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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

There are a few articles I want to especially call your attention to in this issue of the journal.

First of all we're publishing a meta-level "Conversation on the Scholarship of Teaching," (Pearson, Kwok, and Gallagher 2020) which was recorded (transcribed and edited) during the final session of the Wabash Center's 2017-18 Colloquy on Writing the Scholarship of Teaching (2020b). Over the previous year, each of the Colloquy participants had been developing their own essay on a topic in the scholarship of teaching religion and theology. The Conversation begins with reflections on the scholarly peer review process, but quickly expands out to debates about the contours of the scholarship on teaching, and the value of this literature—to authors and to readers—for cultivating a successful teaching practice. Interested readers might want to also take a look at the "Conversation with Maryellen Weimer" (Weimer 2020) in the January issue, a wide ranging discussion of how the Wabash journal fits within the broad range of genres and journals that constitute the scholarship of teaching.

Secondly, I want to call your attention to the Forum on James Cone (1938-2018), the founder of black liberation theology (Editor 2020). Andrea White, a member of the journal's editorial board and associate professor of theology and culture at Union Theological Seminary convened a panel of some of his recent students after his death in 2018. Their essays speak to his power in the classroom and the transformational impact he had on his students. Again, interested readers might want to take a look at the "Forum on the Teaching Legacy of Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon" (Kwok 2020) published by her former students in the January issue of this journal.

And then thirdly, we are delighted to be publishing three short essays on critical incidents in teaching (Pearson 2020) submitted in response to the journal's call for papers. A "critical incident" is a memorable, significant, or unexpected moment in the classroom. Subjecting such experiences to careful critical analysis can reveal important facets of the purposes and practices of teaching. Alison Downie's essay (2020) discusses a student's aggressively disrespectful disruption of her classroom, which cascaded into a campus-wide controversy that got picked up by the national social media of the Alt-Right. Eunyung Lim (2020) unpacks the different cultural assumptions about language learning that inform her students' experience in her "Greek for Ministry" classroom. And Nermeen Mouftah (2020) analyzes how, with all the attention appropriately given to Islamophobia, Islamophilia too can provide its own challenges in the classroom.

We publish three one-page Teaching Tactics in this issue. Anthony Keddie (2020) makes the case for assigning self-care journals at a public research university. Eric Thurman (2020) offers a suggestion on how to give students traction in the "definition of religion" discussion. And Kent Eilers (2020) describes a clever method for teaching virtue theory through what he calls "formation experiments" that give students embodied familiarity with virtue theory's approach.

At the top of the table of contents we feature three articles that together canvas a broad variety of teaching contexts and purposes. There's an article on using avatars in an undergraduate course on Early Christianity (by Laura Dingeldein, Jeffrey Wheatley, and Lily Stewart [2020]). There's an article on teaching information literacy, co-authored by a professor and librarian (Marianne Delaporte Kabir and Sanjyot Pia Walawalkar [2020]), applying a theory of "metaliteracy" that views students as creators as well as consumers of information. And there's a case study by Andrew R. H. Thompson (2020) of a hybrid online-residential program, which is particularly apt for the "hybrid" bi-vocational priests and deacons who attend the program while continuing in their current vocations (and are thus often unable to commit to full-time residential study).

And finally, we're happy to be publishing reviews of books on a wide range of recent publications on teaching and learning in higher education, with a special focus on theological education and religious studies whenever they become available. Once these reviews are published in the journal, they also become available on the Wabash Center's website (2020a) where they are integrated with the book reviews we've been publishing for the past twenty years and linked-to from our vast teaching resources collection (Wabash Center 2020c).

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ARTICLE

Historical Thinking with Avatars in an Undergraduate Course on Early Christianity

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ABSTRACT

History simulations have been shown to promote student learning in classrooms throughout higher education. In an undergraduate course on the New Testament and early Christianity, we sought to foster student learning by having students participate in history simulations that involved the use of fictitious personas known as avatars. In this paper we describe the avatar activities in these simulations, and we examine the effects of our simulations on students' abilities in "historical thinking": that is, engaging in the interpretive practices that historians use to reconstruct the past. We argue that our avatar simulations helped our students build upon, refine, and deepen their abilities in historical thinking in small but perceptible ways. We end by noting the extent to which our findings align with research on the use of history simulations and by identifying ways to develop our project moving forward.

