical creation of uneasiness and tension with the status quo to be a vital component for the resolution of ethical conflict, and ultimately the realization of social justice. That is, to create conflict is to invite and bring about change, and it is only through change that unjust conditions can be transformed to positive life options.

Dr. Cannon was an outstanding scholar and a prime exemplar of excellence in teaching. To be her student was to have before you the most superlative caliber of teaching that at once engaged the *ethos, pathos, logos,* and *theos* of meeting people where they are in order to take them to the best versions of their possibilities. Quite frankly, the more I engaged my womanist muse through her writing, the more I felt my dream of becoming a womanist ethicist was more attainable, partly because Dr. Katie Cannon wrote a new definition for my reality. Even now, while I am still in utter despair and disbelief of her death, she became larger than life and met me in the teaching-learning moment to redeem time, space, and subjectivity for her, for me, and for the others who are yet to come.

It never crossed my mind or my mouth to refer to her as anything other than "Dr." and "Professor" because that was her role and authority in my life. And, after I received my doctorate, she referred to me unceasingly as "Dr. Stacey." What an honor and a womanist act of redemption and reciprocity. Indeed, her great light still shines and the lessons that I learned from her have committed me to daily practices of reading, writing, and teaching in a womanist fashion. What I have been able to accomplish has been done in memory and honor of this wondrous woman and powerful pedagogue whose very surname represents the canon she brought to life for me and the Cannon formation that blew my mind all those years ago and which I carry as my academic arsenal in the front lines of teaching while being an embodied and visionary womanist social ethicist, morning by morning, day by day, and even when the lights are out.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Creating Our Better Selves: The Fruits of Katie Cannon's Womanist Pedagogy

Karen K. Seat
The University of Arizona

ABSTRACT

Katie Geneva Cannon equipped generations of students with analytical tools to reckon with the past and present and to creatively construct previously unimaginable futures. Her body of work teaches us to find new paths as we critically plumb our own historically situated epistemologies and put them in conversation with a variety of traditions. As my teacher, dissertation advisor, and mentor during my graduate studies in religion at Temple University from 1993-2000, Dr. Cannon taught me to examine rigorously my own story in its larger historical and geopolitical contexts, to parse the privileges and perils of pursuing the academic study of religion as a white woman, and to engage deeply with multitudinous ways of knowing. See companion contributions to this Forum written by Edwin David Aponte, Miguel A. De La Torre, Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, and Angela D. Sims.

KEYWORDS

Katie Cannon, pedagogy, womanism, womanist

> I want to discuss how institutionalized domination in the past bears on the present, so that women of color in contemporary classrooms, and all who cast their lot with us, can move from what is to what can be.... [I]n this globalized age of multiculturalism, we already know by way of successful experiences that a generation of students has benefited from pluralistic and participatory education.
>
> — Katie G. Cannon (2016, 115, 119)

Katie Geneva Cannon's life and legacy stand as a call to grapple with the injustices of the past and present while creatively constructing previously unimaginable futures. Her body of work teaches us to find new paths as we critically plumb our own historically situated epistemologies and put them in conversation with a variety of traditions. As a mentor to generations of scholars situated both inside and outside the womanist movement, she reminded us to "stay mindful that there is no unitary essence of human being-ness" (2018, 131). Dr. Cannon's womanist pedagogy helps us to attend to the particularities of our own stories, so that we can better comprehend innumerable sources of wisdom, as well as sites of oppression to which we may have been blinded – and to which we may have contributed – that begin to emerge for us more clearly when we do not universalize our own perspectives and assumptions.

Dr. Cannon was my teacher, dissertation advisor, and mentor during my graduate studies in religion at Temple University from 1993-2000. Starting a PhD program in Philadelphia at age twenty-three, after growing up in Japan as the child of Southern

Baptist missionaries and then graduating from a Baptist-affiliated college in Missouri, I learned from Dr. Cannon to examine rigorously my own story in its larger historical and geopolitical contexts, to parse the privileges and perils of pursuing the academic study of religion as a white woman, and to engage deeply with the multitudinous ways of knowing different from my own. Participating in Dr. Cannon's graduate courses as a student, and in her undergraduate classrooms as one of her teaching assistants, I was steeped in the groundbreaking pedagogy of this premier womanist scholar and educator. I was fortunate to be one of the many students whose life was transformed by this extraordinary teacher, who knew how to equip us with tools for the critical, intersectional analysis needed to reckon with the past and present and to pursue "what can be."

Katie Cannon's womanist pedagogy is invaluable for any educator committed to empowering students to become "self-conscious and deliberate learners" (2014, 325). Although I am not a theologian or a womanist myself, my more than twenty years of teaching religious studies to university students has been informed by Dr. Cannon's womanist pedagogy. I continue to be inspired by the profound respect she had for each and every student. She actively demonstrated this in the classroom and beyond, coaching students through face-to-face and written interactions to examine their own points of resonance and dissonance with course materials. Her dedication to her students was unparalleled; her approach to teaching involved hours of "reading students' papers the way letters are read, to learn more, especially more about the person," while "conducting a running dialogue in the margins of each paper, informing students of supplemental readings and challenging them to find their ethical voice" (2014, 325). She transformed the classroom into what today we might call a "safe space," but what she would more profoundly and accurately describe as a "nonalienating experience," carefully "designed to facilitate students in teaching themselves what they need to know" – including the courageous pursuit of knowledge that can be disorienting and even frightening at times (2014, 326, 323).

Dr. Cannon's womanist pedagogy has shaped my goals as an educator, as I seek to facilitate students' abilities to historically contextualize all knowledge, and to critically examine the power dynamics at play when placing religion in its historical and political contexts. Students become invested in this process through historically situating their own heritages. One of Dr. Cannon's assignments that I use to this day is the Socio-Religious Autobiography, in which students write an essay unpacking their own religious/ethnic/cultural histories while exploring how these heritages are connected to larger historical dynamics. As I tell my students, to read the socio-religious autobiographies submitted in a large course at a public university is to learn with each essay ever more about the human experience around the globe. Each person in the classroom is a part of the human story we are examining through the academic study of religions across geography and time.

In Dr. Cannon's womanist pedagogy, assignments are simultaneously personally meaningful and academically rigorous. In addition to learning critical thinking tools through the elaboration of their own personal narratives, students are challenged to investigate historical documents, literature, sacred texts, and various media assigned throughout the course to determine "whose experience is validated, what groups are left out, what ideology accompanies the analysis, and what is the framework that provides meaning and holds conflicting elements together" (2014, 325). Students come to understand not only that the personal is the political and the historical, but that all matters involving human beings are embedded in powerful webs of meaning, thick with tensions.

Dr. Cannon's womanist praxis was focused and expansive. She gave priority to African American women, "placing Black women's experiences, perspectives, and realities at the center of the discourse, rather than at the margins" (2018, 120). Those who, as she put it, "cast their lot with us," learned to take inventory of their own positionality when engaging with womanism, by "actively seeking and naming the cognitive dissonance they experience in their belief systems, lifestyles, and behavior" (2014, 325). In doing so, we continually create our better selves.

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Personalizing Katie's Canon

Miguel A. De La Torre
Iliff School of Theology

ABSTRACT

Dr. Katie Canon not only touched the lives of her students with what she taught in the classroom, but by how she lived her life. She modeled the type of scholar students of color should strive to become. See companion contributions to this Forum written by Edwin David Aponte, Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, Karen K. Seat, and Angela D. Sims.

KEYWORDS

narrative ethics, Storytelling, Raising consciousness, Ancestors, Mulatto, Socratic questioning

On a balmy fall Philadelphia morning I entered the Anderson Building at the campus of Temple University to start my first day of classes as a doctoral student. I rode the rickety elevator to the sixth floor to begin a new chapter in my life. I was running late so I entered a classroom already filled with fellow students. I noticed one remaining seat next to a particular African American which I quickly occupied. Besides being my first day of doctoral studies, it was the day I made a friend at Temple: the student sitting next to me was Stacey Floyd-Thomas. This was a day of firsts, for it was also the first time I sat in a classroom taught by a person of color. Throughout high school, an undergraduate degree, a master's in administration, and a master of divinity – decades of formal education – this was the first time I ever sat at the feet of a scholar of color.

Dr. Cannon soon became more than simply a brilliant ethics professor upon whose shoulders my own work has stood; she became a mentor who patiently taught me through her actions, more than her words, the responsibility I held for occupying a marginalized Latino body within the academy. I was willing to learn from her because she took the time to get to know me and my story. Over many meetings discussing the institutionalized ethnic discrimination I faced, she earned the right to teach and challenge me. She was instrumental in raising my consciousness of how, in spite of the biases I faced, there existed those who resided on my own margins – specifically women of color. She taught me by challenging me, holding me accountable, questioning my own complicity with racism and sexism. What I learned from Dr. Cannon can be summed up in the three vignettes which follow. I recount these stories in honor of her pedagogy of storytelling which raises the voices of those usually unheard.

Dr. Cannon taught me to boldly proclaim truth by her example. While at Temple I took a class in the department of Latin American Studies. The professor, a white man from Britain, explained how those countries colonized by the English, like India, developed healthy democracies while those settled by the Spaniards leaned more toward authoritarian forms of government. Needless to say, as the only person with Latinx origins, I challenged his assertions. One day after class he pulled me aside and requested that I speak less during his lectures because I was disrupting the class. Dejected, I sat down with Dr. Cannon to seek her council. Dr. Cannon's pedagogy incorporated accountability to one's community to propel the timid toward praxis. If I remain silent when I'm able to speak, she told me, all my ancestors will rise up and accuse me of cowardliness. Talk about linking the past with the present to create a new future. Through her own stories of her ancestors, Dr. Cannon taught me that

I had a responsibility to stand and speak on the side of justice, regardless of the cost. Too many before me sacrificed greatly so I could pursue a doctoral degree; I had a responsibility to those who came before me. I confidently returned to the class and continued to agitate and disrupt attempts to normalize and legitimize structures responsible for so much of the world's oppression. I received the lowest grade of my graduate studies for that class, but who cares? for I found my voice through Dr. Cannon's example.