KEYWORDS

simulations, historical thinking, early Christianity, learning, higher education

Introduction

An ailing grandmother guided by divine revelations, a pickpocket with a penchant for the circus, an ambitious government official and his pious wife—these were just a few of the ancient Romans interested in joining the Christ movement during the first and second centuries CE.[1] Though these figures are largely unknown to scholars of early Christianity, there is a good reason for their obscurity: they were fictitious personas developed by students in an undergraduate course on the New Testament and early Christian history. This "Introduction to the New Testament" course, which we taught at Northwestern University in Winter 2018, focused on the people, events, and texts of the first and second centuries CE that shaped the Christ

1 There are a number of people we would like to thank for helping us with this project: participants in the "Academic Teaching and Biblical Studies" panel at the Society of Biblical Literature's annual meeting in 2017, who provided us with the opportunity to discuss our newly created avatar activities; Derek L. Davis, whose great insights and support helped us further develop our simulations; Mira Balberg and our anonymous peer reviewers from *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching*, whose invaluable feedback greatly improved our earlier drafts of this article; and our students, who trusted us enough to breathe life into their avatars and this project.

movement into the religion now known as Christianity.[2] During this quarter-long course, students were introduced to the New Testament texts that constitute our main evidence for early Christianity, and to the interpretive practices that historians use to reconstruct Christian beginnings.[3] In order to encourage students to think critically about how everyday people in antiquity would have reacted to the messages promulgated by early Christian authors and cultural producers, we asked students to inhabit ancient Mediterranean characters, or "avatars," during a series of activities centered around two historically based simulations.[4] Transforming our classroom first into the province of Galatia in the mid-first century CE, and later into the bustling city of Rome in the mid-second century, students pondered and debated their avatars' reactions to various leaders of the early Christ movement, as well as their interactions with other avatars.

In this article we examine the effects of these avatar simulations on our students' abilities to think historically about the formation and spread of early Christianity. We begin by discussing the main purpose of our avatar simulations, which was to promote our students' historical thinking through an intensely granular study of Christian beginnings, with a focus on the actions of everyday people. After defining historical thinking and briefly outlining the ways in which undergraduate students might apply such thinking to the study of early Christianity, we provide a description of the avatar activities (AAs) themselves. Then, for the sake of brevity and clarity, we analyze students' engagement in three very specific practices of historical thinking during our avatar simulations. These practices are: (1) identifying the range of religious options available and appealing to potential Christ movement recruits in the first and second centuries CE; (2) examining the ways in which social, economic, and political facets of Roman culture conditioned inhabitants' religious activities and choices; and (3) recognizing the extent to which our modern perspectives influence our reconstructions of early Christian history. We argue that our avatar activities helped students in our classroom build upon, refine, and deepen their abilities in these interpretive practices in small but perceptible ways. Finally, we end by noting the extent to which our classroom observations align with scholarship on promoting historical thinking through simulations, and by identifying ways to develop our investigations moving forward.

Goal of the Avatar Activities

A growing body of literature suggests that simulations have positively impacted student learning in classrooms throughout higher education (Hertel and Millis 2002; Vlachopoulos and Makri 2017). Within the field of history specifically, simulations have been shown to promote learning in a variety of ways: simulations energize students, increase student engagement with course material, and build peer community (Arnold 1998; Howard 2017).[5] This is especially evident in studies of the popular program *Reacting to the Past (RTTP)*, with *RTTP* practitioners documenting increases in student energy and engagement in classrooms that utilize these role-immersion games (Carnes 2014; Higbee 2009; Webb and Engar 2016; Weidenfeld and Fernandez 2017).[6] But these are not the only benefits to student learning that may be accrued through participation in history simulations. Scholars have also argued that history simulations can promote historical thinking among students (Beidatsch and Broomhall 2010; McCall 2012; Olwell and Stevens 2015; Rantala 2011; Volk 2013).[7] The term "historical thinking," though variously defined, is regularly used within American scholarship to refer to the goal of history education (Seixas 2017; Van Drie and Van Boxtel 2008; Wineburg 2001). In this paper we define historical thinking as the act of engaging in the interpretive practices used by historians to reconstruct the past. These interpretive practices include, but are not limited to: comparing primary sources' descriptions of a past event, assessing authors' interests, historically contextualizing the actions of people from the past, empathizing with historical people, and identifying the limitations of our own perspectives.[8]

2 Our roles in the course were as follows: Laura Dingeldein was the primary instructor, Lily Stewart was the teaching assistant, and Jeffrey Wheatley was the research assistant for our project (though he had served as a teaching assistant for the course during the prior academic year).

3 Students were also introduced to two non-canonical writings during the course: *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas* and *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*.