Dr. Cannon taught me of my own complicity with racism and sexism by becoming vulnerable and holding me to task. Decades occupying a Latino body has made me familiar with oppression. On both my body and psyche I carry the scars of not belonging, the stigmata of falling short of the white ideal. Surely being among the oppressed meant I could not be among the privileged – or so I thought, in clearly dichotomous terms. Early in my academic development I came to Dr. Cannon sharing my commitment to Mulato Christianity, a popular way of thinking among Latinx religious scholars during the 1990s, especially those – like myself – who hailed from the Caribbean. At the time, the term "mulato," which connoted the African and Spaniard racial composition common throughout the islands, was intended to be a counterpart to Mestizo Christianity which focused on an Indigenous and Spaniard hybridity. Dr. Cannon insisted that I explain to her how a term like "mulatto," used negatively in her culture, could be celebrated by light-skinned scholars from my culture. The more I tried to explain how it was not racist, the more I was convinced it was. Through Socratic questioning which forced me to defend undefendable propositions, I discovered I need to be more critical of what I embrace. More than teaching me womanist thought, Dr. Cannon, with great intellectual dexterity, made me aware of how both my gender and light pigmentation make me complicit with racism and sexism because I appear to be closer to the white male ideal than others.

Dr. Cannon taught me that not all Latinx are my allies. After having my consciousness raised concerning my embracing of a mulatez theology, I began to seriously research the etymology of the word. I incorporated the rejection of Mulato Christianity as part of my dissertation. I argued that the only ones using Mulato Christianity as a way of self-identifying were light-skinned religious scholars who were mainly Cuban. No one on the streets of Miami would ever self-identify as mulato, insisting there was nothing "black" in their genealogy. Unfortunately, when I sought a scholarship from the very first Hispanic granting committee in religious studies, the majority of my fellow white Cubans deciding who obtained graduate financial support were scandalized by my proposal. One particular Latina scholar insisted I was simply wrong and that the term was not racist. I was denied funding.

Rejected by my own community, I contemplated dropping out of the PhD program. Once again, Dr. Cannon used personal stories of her own negative experiences within her own community to provide comfort and support, teaching me the responsibility that scholars of color have to their students of color. She shared how when she began developing the concept of womanist ethics, she too stood before a committee of fellow Black religion scholars who were scandalized she had the audacity to supposedly speak for all Black women. Regardless of her insistence that she was speaking for herself, suspecting other black women might resonate with her thoughts, the committee still rejected her. With a chuckle she confided that some of her strongest detractors then were now vocal in their admiration of her work. With a wink she prophesied the same would one day be true for me. And it came to pass, as those who once dismissed me have written chapters for books I have edited.

Dr. Cannon was first and foremost an intellectual mentor. Sharing her academic rigor in the classroom was pedagogically sufficient. Any perusal of my writing clearly reveals her womanist fingerprints (and those of her students) on my works. But she did not stop there. I am the scholar I am today in part because of how she taught outside the classroom. Listening to my story, becoming vulnerable, holding me accountable, challenging my privilege, and sharing personal stories were pedagogical tools she used which I now attempt to imitate.

Over twenty years have passed since I had the honor and privilege to sit in her classes. Today, I stand before the next generation of students interested in ethical studies. Her impact on my formation as a scholar is manifested in my current pedagogy. Like her, I realize I cannot with integrity raise the consciousness of my students if I don't take the time to hear their stories. For this reason, I constantly strive to hear the stories of my doctoral students, committing to stand in solidarity with them both within and beyond the academy. When I teach, I become totally vulnerable, sharing the failures and successes of the personal, quick to articulate where I have fallen short of my own rhetoric and remained complicit with oppressive structures I rile against. By example, this vulnerability creates a safe space where students are given permission to also be vulnerable. Hence our class conversation moves from the positioning of oneself in the academic discourse to intimately wrestling with uncomfortable topics. And finally, I have adopted her Socratic methodology of questioning those who hold undefendable positions (as I did with Mulato Christianity). Many of my students, through the implementation of this methodology, have experienced major paradigm shifts.

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Dr. Cannon's passing is a tremendous loss to me personally, and more generally, to the struggle for justice. As I sat during the Denver AAR session, listening to others honor her life, I was moved by how packed the room was, filled with those whose lives were impacted for the better by her presence and/or by her written words. I consider myself blessed to have experienced both. Although her death was untimely, too soon with much left to be accomplished, nevertheless, she died a death most academics can only dream of – influencing not only the lives of many, but the lives of generations yet to come. Doña Katie, always *¡presente!*

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Since obtaining his doctorate in 1999, Dr. Miguel A. De La Torre authored over a hundred articles and published thirty-five books (five of which won national awards). He is Professor of Social Ethics and Latinx Studies at the Iliff School of Theology, a scholar-activist, and a Fulbright scholar.

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Deep Breaths and High Impact Aerobics: Reflecting on Teaching Writing in the Key of Katie Geneva Cannon

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ABSTRACT

This tribute by a former doctoral student of Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon reflects on her mentor's pedagogical strategies and techniques and how they have impacted her own teaching, as well as her approach to research and writing. The short essay describes several of Dr. Cannon's assignments, including the Personal Ethical Inventory and the Socio-Religious Autobiography, and expresses her gratitude and indebtedness in prioritizing experiences and contributions of Blacks as an essential aspect of graduate theological education.

KEYWORDS

cultivation of intellect, womanist ethics, teaching strategies, oral histories, integration of research and teaching

On a warm late summer September day in 2002, I gathered around a table with two Black women, an Asian woman, an Asian male, a White woman, and two White males to begin a journey of ethical theological reflection with Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon. On this day, which marked the one-year anniversary after buildings imploded and exploded, after planes crashed, after countless lives were forever changed on September 11th, 2001, Katie Cannon posed a question (which I no longer recall) about this fateful event that required each student to delve into our own interiority and respond from a place of interconnected interwoven realities.

Cannon, known for her ability to allow silence to function as a catalyst by which students engage in genuine introspection, sat with us in the silence. In a nondescript classroom on the grounds of Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education (now Union Presbyterian Seminary) whose library archives house documents that justified support of chattel slavery in the United States, Cannon's proficiency in Socratic methodology was evident. Equally evident was her dexterity in reading embodied transcripts as she employed a process that did not assign normative value to broad non-contextual generalizations. She neither ignored nor sought to diffuse apparent discomfort.

Instead, she encouraged us to take some deep breaths as a preparatory measure for high impact intellectual aerobics. I continue to benefit from the student-centered mutual-learning approach that characterizes Dr. Cannon's teaching. Each syllabus, each assignment, furthered our appreciative understanding of womanist religious thought. These assignments included many creative exercises, including a Personal Ethical Inventory, a Socio-Religious Autobiography, and a Womanist Rhetorical Methodology for Projects of Possibility.

In her Summer 2006 "DMin Seminar II: Church and Culture" syllabus, Cannon's guidelines for the Personal Ethical Inventory required students to address ten areas of ethical behavior as one way, as stated in the course description, to "critique intellectual bridges between the church and cultural patterns of moral agency," in order to "become conversant with elements of responsible decision-making." For many students, non reliance on assigned readings for direction in crafting a response resulted in questions about sources of moral discernment which had not been considered previously. While similar to the Personal Ethical Inventory, Cannon's guidelines for a Socio-Religious Autobiography required students in her January 2004 "Ethical Matters of Life and Death" seminar to "look at patterns of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation in [their] family and among [their] circle of friends." For Cannon, and as iterated on the syllabus's course objectives, it was important for students to "demonstrate facility in using inductively embodied reason and deductively applied norms so as to become conversant with elements of responsible decision-making." As a final example of her pedagogical creativity, Cannon, in her May 2003 "Codes of Ethics in Freedom Narratives" seminar, provided guidelines for a ten-step multifaceted assignment with the initial step functioning as invitation to students to "write in free-style [their] 'felt sense' of the values, ideas and/or experiences [they] *brought* to the reading of slave narrative, religious text, and the slave novel." Drawing on Beverly Wildung Harrison's Dance of Redemption, Cannon's Womanist Rhetorical Methodology for Projects of Possibility asked students not only to identify a specific "audience of accountability" but to be conscious of their own personal responsibility and commitment that might translate into others accepting an invitation "to engage in justice-making ministry." Aware that several students may not be familiar with the seminar's required readings, Cannon designed this Projects of Possibility assignment "to enable students" to accomplish four specific objectives:

a. Examine theoethical issues in the freedom narratives of enslaved African Americans

b. Reflect upon required readings and gain facility in assessing scholarly literature

c. Discern and articulate ways in which the course materials can serve as a resource for Projects of Possibility in the practice of ministry

d. Demonstrate a coherent grasp of the womanist rhetorical methodology

As with all of Cannon's approaches to teaching and learning, students were encouraged to embrace the cultivation of the intellect as a process that necessitates an appreciation for what is required to love the Lord with one's whole self.

In a compilation of pioneering essays published as *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community*, Cannon writes:

> As a womanist theological ethicist my research continues to look directly at ancestral cultural material as well as relatively fixed literary forms. Womanist ethics examines the expressive products of oral culture that deal with our perennial quest for liberation, as well as written literature that invites African Americans to recognize "the distinction between nature in its inevitability and culture in its changeability." When understood in its essentials, my work as a womanist ethicist focuses on the four following areas: (a) the creation of womanist pedagogical styles; (b) the emergence of distinctive investigative methodologies; (c) reconsideration of the established theories, doctrines, and debates of Eurocentric, male-normative ethics; and (d) the adjudicative function of womanist scholars. (2002, 69-70)

When I developed the protocol for my oral history research, "Remembering Lynching: Strategies of Resistance and Visions of Justice," published as *Lynched: The Power of Memory in a Culture of Terror* (Sims 2016), I did not consider initially how my research would inform my teaching nor how my teaching would be shaped subsequently by a methodology whose results might offer significant insight into counter responses that enabled individuals to exercise agency in what is perhaps best described as a culture of domestic terror. By the time I began to design a Spring 2010 "Black Church in the United States" survey course, with more than forty oral histories recorded, the question was not if, but how, to incorporate an aspect of my research into the class. Designed to provide a general overview of religious expressions among Blacks in the United States, two-thirds of the students were Black, two were white, and two were from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. What continues to stand out for me in this initial seminar offering was the white male student from East Texas who thought it appropriate to offer me a lynching artifact preserved by his family. I used this teaching moment to encourage the student, who subsequently dropped the course, to use this artifact to initiate conversations on race, violence, and memory with his relatives.

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To address ways in which students might initiate difficult but necessary conversations about specific moral issues, I adopted a historical approach informed by an ethical dilemma as a way to (1) invite students to broaden their view of life in the United States and (2) frame an examination of the Black Church's response to lynching. This required each student to facilitate and record an oral history interview, not to exceed ninety minutes, about this particular national dilemma. In addition to a review of the approved research plan adapted for the course, an introduction to oral history methodology, as well as a review and discussion of at least one oral history interview from my project, I needed to adapt a pedagogical approach to guide students' engagement with an ethical issue with which they might have limited knowledge. In particular, I needed a teaching strategy that (a) emphasized an awareness of the critical role of language in shaping religious identity, (b) addressed multiple intersectionalities across a spectrum of social constructions, and (c) provided a framework to foster informed religious-social-historical analysis. I elected to modify a pedagogical approach, "Report of a Critical Conversation" (see Appendix) which Cannon introduced to me in a Fall 2003 seminar, "Social Ethics and Contemporary Thought."

Cannon defines the "Report of a Critical Conversation" as an account of a life-experience, which as nearly as possible recounts the exact words and happenings. It is the raw data of a discussion, meeting, or informal discourse. As such, the interviewer attempts to recall as nearly as possible exactly what was said and done in a given situation, initially imposing the least possible degree of interpretation of the facts. A verbatim similar to that used in other disciplines, the conversation, reconstructed as soon as possible after it occurs from notes or an electronic record, serves as a primary resource from which to write a three-part report. As a teaching and learning tool, Cannon's Report of a Critical Conversation includes a list of guiding questions that inform how to situate a conversation within a particular context. This background information, essential to an analysis of the conversation, contains indicators about themes that scaffold the conversation which warrant further investigation. In addition, Cannon insists that the investigator must also engage in a process of self-evaluation. In my own research, I situate Black elders' lynching narratives in Cannon's Report of a Critical Conversation as a pedagogical research approach to assess the relationship between oral history and ethical-theological ethnography.

Each interviewee had a story to tell about life in the United States of America during a period characterized by "mob rule" not confined to southern states. As I listened to each account, and read the associated transcript, I did so mindful that each lynching narrative is a primary text. In this regard, Cannon's pedagogical approach reminds me that priority must be given to both the interviewee's contextual location(s) and the socio-cultural factors that might influence how a story is transmitted and the level of detail offered.

Participants' narratives illustrate how oral histories, as primary texts, invite and maybe even demand that non oral historian researchers examine and assign value to these non-scribal sources as repositories from which to reframe theological questions that force us to examine key issues and ethical problems that may not be addressed from multiple perspectives in our accepted canonical sources. In other words, to employ Katie Geneva Cannon's pedagogical approach as a research tool is to engage in a thick description of the resultant ethical-theological-ethnographic analysis.

As a methodology, oral history, as more than data collection, can facilitate our ability to excavate sources and/or resources that add texture to difficult but necessary dialogues. In addition to providing students with written guidelines, class time was designated to prepare students to conduct an interview with an emphasis on active listening. While it has been eight years since I taught this course, I recall students making connections between memory and published representations of history as well as thinking more deeply about the function of narrative theology in their own ministry setting. As a teacher, this experience reemphasized the importance of prioritizing experiences and contributions of Blacks as an essential aspect of graduate theological education. Given a legacy of oral tradition as a primary mode of transmission among Blacks, to integrate oral history as a research methodology with Cannon's interdisciplinary approach is to engage in an intellectual endeavor whereby we celebrate embodied creativity that values Black peoples' lived experiences. Blacks who remember lynching remind us that, at its best, history is always an incomplete record. Thus, I do the work to which I am called, as I breathe deeply and engage in high impact aerobics guided by Cannon's yet to be developed fully womanist virtue ethics characterized by "invisible dignity, quiet grace, and unshouted courage" (1988, 159). Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon, thank you for your gift to society, to the academy, to the church.

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APPENDIX: Report of a Critical Conversation by Katie G. Cannon

Definition:

The Report of a Critical Conversation is an account of a life-experience, which as nearly as possible recounts the exact words, and happenings. It is the raw data of a discussion, meeting, or argument. The presenter attempts to recall as nearly as possible exactly what was said and done in a given situation, imposing initially the least possible degree of interpretation of the facts. The conversation may be reconstructed from notes or recorded electronically. The best time to commit a conversation to paper is soon after it happens.

Structure of Presentation:

1. Background

   Share enough information to set the conversation in context. Who are the speakers? What did you have in mind when you decided to initiate this dialogue? What were your hopes and fears? When and how did you become involved with your conversational partner(s)? Describe the physical space and surrounding of the critical conversation.

2. Account of Conversation

   Report exact words as often as possible. When paraphrasing, avoid interpretive remarks. That comes later. A form often used is that of dramatic writing.

   Sara: How long have you been in ministry?

   Ben: Are your referring to this time or the time before?

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Ngozi: I was under the impression that this was your first ordination.

Ben: No, I've been …

3. Analysis

Read the transcribed conversation at least twice, silently and aloud. Hear the voices and begin to form an interpretation. Identify key issues, ethical problems, and theological questions by uncovering the sequencing and layering of emergent themes that scaffold the conversation.

- mark words and phrases that you remember and the ethical issues inspired by the dialogue
- examine the transcript for hidden assumptions and premises that are not stated because they are assumed – logically, contextually, and/or culturally

  - note moments of silence, places of evasiveness and/or laughter

  - write about a significant difference between you and your conversation partner(s)

  - summarize the primary insights you learned

4. Evaluation

Estimate your effectiveness in this conversation. From looking at the data, what observations can you make about your own skills as a listener? Did you do what you set out to do? If so, how? What factors or dynamics emerged which you did not anticipate? During the conversation, what points do you wish you had made but you did not? What would you do differently if you could have another conversation on this topic? Will you dialogue with this person again, why or why not?

Katie G. Cannon (2002)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Angela D. Sims is President of Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School. She is the author of *Lynched: The Power of Memory in a Culture of Terror* (2016).

THE WABASH CENTER
JOURNAL ON TEACHING

FORUM

Reflections on the Pedagogy of My Professor and Mentor Katie Geneva Cannon

Edwin David Aponte
Louisville Institute

ABSTRACT

This is a short reflection on aspects of the pedagogy and mentoring practice of Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon. This approach invited collaborative engagement and included a threefold process that included affirmation, inspiration, and charge. See companion contributions to this Forum written by Miguel A. De La Torre, Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, Karen K. Seat, and Angela D. Sims.

KEYWORDS

colleague, feasibility study, graduate work, mentor, mentorship, pedagogy, scholar, scholarly accompaniment, "seeing," teacher

She saved me from dropping out and showed me how to be a better scholar, teacher, and mentor.

I was starting my third year of doctoral studies in the department of religion at Temple University in Philadelphia. I was one of those doctoral students who did not take a straight path from undergraduate studies to the PhD. After receiving my first master's degree, I taught part-time at a small college while also working full-time at other jobs to pay the bills. Eventually I became a university financial aid administrator while continuing to teach as an adjunct. It was only after several years of being a university administrator and a contingent faculty person that I went on to study for the PhD in religion and culture.

That first year of doctoral studies at Temple University was challenging and surprising, starting with the university faculty going on strike. In that first year I also wrote a grant proposal to the Pew Charitable Trusts for a study of Latino/a Protestants in Philadelphia. The summer between the first and second years included an extended stay in Puerto Rico with the primary goal of enhancing my abilities in Spanish. My second year meant jumping into field work and seemingly innumerable trips of seventy miles each way from my home in the Lehigh Valley to Philadelphia. In addition to the field research in Philadelphia and the surrounding towns, I took a full load of graduate courses at Temple University, plus extra study to fill in my gaps in history, philosophy, feminist studies, political theory, postmodernity, postcolonial theory, sociology, anthropology, Hispanic/Latino theologies, as well as various types of liberation theologies. In short order I needed to become familiar with the work and theories of Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, Michel Foucault, Karl Marx, Niebuhr (both Reinhold and H. Richard), Natalie Zemon Davis, Hayden White, Edward Said, Catherine Albanese, Jürgen Habermas, Clifford Geertz, Karen McCarthy Brown, Pierre Bourdieu, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and many more. Given the inter-religious emphasis of the department, I studied African diaspora religions, Buddhism, and Islam, in addition to studies in my area of concentration. As I moved further into my studies I was deeply impressed and bit awed with the abilities of many of my colleagues in the program. Furthermore, beyond all the graduate work, I taught at regional colleges, not only for the teaching experience, but frankly because my family needed

the money. I was worn out and stretched thin. I wondered if I could do this doctoral work, or if perhaps I should face facts and just quietly drop out and fade away. And at that critical juncture of extreme fatigue, growing doubt, and deepening despair, Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon arrived at Temple University and entered my life.

I enrolled for individual study with Dr. Cannon in a course called "Readings in African American Religion." What she laid out for me was enormously challenging, with of course lots of reading and writing, but even more than what I had been given in the two prior years for other courses. Dr. Cannon structured this course with multiple readings that included *Souls of Black Folk* by W. E. B. DuBois (2010), Albert J. Raboteau's *Slave Religion* (2004), *Sisters in the Wilderness* by Delores Williams (2013), and Cornel West's *The American Evasion of Philosophy* (1989). In retrospect I can recognize that part of Dr. Cannon's pedagogical approach was to introduce me to a canon of work in African American religious studies, but also both to invite me into critical conversations about the same, as well as to connect me with wider intellectual discussions. Moreover, Dr. Cannon's pedagogy for this reading course was unlike other "independent" studies that I had experienced where I had been left mostly on my own. This time it was different. Through reflection papers (not traditional book reviews) on each work and regular meetings I experienced engaged scholarly accompaniment. These one-to-one meetings were both critical conversations and tutorial, not only on the subject matter at hand, but also on how to be a scholarly mentor and colleague.

It was clear that something different was happening from the first time we met to discuss what I wrote as a reflection on a text. As we sat in her faculty office Dr. Cannon started by looking directly at me and saying, "You are brilliant." I was shocked, initially speechless, but also deeply moved. I am still moved today. I share this not to boast; certainly there are those who can give their own assessment of my intelligence and scholarly aptitude. I share this story because up until that moment no one had ever said that about me to me. At an extremely low point when I seriously contemplated slinking away and becoming another casualty of the higher education industrial complex, Dr. Cannon saw me in the fullest sense of the word. In that first meeting and in our subsequent meetings she affirmed me as a person and as a scholar, and in doing so she saved me from dropping out of the PhD program. She acknowledged my being, my scholarship, and my multifaceted calling. Part of Dr. Cannon's pedagogy was that she fully saw her students for who they were and could be, and boldly affirmed her students as critical thinkers and scholars who would engage the world.