4 We adopted the use of the term "avatar" from Volk (2013).

5 Cf. Baranowski and Weir (2010), who argued that students' learning during role-playing simulations may be affected by the types of roles that students play.

6 *RTTP*, developed by Mark Carnes in the 1990s, is a series of immersive, historical role-playing games that take place over multiple class sessions. Students, using a game-book that contains historical texts and contextual information, work to persuade one another of a particular viewpoint. In many *RTTP* games, students are assigned one of three roles: (1) they represent a historical leader, (2) they represent a member of a partisan faction, or (3) they are "indeterminate," in that they choose a viewpoint at the end of the simulation.

7 Though most scholars cited here do not use the term "historical thinking" to describe the sort of learning that is promoted among their students through participation in history simulations, they do describe students engaging in and cultivating practices that we consider to be components of historical thinking: namely, empathizing with and historically contextualizing the actions of people from the past.

8 There is no exact consensus on the acts that constitute historical thinking, or the key concepts associated with these acts, though the terms "contextualization," "corroboration," "sourcing," "historical perspective taking," and "historical empathy" are frequently used to refer to key dimensions of historical thinking (Lee and Ashby 2001; Seixas 2017; Wineburg 1991; Yeager and Foster 2001).

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Our major goal in using avatar simulations in our classroom was to develop students' abilities in historical thinking, particularly as this act is applied to the study of everyday people's roles in the formation and spread of Christianity in the first and second centuries CE. Prior to and in between our avatar activities, our students spent much of their time learning to think historically about the New Testament and other ancient Christian texts, which constitute scholars' main evidence for the early Christ movement. Our course lectures, discussions, and readings were aimed at teaching students how to interpret early Christian writings within the context of first and second century Mediterranean culture, assess early Christian authors' interests, and corroborate these authors' claims. When students participated in our avatar activities, however, we wanted them to build upon, refine, and deepen their engagement in such practices by adjusting the object of their analysis, moving from examinations of texts and literate specialists to investigations of the people for whom these writings were produced.

During our simulations, our classroom was populated with the unknown, everyday people who might have joined the Christ movement, rather than the prominent figures who wrote and have been written about in the texts that survive to us. This was a rather significant departure from many of the history simulations described in the aforementioned literature, in which students inhabited known historical people and prominent figures from the past.[9] We asked students to inhabit everyday people, rather than well-known leaders and textual producers like the apostle Paul or the priest Irenaeus, because we wanted students to focus on how the Christ movement might have developed—or not developed—on the ground. That is, we wanted students to explore the early Christ movement as it might have existed in the mode of everyday, lived religion, which has become a popular topic of investigation in the field of religious studies. This emphasis on a range of individualized ancient personas and hypothetical communities allowed us to explore how religious movements shape and are shaped by the everyday people who live them.

We hoped that students would apply the historical knowledge and interpretive skills that they had acquired during textual analysis to their examinations of the religious actions of these everyday characters. For example, we imagined that students might: assess the effects of their avatars' historical context on their avatars' religious perspectives, recognize the vast differences between their avatars' ancient historical context and their own, and reflect on the ways in which their modern perspectives affect their interpretations of ancient people and events.[10] The goal of our avatar activities, then, was not to arrive at solid conclusions about how and why people joined the early Christ movement. Rather, our goal was to cultivate historically disciplined imaginations among our students by deepening their engagement in the interpretive practices that expert historians use to reconstruct early Christian beginnings.[11]

At the conclusion of our avatar activities, we expected to see small, incremental improvements in students' historical thinking, rather than grand leaps in abilities. There were several reasons for this. First, many students who enroll in introductory undergraduate courses are neophytes in historical thinking, and most have never applied this sort of thinking to the study of religion.[12] Developing expertise in historical reconstruction takes years, and viewing sacred texts as products of particular times and places often requires students to question deeply ingrained beliefs regarding the timelessness of scripture. Second, most students who take introductory courses in the New Testament are just beginning to learn about ancient Roman culture, and they are not well versed in the past nineteen hundred years of Christian history. This means that such students are unlikely to fully understand the ancient Mediterranean culture in which early Christ followers were embedded, and they are inclined to fill in these gaps in their knowledge with modern ideas and constructs. These are major impediments to historical contextualization. Third, students' religious commitments also frequently obscure historical contextualization: students who

9 Consider, for example, *RTTP*. *RTTP* games do include roles for students that represent historically plausible people who were not elite or well known in the historical record, but these roles are often part of a generalized faction advocating for one viewpoint over another. Rather than asking students to reason and speak from the position of a generalized faction, our simulations asked students to base their reactions on a very particular perspective—that of their avatar.