By studying with Dr. Cannon new areas of discourse were opened up to me: Womanist theology, the writings of Delores Williams, James Cone, W. E. B. DuBois, Cornel West, Cheryl J. Sanders, Albert Raboteau, C. Eric Lincoln, Lawrence H. Mamiya, Gayraud Wilmore, Benjamin E. Mays, Emilie Townes, as well as many others. I took Dr. Cannon's seminar "Social Teachings in African American Sacred Rhetoric," where again I witnessed her passion for teaching and engaging complex subjects in ways that were contagious and invitational. She motivated me to be a zealous co-learner; I was also challenged and stimulated by her methodology of analysis. That methodology included writing weekly "Demystifying Domination Reflection Papers" designed to help us identify the ideology, theology, or the value system of the work we were reading, construct a cognitive map of the logic of the particular work, name the communities connected to the writer's claims of accountability, and unmask the sacred rhetoric present and how the moral values of the writer as activist interacted with their articulated social conscience. Moreover, Dr. Cannon's consistent, determined examination of African American sacred rhetoric identified a way for me in my exploration of Latino/a sacred rhetoric, including examining *lo cotidiano* (daily life), as well as other expressions of religious and spiritual discourse in various Latinx contexts.[1]

Another important part of Dr. Cannon's pedagogical approach to teaching a methodology of analysis was having us do a "Feasibility Study." Rather than assigning a typical research paper, Dr. Cannon provided us with a way to explore how to create a detailed intellectual blueprint that would be the basis for a thoughtful research paper. That is significant in itself, but all the more so because the assignment did not include writing the research paper. In the midst of the busyness of graduate school and life beyond the university, we were introduced to a disciplined way of doing what ought to have been implicit, but which, in the midst of our graduate student praxis, really had been a missing step. By having us focus on that missing step, the pedagogy employed was both exciting and counter-cultural. Dr. Cannon had us name a particular problem, hypothesis, or question that provided the focus of our individual desired research. The next step was to state a rationale for the desired study, to name significant prior research, and then to define any limitations and key assumptions – in essence doing an early stage self-critique, and finally outlining the methodology for data gathering and the process of analysis. The Feasibility Study approach is extremely useful and I incorporated it into my own pedagogy when it was my turn to teach. And I must confess that it was with pride, appreciation, and some hope that I told my students that I learned the Feasibility Study approach from Dr. Cannon, and that therefore they were part of an academic legacy that they would take with them into various callings of their own.

1 For example, readers might discern Dr. Cannon's influence in my book *¡Santo! Varieties of Latino/a Spirituality* (2012).

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In addition to learning from her and with her through individual study and in graduate seminars, Dr. Cannon agreed to serve on my dissertation committee and also as the reader for my doctoral examinations in "African American Religion and African Antecedents." In writing answers about the chief features of a West African worldview complex, continuities within African Diaspora communities, and their significance for study of the African Diaspora in the Western Hemisphere; or on how the central themes in *The Souls of Black Folk* (2010) address the fundamental aspects of African American social, political, and religious life; or reflecting on Albert Raboteau's understanding of the "invisible institution" in the antebellum South; or on bringing into conversation the rhetorical and philosophical approaches of W. E. B. DuBois and Benjamin E. Mays, and how each foreshadowed the prophetic pragmatism of Cornel West, I was motivated to do my best. Certainly I wanted to do well in the PhD exams, but at that point I also strove to excel because as a professor and scholar Dr. Cannon had put her faith in me, she had invested in me, and as her student I wanted to make her proud. Part of Dr. Cannon's pedagogy was that through respectful, invitational interactions she inspired her students to do their very best, not just for her, but also for themselves and their communities of accountability.

Years afterward, with both the PhD and a university tenure-track appointment in hand, one of the yearly joys of life was seeing Dr. Cannon each November for the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion. One year, while walking with two Temple University colleagues who were also her students, we met Dr. Cannon in passing, to our great mutual delight. She paused to greet us effusively, then put her arms around us, drew us close, and looking into each of our faces she said, "Take care of each other." On that day and every day since, I have received what Dr. Cannon said not simply as good manners or kind advice, but also as encouragement, and ultimately as a solemn charge and challenge. I try to live up to that charge to be a good, supportive, and encouraging colleague to others, working collaboratively, avoiding competition, or any of the destructive behavior that is far too common in academia. Part of Dr. Cannon's pedagogy continued beyond our studies as she continued to mentor her students by charging us to care for each other.

I was blessed to study with Dr. Cannon at Temple University, she saved me from dropping out, and she served on my dissertation committee. Another gift she gave was that she placed the doctoral hood on my shoulders like a mantle at graduation. And by doing so, she sent me to go and do the same as she did: to affirm, inspire, and charge. She continues to influence my work as a scholar, teacher, and mentor. Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon help me to recognize and do "the work that my soul must have" to be a better scholar, teacher, and mentor.

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ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS FORUM HONORING DR. KATIE GENEVA CANNON

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THE WABASH CENTER
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TEACHING TACTIC

Zoom in on Interpretive Skills

Amy Beth Jones
Independent Scholar

Stephanie Day Powell
Manhattan College

The context

We created this twenty- to forty-minute exercise for first-year students in a biblical exegetical skills course at Drew University Theological School, though it could be used in any context where students are expected to read texts closely and critically. If one does not have access to the picture book, *Zoom*, the exercise can be reproduced using any two images that compare a long shot to a close-up of the same image.

The pedagogical purpose

To (1) concretize many theoretical lessons about exegesis, from the importance of the contextual translation of words to the necessity to read in community rather than in isolation, and (2) impress upon students the need to read texts in their larger literary, historical, social, and theological contexts.

Description of the strategy

Each page of Istvan Banyai's evocative picture book, *Zoom* (Viking, 1995), is an inset of the drawing on the page that follows (see sample here[1]). With every page, one must zoom out to discover a fuller or more detailed picture – a useful analogy for the play of perspectives involved in any sustained literary inquiry.

Distributing illustrations from *Zoom*, we divide the class into groups, telling them that they are each receiving "identical" images. The groups discuss their images and produce a paragraph describing their scene. When the class reconvenes, each group shares their description and soon they realize that their images are (seemingly) different from one another. Then they begin to recognize the connection between scenes, and a conversation about experience and vantage point ensues.

We employed *Zoom* alongside a study of Genesis 16 in order to challenge hackneyed interpretations of Abraham's character. After this activity, students read the story of Hagar and Sarai twice, first as an individual story and then within the larger Abrahamic cycle. While they initially viewed Abraham as the spiritual hero, they soon redirected their attention to how his misogyny is at odds with his ostensible faith. They then rezoomed to more substantively analyze the patriarchal context in which the female protagonists struggle for representation. The lessons of *Zoom* stayed with them as they widened their field of vision beyond Genesis to reflect upon the greater Deuteronomistic narrative of human failings and unfinished redemption.

Why it is effective

While one student group produces a narrative about a cityscape, another produces a story about a lone cowboy in the desert watching a television show set in the city. Students come to realize that the cityscape is merely an inset within the larger desert image. The exercise disorients students and gives them a tangible example of the focalized nature and limits of their perspectives. As students continually zoom and rezoom on the interpretive landscape, superficial readings are rejected for multilayered analyses that replicate the complexities of critical interpretation.

1 https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Jones_And_Powell_TACTIC-Zoom-Photos.jpeg (accessed 14 August 2019).

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TEACHING TACTIC

The Buddha's Positionality

Christina A. Kilby
James Madison University

The context

I teach at a public research university in rural Virginia with a student population that is increasing in diversity. I assign this thirty to forty-five minute teaching tactic near the beginning of an undergraduate "Introduction to Buddhism" course. This tactic works best in classes sized for discussion; my classes consist of twenty-five to thirty students. Although this example uses the life of the Buddha, the exercise can be easily adapted to focus on another historical figure.

The pedagogical purpose

To prompt students to reflect critically on their own positionalities[1] in the religious studies classroom as well as to culturally and historically contextualize the life of a human figure they are studying. This exercise serves as an entry into self-reflective scholarship, providing a model for speaking academically about identity and difference for students who may have little experience doing so.

Description of the strategy

I first ask students to write down the various positionalities or social locations that impact how they as individuals engage with the study of religion: class, creed, gender, sexuality, race, language, and so forth. Then, students complete the same positionality exercise about the Buddha. Drawing closely from a narrative or film depiction of the Buddha's life story (such as BBC's 2005 *Life of the Buddha*[2]) that I have assigned, they glean which positionalities mattered in the Buddha's time and place for his religious quest: human being (not god), prince, warrior caste, wealthy, male, straight, father, ancient person, Indian, able-bodied, renunciate. When I next ask students to review their own positionalities in light of their role as scholars encountering the Buddha, they discover additional positionalities in themselves: twenty-first-century person, westerner (perhaps), citizen of a democracy (perhaps), consumer, English speaker, non-renunciate, user of modern learning technologies, and so forth. We reflect on these discoveries as a group in order to explore the cross-cultural and cross-historical nature of religious studies.

Why it is effective

Students enjoy exercises in self-reflection upon their identity, but such reflections are rarely situated in dialogue with the academic content they are studying. By comparing their own positionalities with the Buddha's, students practice contextualizing themselves, contextualizing the Buddha, and identifying some of the cultural and historical distances across which their study of the Buddha's life and teachings occurs.

1 https://www.dictionary.com/e/gender-sexuality/positionality/.

2 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEe8hl6GoGY (accessed 14 August 2019).

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THE WABASH CENTER
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TEACHING TACTIC

Maximizing Engagement between Online and On-Campus Students Via Zoom

Daniel Orlando Álvarez
Pentecostal Theological Seminary

The context

My seminary classroom often has as many students online as on-campus. This tactic can be adopted for classroom discussion of most any content, and can be adapted to any class size.

The pedagogical purpose

The purpose of this exercise was to introduce students to Paul Tillich's *Theology of Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1980). I wanted to create collegiality between my on-campus and online students by facilitating their engagement with one another. Students would re-think the idea of "religion" they'd been raised with by understanding Tillich's concept of "ultimate concern." The goal was that students would understand how religion, as Tillich uses it, is foundational for all of humanity's existence.

Description of the strategy

Simultaneous small discussion groups are not possible in a normal Zoom Session, so I used the technology of Zoom[1] Breakout Rooms to facilitate simultaneous small discussion groups. Before class I logged into Zoom with the host account and set up the breakout room controls. With these controls the host can manually sort participants so that on-campus students can be in mixed groups with online students. I created breakout rooms of three students each. The on-campus students took their own personal devices to quiet places nearby (with WiFi access). As the host, I can enter and leave any breakout room at my discretion to listen to conversations, provide feedback, answer questions, or make suggestions, just as I could if all the small group discussions were physically happening in the classroom. The steps for set up are illustrated in this video[2] and on this Zoom support page.[3] This video[4] shows the breakout rooms in action.

First, groups talked about their notions of religion and defined what this term means for them. Next, they described and defined what "religion" meant for Tillich as compared to what it may mean to them currently. As conversation wound down, I broadcast a message to all groups calling them back to the classroom (for on-campus students) and to the larger Zoom Session (for online students). The students then shared their thoughts and experiences with the larger group.

Why it is effective

The strategy was effective because the online and on-campus students were able to engage and interact with one another on a closer level. Students carried on more in-depth conversations than they had before. Students took turns describing the emotions and thoughts the readings elicited in them. They listened to one another and considered the thoughts of their peers. I think this exercise was helpful in building collegiality, and for allowing students to "embody" their presence in ways they previously could not.

1 https://zoom.us/ (accessed 14 August 2019).
2 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pC_7lGHNH2g.
3 https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/206476093-Getting-Started-with-Breakout-Rooms.
4 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=flJJLtanyxk.

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THE WABASH CENTER
JOURNAL ON TEACHING

TEACHING TACTIC

Does This Sound Religious?

Amy DeRogatis
Michigan State University

Isaac Weiner
The Ohio State University

The context

An introductory undergraduate religious studies course with students from a variety of majors. We teach at large, midwestern state universities. This strategy could probably be adapted for any size classroom, but the professor might not be able to incorporate every student response.

The pedagogical purpose

This activity introduces students to the central question in the study of religion: how does one define religion? The tactic, which could be paired with an introductory lecture on classical definitions of religion, provides students with the opportunity to discuss definitions of religion and specifically, to take seriously the scholar's role in creating definitional boundaries. It also invites students to reflect on the differences between engaging with religion through aural sources rather than textual or visual ones. Finally, it helps students reflect on whether scholars privilege some sensory forms of knowledge (seeing, feeling/experiencing) over others (hearing) in their definitions of religion, and how aural sources might provide different insights into the nature of religion.

Description of the strategy

This tactic requires instructors and students to use the American Religious Sounds Project database.[1] Prior to class, students review audio clips in the ARSP Archive[2] and choose one example of a sound clip that they think: (1) is religious; (2) might be religious; and (3) is not religious (for example, a metaphysical healing expo[3] or a political protest[4]). Divide students into pairs to discuss their three clips for fifteen minutes or so, comparing and explaining their choices to each other. Then ask each pair to list their audio files in three columns on the board (religious, might be religious, not religious). Discuss the reasons for their placements:

- Why do you think clip x is a religious sound? What do you expect religion to sound like?
- What makes a sound religious? Who decides?
- What types of information do you need to label a sound religious? What information do you need that you don't have?
- Give a compelling argument for why clip x should switch columns.
- Would it be easier to decide if something were religious by reading a text or looking at an object? How does hearing a practice differ from reading about it or watching it?
- How does this classroom activity relate to the study of religion?

Why it is effective

This activity requires students to go through the process of making choices about which sounds count as religious and then to explain their choices. Rather than lecturing to students about how definitions of religion are always interpretive choices, this activity engages them in the process. Their debates replicate those in the field and demonstrate that students (like scholars) bring their own experience and knowledge to the classroom that influences how they think about religion.

1 http://religioussounds.osu.edu/ (accessed 14 August 2019).

2 https://explore.religioussounds.osu.edu/visualization?show_popup=true&skip_control_screen=true&target_visualization=archive.

3 https://explore.religioussounds.osu.edu/public/recordings/127.

4 https://explore.religioussounds.osu.edu/public/recordings/122.

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THE WABASH CENTER JOURNAL ON TEACHING

BOOK REVIEW

Reflexivity and Critical Pedagogy (International Issues in Adult Education, Volume, 27)

Anne Ryan and Tony Walsh, *editors*

Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishing, 2018
(162 pages, ISBN # 978-90-04-38450-7, $54.00)

Reviewed By

Katherine Daley-Bailey
University of Georgia

"There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says 'Morning, boys. How's the water?' And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes 'What the hell is water?' David Foster Wallace, *This Is Water"*

Upon reading this volume, I was repeatedly reminded of the late David Foster Wallace's speech, "This is Water" (Little, Brown, and Co., 2009). Foster's commencement speech hones in on some underlying themes of life many of those in higher education hope to instill in our students. Most importantly, I think, is the lesson that the most powerful influences on us are often those in which we are continually swimming but which we often cannot see. We must learn the practice of "seeing" the water we swim in. The practice is imperfect, messy, and will not make you particularly fun at parties, but it is vital for any transformative learning to occur. We can do this in a myriad of ways, such as those laid out in this volume, by practicing reflexivity.

What is reflexivity? The editors, influenced by Foucault's concepts of discourse, knowledge, and power, define reflexivity as "encompassing a critical assessment of the significance of environment, power, and context as well as subjectivity in the delineation and construction of knowledge" (1). Reflexivity implies "a responsibility to critically examine our world, and how we position ourselves, and are positioned in that world" (1). Reflexivity is not narcissistic navel-gazing; it involves an intimate interrogation and critical examination of the personal, political, and professional. It is a practice. Contributor David McCormack describes reflexivity as the "practitioner's attempt to turn their awareness to whatever is happening at any given moment at a personal, interpersonal, organizational, and societal perspective and to use that to illuminate the interpersonal dimension in their work" (122). The self is not freestanding – it always has a context.

Why is reflexivity critical to education? Education must be reflexive in order to avoid being merely indoctrination. Education can make space for reflexivity, can give educators and students an opportunity to analyze not just "what works" but also to interrogate for whom does it work and to what end. Learners need spaces to confront dominant narratives and cultures, and educational spaces can provide just that.

Contributors to this volume are primarily affiliated with the Department of Adult and Community Education at Maynooth University in Ireland. Each was invited to "challenge traditional thinking in education" (10). The chapters of this volume exemplify a myriad of ways reflexivity can be practiced in educational spaces. Despite this variety, each of these contributions emphasize the critical imaginative element among practitioners, a willingness to see things as possibly otherwise. Whether the reflexive practice happens within discursive analysis, writing, theater-making, transformative learning, systems theory, defining citizenship, facilitative work, or narrative inquiry, it requires imaginative capacity and a willingness of the practitioner to critically examine the very bedrock of their experience and the systematic assumptions underlying their everyday reality.

This book would be especially helpful for educators and administrators hoping to equip their students with theoretical tools and practical exercises aimed at "bringing to light dynamics of power which privilege conformity" and "revealing the normally occluded dynamics of dominant discourse"(6). It is also a resource for those who see themselves occupying hybrid spaces: those who acknowledge a multiplicity of knowledges and competing and intersecting realities and experiences, who interrogate and trespass boundaries, and, overall, who strive to "see" the water in which they swim.

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BOOK REVIEW

Issues in Applying SLA Theories toward Reflective and Effective Teaching

Mitra Zeraatpishe, Akram Faravani, Hamid Reza Kargozari, and Maryam Azarnoosh, *editors*

Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2018
(ix + 218 pages, ISBN 978-90-04-38086-8, $43.00)

Reviewed By

Paul Overland
Ashland Theological Seminary

Issues in Applying SLA Theories (hereafter Issues) comprises volume seven in the series, Critical New Literacies: The Praxis of English Language Teaching and Learning (PELT).

What is meant by reflective teaching? In their article on writing, Zeraatpishe and Azarnoosh offer the following definition: "Reflection is regarded as a process through which teachers observe their beliefs and practices, assess, restructure their teaching and learning so that they can better situate themselves as agents of change in the immediate contexts of teaching" (165). Effective teaching, in contrast, involves conscious monitoring of student needs and progress, followed by corresponding adjustments in one's instruction.

Issues is a collection of fourteen essays by a global array of authors. Most hold doctoral degrees, with teaching experience ranging from assistant professors to emeritus professors. Several serve as editors of major publications in the field of Second Language Acquisition.

Part One concentrates on six theories that have influenced language learning pedagogy. Part Two addresses eight skills necessary for learning a language.

Theories explored in Part One include behaviorism, cognitive approaches, constructivism, connectionism, interactionism, and critical theories. Behaviorism's attention to stimulus and response led to the emphasis on language drills found in the Audio-Lingual Method. Cognitive approaches bring together rationalist and empiricist viewpoints, valuing both Chomsky's innate Universal Grammar and also the importance of learning through experimentation. Constructivism in language learning involves forming increasingly more complex categories of information by analyzing similar elements, whether individually (cognitive constructivism) or in community (social constructivism). Connectionism draws from the design of digital computers to consider how parallel distributed processing (or artificial neural networks) serve the task of pattern recognition. Interactionism holds that language learners benefit from conversational communication, which involves input, negotiation of meaning, noticing, and second language output. Critical Second Language teaching would value "a listening phase on the part of the course designer or teacher, and… finding out about the learners' real lives and needs" (70), then creatively adjusting the course correspondingly.

The remaining eight chapters turn from theory to praxis, exploring what it means to teach particular skills in a reflective and effective manner: pronunciation, grammatical competence, vocabulary, idioms, speaking, writing, listening, and reading. For example, instructors are encouraged to journal after class sessions to become attentive to trends in student performance of pronunciation. Grammatical competence can be enhanced by immersive use of illustrated fiction readings, with discussion and open-ended composition assignments. Vocabulary learning will be more effective as students are encouraged to master roughly 2000 words, whether isolated lexemes, word families, or phrasal vocabulary, so that they may produce them in speech and in writing. Idioms will be learned more effectively through a pragmatic approach that is attentive to context and the speaker's aims. Speaking will improve as instructors facilitate conversation that is incremental and attentive to stages of students' proficiency. Writing instruction can be segmented into eight discreet stages. And listening comprehension improves as students appreciate and attend to specific processes at work during periods of concentrated listening. Reading fluency, defined as the ability to read "effortlessly and confidently at a level of understanding and a rate appropriate for the purpose or task and the material" (Day, 203), requires automatic recognition of words which results from students having read large quantities of easy and interesting material.

Instructors of English as a Foreign Language comprise the principal audience for *Issues*. Those who, like the reviewer, teach a classical language will benefit primarily from R. R. Day's insights concerning literacy (199–208), and also from Nurmukhamedov and Plonsky's essay on vocabulary (115–26).

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THE WABASH CENTER JOURNAL ON TEACHING

BOOK REVIEW

Vocation across the Academy: A New Vocabulary for Higher Education

David S. Cunningham, *editor*

New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017
(xxiii + 345 pages, ISBN 978-0-19-060710-4, $34.95)

Reviewed By

Frederick W. Schmidt
Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary

Against the backdrop of growing debate over both the nature and value of higher education, David Cunningham and twelve scholars offer what they believe may serve as a "common purpose" – vocation. Along with the word, "calling," vocation has theological roots, but Cunningham argues that a "more expansive" approach to the word "is attentive to questions of profession, work, and employment" and "encompasses a much broader range of concerns that will arise during a college student's current and future life." The writers of this volume do not believe that appealing to the concept of vocation will eliminate conflict swirling around competing visions of the academy, but they do believe that the concept appeals to both the roots of the modern university and the goals of faculty from across the academy (3).

With that goal in mind, Cunningham and his co-contributors divide their effort into four parts. Eschewing a disciplinary-centered approach to their work, they instead consider "four different *pathways* or *approaches* through which the disciplines can come into conversation with one another: first by emphasizing certain themes that are common to them all; second, by borrowing concepts from one discipline that can apply to many other disciplines; third, by focusing on the future lives of undergraduates…; and fourth, by considering some of the institution-wide obstacles that need to be addressed if the language of vocation and calling is to be perceived as relevant to all academic departments and programs" (14).

In a closing epilogue, Cunningham notes that the volume demonstrates that neither vocation nor calling exhaust the concerns that arise from their use in the academy. The words, "responsibility, character, virtue, mission, covenant, mapmaking, storytelling, performance, work, [and] leisure," along with others, figure in the contributions to this volume (315). That should come as no surprise, he argues. From the very beginning, Cunningham commends a definition of vocation that is "capacious, dynamic, and elastic" (315, cf. 10ff.).

Accordingly, he argues that one should approach the issue of vocation prepared to use multiple vocabularies that reveal different, but interrelated discoveries. To have a vocation means that one is shaped by that calling (317ff.); that one is summoned "from without" (319f.); that one must decide what to do (320f.); that those who are called inevitably consider their link to the callings of others (321f.); and that they are compelled to think about the impact their vocations will have on the future (322ff.).

This is the second of three volumes in an ambitious and welcome effort to recapture the inspiration of vocation as a locus for higher education. The first, published in 2015 under the title, *At This Time and in This Place*, focused on pedagogy. The third, published in January of 2019 appeared under the title, *Hearing Vocationally Differently,* and expands on the vocabulary associated with vocation, relying on contributors from diverse religious traditions.

One may well wonder what the prospects will be for the project of this series. Embattled as the academy is – by forces both within and without – one would hope that scholars will find a common inspiration that will lend new energy and focus to their work. But even cursory attention to the debates roiling college and university campuses underlines the truth that "an optimist is someone who is not in possession of all the facts." It is difficult to believe that disciplines that are struggling to define a shared vision of the work that they are doing could agree on a vision for the larger work to which the whole academy is devoted.

The task that the writers propose is made all the more difficult by the choice of "vocation" as the organizing principle around which they attempt to rally their readers. As Cunningham himself observes, the verb *vocare* is transitive (317). As such, it implies that one is not only called, but one is also called *by* someone or something. The absence of a shared understanding of who or what issues that call — if anyone or anything does — underlines how little shared vision may be in the offing for the modern academy.

For theological educators the answer to that question and others ought to be easier to achieve, but anyone who teaches in the mod-

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ern divinity school knows better than that. As seminaries struggle to address declining enrollments, degree programs are crafted with an eye to the individual's goals and the notion of vocation – and the spiritual formation that accompanies it – has slipped again to the margins of theological education. Where it still lingers, it is necessarily governed by private definitions. In the meantime, seminary faculties differ with one another as much or more on such questions as the faculties at any college or university.

The effort made by Cunningham and his co-contributors comes, then, as both question and indictment: What is it about the concept of vocation that leads even a small but brave cohort of scholars without shared confessional commitments to imagine that they can galvanize their work around the concept? The indictment is this: What are the factors that have relegated the question of vocation to the margins of the very institutions that gave birth to the vocabulary?

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THE WABASH CENTER JOURNAL ON TEACHING

BOOK REVIEW

Creativity and Critique in Online Learning: Exploring and Examining Innovations in Online Pedagogy

Jacqueline Baxter, George Callaghan, and Jean McAvoy, *editors*

Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018
(xxiii + 278 pages, ISBN 978-3-319-78297-3, $119.00)

Reviewed By

Rob O'Lynn
Kentucky Christian University

Online learning has come a long way in twenty years. Although distance education has been around in one form or another for a really long time, *online* education had fairly humble beginnings in California in the late 1990s. As noted in the foreword of *Creativity and Critique in Online Learning*, "At the end of the 1990s the internet was seen as an interesting application, but not necessarily relevant to all subjects or modes of teaching" (vii). The initial benefit of distance and online education was that it would connect learners together in a networked classroom that spanned further than four cinderblock walls. What initially started as a distance enterprise, where students would log in to a remote learning server and be funneled into a class with potentially dozens to hundreds of other faceless paying customers (and may or may not have received an actual education), the Learning Management System (LMS) has evolved into a "commonplace and essential piece of technology infrastructure in almost every university" (viii). Yet creativity does not come without critique, as is often the case when boundaries are stretched and broken. This volume provides a summary of the creative side of online learning as well as a critique of the overall process, at least within the purview of Open University's experience as a leader in online learning, answering significant challenges and squashing anecdotal myths throughout.

The editors and contributors, all of whom are either faculty at Open University or products of one of Open University's online programs, seek to rewrite the narrative regarding online education. Rather than asking "Can online study really replicate the challenges and occasional joy of learning in a face to face environment?" (2), these contributors shift the focus to answering questions such as "How can [online learning] help teach the 'hard to reach' and how can it provide learning for those who have failed in (or rejected) learning in a face to face context?" (2). Putting aside such arguments as online education being more cost-effective in a bloated yet dwindling brick-and-mortar learning environment and what tools and techniques work the best in an online context, the contributors pull directly from their experience and ground their findings in action research that seeks to add a cogent and coherent voice to the ever-widening field of online learning studies. *Creativity and Critique in Online Learning* presents real-world problems with and in online learning with real-world solutions from real-world practitioners, some of which worked and some which did not. Of particular note in this volume are the chapters on developing effective forums (chapter 3), engaging students in informal learning communities (chapter 5), addressing concerns with academic dishonesty (chapter 7), and developing appropriate yet effective teacher-learner relationships (chapter 11).

Overall, I found this volume helpful. As the director of a completely online graduate program in biblical studies and Christian leadership, I recognize the growing challenge of developing online learning experiences that are academically rigorous while also developing spaces for relational connection and personal growth. I was afraid this book would be another "do it our way" argument. However, the essays are more akin to the casual conversations we catch over coffee at a professional conference than the peer-reviewed "expert" keynote that we actually paid to hear.

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THE WABASH CENTER JOURNAL ON TEACHING

BOOK REVIEW

Pedagogies for Building Cultures of Peace: Challenging Constructions of an Enemy (International Issues in Adult Education, Volume 25)

Catherine Baillie Abidi

Leiden, The Netherlands; Brill, 2018
(141 pages, ISBN 978-90-04-37521-5, $57.00)

Reviewed By

Ryan Korstange
Middle Tennessee State University

Social media and the daily news both mark the continued normalization of violence. Given that one of the chief aims of liberal education is toward personal development and the attainment of civic responsibilities, the normalization of violence is a central issue with which twenty-first-century educators must grapple. To this end, *Pedagogies for Building Cultures of Peace* is a useful resource both for centralizing current research on structural and cultural violence and the concomitant dehumanization of the "other" (Chapters 1-4). Further, the book details the many benefits of engaging youth in structured critical dialogue about their experience and internalization of violence in many forms and leverages this dialogic strategy for the transformational aim of building peace and destabilization of structural violence (Chapters 5-9).

This book is a theoretical treatment of a specific dialogic experience examining the normalization of violence. It is evident that the experience was significant for the participants, and the detailed reporting of the participant dialogue helps make clear some ways in which structures of violence are normalized for these youth. However, as with qualitative research – the difficulty lies in transferability, specifically in the question of how generalizable the experience of these ten youth is for a broader audience. In part, this challenge could have been alleviated with a more detailed description of both the methods used in the dialogic process itself and by providing more information about the participants themselves. That difficulty aside, the central argument – that safe, collaborative, and critical dialogue functions as a viable pedagogical strategy for building real peace – is compelling, even if the author does not provide practical details for creating this type of dialogue or these types of spaces (a brief outline of the dialogic structure utilized does appear in Table 10.3).

Readers of *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* will find the final two chapters the most beneficial. These summarize the dialogue and extract pedagogical implications, which are supported by research in experiential learning, social constructivism, relational epistemology, and power analysis. Taken together, these chapters provide a robust theory that must inform teaching aimed towards peace. As Abidi observes, "education that neglects to challenge normalizations of violence, and the relations that maintain violence as an accepted norm in society, further reinforces unquestioned ideologies of the dehumanized other" (113). It is, therefore, no longer an option to say nothing about the normalization of violence in the classroom – rather collaborative critical conversation must be employed towards the end of peace.

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THE WABASH CENTER JOURNAL ON TEACHING

BOOK REVIEW

Out in the Center: Public Controversies and Private Struggles

Harry Denny, Robert Mundy, Liliana M. Naydan, Richard Sévère, and Anna Sicari, *editors*

Louisville, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2018
(xii + 267 pages, ISBN 978-1-60732-782-0, $34.95)

Reviewed By

Zandra L. Jordan
Stanford University

Out in the Center: Public Controversies and Private Struggles provides a fresh perspective on the inter- and intra-personal dynamics of writing center work. Building upon Greenfield's and Rowan's *Writing Centers and the New Racism: A Call for Sustainable Dialogue and Change* (2011), Condon's *I Hope I Join the Band: Narrative, Affiliation, and Antiracist Rhetoric* (2012), and Denny's own *Facing the Center: Toward an Identity Politics of One-to-One Mentoring* (2010), this edited collection presents the personal narratives of underrepresented voices in writing centers and invites critical conversation about the complexities of identity negotiation among tutors, writers, and administrators.

While some writing centers claim to be neutral spaces where writing is engaged apart from the culture that produced it, this collection acknowledges the ways in which writing and collaborations around writing are always already both personal and political – shaped by a confluence of internal and external factors. Writers, tutors, and administrators bring their selves to the work, thereby making public their past, present, and emerging identities, which are inextricable from the social, political, economic, and cultural dynamics of the communities in which centers reside.

The collection is organized into six parts – race, multilingualism, gender and sexuality, religion, class, and (dis)ability – some with more narratives than others. This imbalance likely speaks to the variety of submissions and also signals the need for even more narratives from underrepresented and marginalized perspectives. Additionally, while each part is purposefully arranged, the editors recognize that identities are intersecting and note in the review following each section that identity categorizations are fluid.

Part I narrativizes the interplay between the reading or erasure of black female and male bodies in one-to-one consultations and the writing classroom and how those occurrences interconnect with public discourse on issues like black natural hair, Black Lives Matter, and black masculinity. Part II explores the benefits and complexities of multilingualism in the center and ways that tutors can leverage linguistic dexterity. Part III focuses on the role of gender and sexuality in the identity formation of writing center administrators and tutors. Part IV takes up religion, an identity-marker that is sometimes unseen, and asks how inviting disclosure of religious identities might challenge hegemonic norms. Part V considers how class converges with other identities in writing centers, inviting interrogation of economic standing and belonging. Part VI explores how learning differences can shape writing practices and influence pedagogical approaches to tutoring.

The collection concludes with a final chapter and afterword that encourage readers to recognize the pedagogical and epistemic value of these lived stories in their own contexts and for future research. Engaging meaningfully and critically with these stories and the intricacies of intersecting identities that they underscore enriches our ability to create more inclusive practices in hiring, training, and tutoring – a worthy charge and a fitting ending for this valuable work.

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THE WABASH CENTER JOURNAL ON TEACHING

BOOK REVIEW

The Religious Studies Skills Book: Close Reading, Critical Thinking, and Comparison

Eugene V. Gallagher and Joanne Maguire
London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019
(194 pages, ISBN 978-1-350-03374-0, $20.66)

Reviewed By
Molly H. Bassett
Georgia State University

Gallagher and Maguire wrote *The Religious Studies Skills Book* for undergraduate students taking religious studies courses. Recipients of the American Academy of Religion's Award for Excellence in Teaching and longtime Wabash Center affiliates, Maguire and Gallagher draw on the breadth of their experiences as scholar-teachers to craft an accessible book that covers the basics – and more.

They dispel myths, like the assumption that teaching about religions in public universities is unconstitutional, and they clarify common confusion, including the distinction between studying theology and religious studies. They also offer insights into what makes the study of religion so compelling and worthwhile:

> Students of religion are in a field unlike any other. The field has interdisciplinary breadth and global and historical depth that can't be found elsewhere on campus. Many students come to the academic study of religion expecting personal spiritual development. Although that might be an accidental outcome of exposure to ideas in any course, teachers tend to be strongly interested in developing students' skills and knowledge, goals achieved in part by reading, observation, and discussion that brackets personal judgement and biases . . . If a single introductory course in religious studies teaches nothing else, it will at least show you that there are many other ways to understand the world. (69-70)

I quote this passage at length because it exemplifies one of the two most important features of this book: the authors write to and for students. They do this from the first to the last page. I never felt like they overlooked the student to speak to a colleague. Midway through, I flipped back to the title page and wrote, "How many of us write for this audience? They're taking students seriously!" It's refreshing, and it is one aspect of the book that would make me want to assign it.

The book's other great strength is how the authors model what they expect students to learn. Most chapters include explicit examples. The chapter on comparison offers lengthy examinations of how comparison works using excerpts from sacred texts (Matthew and *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*) and scholarly ones (definitions of religion). In some places, the authors anticipate students' observations, and in others, they expand their scope. For example, they note fairly obvious similarities between the gospel and *Science and Health*, and then they expand the comparison through a series of questions about authorial intent. In addition to the explicit examples, Gallagher and Maguire build an argument through the arrangement of the book's chapters and draw on evidence from scholarship on teaching and learning. The companion website provides more general information and additional exercises, too.

My main concern is how the book can reach its intended audience. Ideally, students in introductory courses would read and absorb the *Skills Book*. Realistically, the motivated majors in a third-year seminar will be carrying copies with dog-eared pages, and, years from now, graduate students learning how to teach will be lucky to find a copy with some dedicated major's marginalia.

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THE WABASH CENTER JOURNAL ON TEACHING

BOOK REVIEW

Teaching across Cultures: Contextualizing Education for Global Mission

James E. Plueddemann

Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018
(xi +156 pages, ISBN 978-0-8308-5221-5, $20.00)

Reviewed By

Eduardo C. Fernández, SJ
Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University

As a Roman trained missiologist who teaches intercultural pedagogy and ministry, as someone who grew up on the US-Mexican border and who has worked in religious formation since the age of twelve, I was drawn to this book's title and cover design, a world map on a chalk board. I am blessed with a large number of international graduate students, most of whom will be returning to their home countries or will be called to work internationally. The book's title seemed a tall order – but it did not in the least disappoint.

Penned by a seasoned missiologist and professor who knows how to draw educationally from his extensive international travel and work abroad, the work is exceptionally readable, one which strives to integrate course content, or knowledge of the biblical tradition, with contemporary human experience, or alternatively phrased, an appreciation for an ongoing dialogue between a course being content-centered and student-centered. Plueddemann does this especially by engaging Edward Hall's highly effective categories of "high and low context" styles of communication, together with Geert and Gert Jan Hofstede's development of power distance. Filled with examples and anecdotes, not only from his own teaching but also from other practitioners appropriately placed at the end of every chapter, he makes a strong case for paying attention to biblical pedagogy, one which is profoundly experiential and cognizant of diverse contexts. His sources are carefully selected so as not to overwhelm the reader with jargon and very applicable to those wishing to respectfully do global Christian mission in a way in which Bible and culture inform each other, especially in contexts which are much more communal than our U.S. contexts. His brief inclusion of key learning theorists such as Piaget, Lewis, Dewey, MacDonald, and Freire show their continued relevance, and provide a necessary bibliography for further study.

It is not often that we find good pedagogical material specifically aimed at teaching theology or religion, so this little gem is a welcome one, a work carefully tailored to shifting contexts, learning styles, and contemporary media globalization. Much to my amazement, Plueddemann's tools can be applied to a variety of educational tasks such as teaching language, preaching, summer camp work, Sunday school, mentoring and coaching, and even parenting. His appreciation of the teaching potential of novels and other forms of art provides ways in which teachers unfamiliar with local contexts can begin to enter these learners' worlds. *Teaching across Cultures'* ecumenical sensibilities, similarly, such as the inclusion of the work of Thomas H. Groome, well-known in Catholic educational circles, makes it a useful text beyond the Protestant world.

Will I assign this text? Definitely! My own use of some of the biblical and anthropological tools he cites will be enhanced by his examples of how they can be applied to educational and pastoral settings, not only to those which demand intercultural sensitivity, but even to those which we think we already understand.

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THE WABASH CENTER JOURNAL ON TEACHING

BOOK REVIEW

Creating a Data-Informed Culture in Community Colleges: A New Model for Educators

Brad C. Phillips and Jordan E. Horowitz

Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2017
(204 pages, ISBN 978-1-68253-087-0, $60.00)

Reviewed By

James R. Wilson
Independent Researcher
Fargo, North Dakota

Armed with strong backgrounds in institutional research and effective educational leadership, Phillips and Horowitz provide educators with an excellent resource for improving academic success with proven data use strategies and practices for community colleges. A central, uniting focus of the book is the need for information to be contextual, "useful, useable, and actionable" (9), and the need to enlist the widest number of stakeholders within its ecosystem. Administrators, researchers, faculty, and staff are encouraged to be co-partners in cultivating academic excellence.

Rather than placing data at the center, the authors advocate for a model that places "the use of data" at the center. The book is divided into three sections: (1) "A New Model for Data Use," (2) "Putting the Model to Work," and (3) "Case Studies of Data Driven Reform."

The first part outlines a new model for data use that is user-friendly, improves educational instruction, and maximizes student success, combined with intentional adaptation to those it serves. For example, "few educators want to [be] analysts; they want to be provided with useful information and assisted in applying it toward student success" (56). Attention is also given to analytics, behavioral economics, organizational theory and habits, and the role of emotion in decision making.

In the second section, Phillips and Horowitz reveal a data use model that is put to work removing obstacles to student success. Specific consideration is given to leading and lagging indicators and the employment of backward mapping that begins with the identification of lagging indicators or goals. Attention is then refocused on the leading indicators that influence them, and which a college has the ability to control and reshape in proactive ways. Lagging and leading indicators have the ability to switch places from time to time. Scrutiny is also given to disaggregation and how different demographic subpopulations can impact the design of programs, services, and policies. The authors make use of a four stage, continuous improvement approach for use of educational strategies that moves from assessment, to planning, to implementation, to monitoring, and back again to assessment (110). They believe that data should be processed in manageable bites and reflect an institution's unique cultural context and problem areas (176).

When evaluating outcomes of particular programs or services, Phillips and Horowitz call for academic institutions to review all other policies and programs that may or may not have an impact, positively or negatively. When introducing data and discussing it educators need to make sure that the content is real, that they include moments of humor, that they engage with the data, and that it works towards a consensus in decision-making. Resistance is another key factor for community colleges to scrutinize. College staff often bring their "own history of belief and experiences to the process and accept only information that confirms those beliefs" (104). Helping people to move outside their comfort zones and embrace change can assist in creating a positive, data-informed culture.

The last section provides actionable approaches and case studies drawn from community colleges from differing socio-economic and ethnic settings that intentionally choose to embrace a data-informed culture and foster proactive uses of information for student success. A failing institution was among the colleges examined – it had been on the verge of being shut down by state authorities because of dissatisfaction with its academic quality and student success.

This book is more than a guide for interpreting data by academic researchers. It also provides a research-based, comprehensive, and practical approach for improving academic excellence in all areas, and amongst all segments of the college community. This book will help teachers of religion and theology to increase their classroom effectiveness – in lecturing and interacting with students.

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THE WABASH CENTER JOURNAL ON TEACHING

BOOK REVIEW

Educating for Creativity within Higher Education: Integration of Research into Media Practice

Phillip McIntyre, Janet Fulton, Elizabeth Paton, Susan Kerrigan, and Michael Meany

New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018
(xix + 240 pages, ISBN 978-3-319-90673-7, $89.99)

Reviewed By

Andrea Janelle Dickens
Arizona State University

As our students encounter work in what is more and more a gig economy, the authors of this book have been thinking about the implications of such employment for those entering the workforce and also for those who wish to pursue creative endeavors either as full-time or part-time work. The authors focus on creativity as a locus for student and worker resilience and adaptation to changes in global economics.

The first several chapters outline various theories of creativity. It is particularly useful that the authors elaborate on many varied theories of creativity within different academic disciplines and contexts. Chapter 1 includes thinking about creativity within a global context, and how different social, cultural, and political situations affect the development of ideas of what constitutes creativity, who is creative, and how they come to be creative. The authors consider the nature of creative development within both collectivist and individualist views of society. They also consider several religious contexts for the development of creativity, including thinking about humans as divine conduits, both as described in sacred texts (such as the story of Moses) and as the Muses working through artists.

One strength of the early chapters is seeing the deep theory of creativity in a number of fields. In chapters 3 and 4, the authors turn not just to describing theories, but to challenging them, saying that some might misidentify creativity. The authors probe the sociology and social systems that allow certain types of creativity to become dominant in various societies, and which types of creativity are recognized by their societies. The confluence approaches and systems model, which comprise the central chapters of the book, looks at a number of ways in which creativity can fit or allow a person to thrive within a system. The authors highlight various features such as intrinsic motivation, domain relevant skills (such as knowledge of field and necessary technical skills), and creativity relevant skills. An overwhelming strength of this book is how the reader can look through the authors' lenses of multiple disciplines and access their background research, ideas, and the main voices in their fields for others to know, which helps readers understand how these ideas apply in various contexts.

In chapters 5 and 6, the authors turn from a descriptive project to a constructive one, considering how systems approaches can provide guidance for thinking about effective ways to develop creativity in higher education that will provide students and workers with the necessary tools to adapt to new work situations as our economies evolve. The authors then tease out implications and impacts of such a model and its adaptability to other contexts. All these confluence systems are deeply interactive, and recognize the context in which the person has lived and operates. It is here that the book best provides help to scholars and practitioners in theological and religious studies. While the book is written within the context of media studies, it is clear in the second half of the book where these systems approaches could apply to someone who wishes to either research or serve a religious community, and the authors have begun that work of thinking how this model can work in other contexts. In its last chapters, the book provides multiple ideas about how one's context can positively shape the ability to develop and foster community.

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THE WABASH CENTER JOURNAL ON TEACHING

BOOK REVIEW

Implementing Communities of Practice in Higher Education: Dreamers and Schemers

Jacquie McDonald and Aileen Cater-Steel, *editors*

Singapore: Springer, 2017
(xiv + 643 pages, ISBN 978-981-10-2865-6, $145.00)

Reviewed By

Anne-Marie Ellithorpe
Vancouver School of Theology

This edited volume profiles higher education communities of practice, with contributing authors reflecting on their experiences of dreaming, scheming, and implementing communities of practice (CoP) within a variety of higher education contexts. As an elementary teacher turned practical theologian, I am encouraged to see this attentiveness to social learning within higher education. The CoP concept has significant potential for critiquing, enhancing, and transforming teaching and learning practices within religious and theological educational contexts.

It is noteworthy that, despite the current climate in higher education being identified as chilly and non-supportive of collaborative activities (xii), the enthusiastic response to Jacquie McDonald's call for papers exploring the use of CoP for learning and teaching in higher education resulted in two volumes. A more practical focus is evident within this second volume.

The Foreword, written by Etienne and Beverley Wenger-Trayner, provides a helpful overview of the history of the CoP concept. CoP theory is identified as having moved through three phases, from the community defining learning, to learning defining the community, to the consideration of a broader landscape of practice, acknowledging learning taking place at the boundaries between communities of practice as well as within them (viii). Theological educators will benefit from considering the relevance of each of these phases.

The volume is divided into four parts. Part I consists of case studies. Amongst these first seven chapters, the more generalizable are certainly relevant to teachers of religion and theology. These include the first chapter, with its focus on the use of CoP to support the capacity development of supervisors of HDR students, and the fourth chapter, with its focus on the practice of generous scholarship and collegiality through academic writing retreats. Here Sally Stewart Knowles advocates for attentiveness to the *actual* practices and processes that lead to publication. Noting the proven value of writing retreats, Knowles implies that the communities fostered by such retreats must move from fringe status to becoming an integral part of a research environment (78). The sixth chapter, with its focus on collaborative autoethnography and decoloniality, may also prove invaluable in terms of researcher preparation in various contexts.

Part II focuses on curriculum development. Here theological educators may particularly resonate with an emphasis on "transformational approaches to professional learning" (161) within chapter eight and the interdisciplinary focus on transformative education and sustainability within chapter thirteen.

Theological educators and students will benefit from considering the various student-focused CoP within Part III. Doctoral students may particularly engage with the development of informal organic networks outlined in chapter fourteen. Variations on the *Equity Buddies* concept outlined in chapter seventeen may be valuable for supporting first-year students within theological colleges.

Finally, the focus within Part IV on virtual CoP will be of relevance to those engaging students in quality learning experiences through online teaching, learning, and research. Themes that emerge through these chapters include the organic nature of communities and the fostering of a culture of collaboration.

Given that some contributors make extensive use of acronyms, readers unfamiliar with these acronyms may need to engage in the discipline of slow reading. While a final summary chapter reviewing and discussing key themes and findings that emerged throughout these papers would enrich this work, educators will nevertheless benefit from focusing on those chapters most relevant to their contexts. Overall, religious and theological education readers are likely to glean inspiration, ideas, and implementation strategies that contribute to learning with and from one another in today's isolating yet interconnected world.

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THE WABASH CENTER JOURNAL ON TEACHING

BOOK REVIEW

Higher Education and Social Justice: The Transformative Potential of University Teaching and the Power of Educational Paradox

Leonie Rowan

Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019
(ix + 141 pages, ISBN 978-3-030-05245-4, $54.99)

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At a recent workshop on "Diversity, Civility, and the Liberal Arts," I found myself in the company of faculty and staff teams from small colleges and universities around the United States who find themselves, like Leonie Rowan, "motivated by a desire to create university contexts in which diverse learners feel themselves to be included, valued, and safe" (1). This desire names the telos, or end, towards which critical, liberative pedagogy aims – freedom. Unlike the Aristotlean defense of the liberal arts as education suitable for free persons (read: male, property-owning citizens), Rowan's notion of freedom extends to all learners, especially those whose participation in higher education has been constrained by the unjust dynamics of the sociohistorical contexts in which they happen to be born. Rowan argues that education can be transformational when the decision-making processes in higher education – from curriculum and syllabus design to admissions policies and the student support portfolio – begin with the question: "For whose freedom – in whose interests – do we, now, labor?" (4). It is an important question that suggests that not all student-centric approaches lead to models of student-as-customer and higher education as a private good.

For readers who have followed debates about diversity and inclusion in higher education since at least the 1990s, the terrain Rowan is covering and the companions along the way will likely be familiar – notably, the relationship centered, liberative philosophies of Paulo Freire, bell hooks, and Parker Palmer. Like many social currents today, it is difficult to avoid a sense of déjà vu when reading about education and "its fundamentally constructed and negotiated nature" (16) and the need for academics to embrace "the idea that language is a site of struggle" (18). The key move Rowan makes is the attempt to get underneath these now familiar discursive moves in order to understand "what it actually, really, feels like to study within a university classroom" (15). In so doing, she sides with social justice theorists like Nancy Fraser whose notion of participative parity juxtaposes classical questions of social justice as distributive justice with questions related to recognition and representation: "do people have the opportunity to participate in an environment on an equal footing" (14)?

The middle chapters demonstrate how pedagogical decisions that flow from notions like participative parity have the potential to transform student engagement. Empirical evidence for this potential is drawn largely from Rowan's own classroom experience educating future teachers from diverse backgrounds in an Australian university. The data sets consist of student course and instructor evaluations as well as brief "doorstop" interviews with students, most of which confirm what she highlights in the scholarly literature about student engagement and diverse learners. These chapters would, in the end, make much better stand-alone scholarship of teaching and learning articles, offering insights from her own successes and failures to create the type of classroom space she desires. In a telling example of the challenges of actualizing this type of space from chapter four – for me, the strongest section of the book – Rowan describes what she refers to as "one of the most appalling lessons I have ever taught" (115). She acknowledges that in her attempt to empower diverse learners with a lens for critically interpreting past discrimination against First Nations people, she inadvertently opened the door to "inappropriate and offensive language." The effect was immediate: the goal of a charged but hospitable environment (one of Palmer's educational paradoxes) devolved into something "destructive and frightening." Despite her extensive background and skills as a facilitator of difficult dialogues, she acknowledges that this episode created fissures in the class that could not be overcome – indeed, "several of the participants never returned to the class again" (115).

What is most striking about this example in the context of her overall argument is the short shrift she gives it. Offered under the heading "A Summary and a Pause," she relates this anecdote in the space of a page or two, as a kind of aside. Yet, for me, this anecdote is at the heart of her project, illustrative of the pitfalls of liberative pedagogies that fail to adequately acknowledge the priority of her other pedagogical concern: relationships. She concludes the anecdote with an apology to all the students involved, and in this gesture – as well as the telling of the anecdote itself – Rowan reveals herself to be the kind of caring,

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reflective, intentional pedagogue needed to hold educational paradoxes in creative tension and to resist conflating "giving students an opportunity to have their individual voices" and "anything goes" (116). Yet, the reader is left wondering what she would do differently next time? The evidence she has gathered from years of student evaluations and the practical wisdom she has accumulated teaching these topics semester after semester surely has something important to say about how this might be handled, whether in forms of restorative practice for that particular class or decisions she made the next time to create a more "sufficiently hospitable" (116) environment before introducing similar content. Given her primary data sets for the rest of her argument, it may also have been instructive to hear how students processed that experience in their evaluations.

This particular example points to a challenge that has become more acute in recent years as attempts to create participative parity in college classrooms and curriculum have sparked various forms of resistance by those who perceive this type of parity as a threat. While Rowan acknowledges this challenge, the lack of engagement with recent scholarship on concepts like white fragility risks limiting the liberative early insights of luminaries like hooks, Freire, and Palmer. Emerging research on best practices for engaging straight white males as social justice allies on college campuses reveals something about the educational paradox faculty face when introducing issues of social justice in their classrooms – environments that help some diverse learners feel valued and safe may have the opposite effect on other diverse learners (e.g., Vianden 2018). Rowan alludes to this paradox when she coins the term "furiety," which she refers to as an approach that recognizes, on the one hand, multiple dimensions of diversity including individual differences within traditional categories (e.g., race) and, on the other hand, "a commitment to intellectually charged activities approached through pedagogical variety" (87). Furiety opens a way into a deeper analysis of the example above. More importantly, for those of us who struggle daily to live into the question "For whose freedom – in whose interests – do we, now, labor," Rowan's further development of the term may encourage us to respond with greater integrity: "All of my students."

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