10 Creators of other role-playing simulations of early Christian history have articulated similar goals, though they do not explicitly frame these goals in terms of historical thinking. Finger (1993) and Finger and McClain (2013), whose handbooks are intended to aid others in simulating early Christ assemblies in Rome and Corinth, describe the goal of their simulations as a better understanding of what the apostle Paul meant in his own historical period (Finger 1993, 17). Howard (2017), who created and uses *The Jesus Game* in her classrooms, observes that her simulation promotes deep learning among her students, increases students' motivation, and encourages students to sympathize with different points of view.

11 Here we were influenced by the words of Smith (2013, 134): "Collegiate education depends on, and trains for, the capacity to assume, simultaneously, differing points of view in order to engage in the interpretative enterprise and to reach some consequential decision. It is here, in such an in-between, that guessing and valuing finally come together. At times, this process may produce the 'right answers'; at times, our discussions and arguments will be frustrating and inconclusive; at times, we will appear to have wasted our time. None of these is an inappropriate outcome, each is the precondition of the other. . . . What we celebrate in college is not rectitude. What we honor, above all else, are playful acts of imagination in the sense stipulated by Wallace Stevens when he wrote, 'Imagination is the power of the mind over the possibility of things.'"

12 In fact, students in our classroom sometimes assumed that religion is wholly exempt from critical, historical analysis. This is in large part due to the pervasive assumptions within American culture that (1) religion is fundamentally about personal beliefs, and beliefs are unassailable; and (2) religion is unchanging, divinely mandated dogma. Within our classroom, however, religion was studied as a mode of human activity, and categorizing it as such rendered it subject to humanist inquiry.

self-identify as Christian sometimes presume similarities between themselves and ancient Christians, and they also often believe that Christianity succeeded because of its promotion of an ultimate truth. Given all of this, then, we did not expect our students to achieve great expertise in historical thinking through our avatar activities. We did, however, hope that our avatar activities would enable students to refine, expand, and deepen their abilities in historical thinking in small but noticeable ways.

Description of the Avatar Activities

The course in which our avatar activities took place was nine weeks long, and there were forty-eight students enrolled. All enrolled students engaged in the avatar activities described below, and twenty-nine of these students agreed to participate in our study. In this article we analyze only these twenty-nine participants' work.[13]

We began our avatar activities by generating basic biographies for forty-eight different avatars. These basic biographies included the following information for each avatar: name, age, sex (in this case, male or female), social status (freeborn, freed, slave), literacy level (literate or illiterate), and varying degrees of elaboration on the avatar's profession, interests, social relationships, and physical health. We did our best to recreate among our community of avatars the demographics of early imperial Rome, particularly with regard to literacy levels and social statuses. Below are three examples of the basic avatar biographies that we provided to students:

Malchio

- eighteen year old male, slave, illiterate
- manages a local tavern at the behest of his owners
- often regaled with stories from customers about their trips to consult with the local sibyl

Aurelia

- twenty-six year old female, freeborn, literate
- married to Publius, a *quaestor*
- has two young children
- regularly commemorates her dead parents by pouring out libations at their graves
- friends with a woman named Eirene, who has children around the same age

Pratonikos

- thirty-three year old male, freed, literate
- decently educated (possesses basic reading and writing skills)
- a scribe
- copies texts in the library of his former owner
- in a romantic relationship with a slave, Ariston, who is owned by Pratonikos's former master

We did not assign religious identifications (such as Jew, Christian, or Mithras devotee) to any of the avatars that we created. Rather, we framed religion-related biographical tidbits in terms of practices and interests: for example, an avatar might be initiated into a mystery cult or interested in prophecy. We did this because we suspected that our students would interpret religious identifications as fixed, static, and immutable, and as indicative of adherence to normative systems of beliefs and practices. Such an understanding of religious identification would have been problematic in two major ways. First, both in antiquity and today, religious identifications are not fixed, and they do not typically result in perfect adherence to prescribed norms. Second, students would be given the possibility of joining new religious movements in our simulations, and thus we did not want students to presume that their avatars had fixed religious identifications.

13 We received consent from participants to analyze and cite their work in this study. Participants have been assigned numerical identifications in order to protect their privacy. Avatars have also been given pseudonyms in order to protect the privacy of participants. This study was determined to be exempt by Northwestern University's IRB (STU00206565).

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In the first week of our course, we randomly assigned avatars to students by having each student blindly choose a slip of paper that contained the biographical information of an avatar. Then, in the third week of our course, students were asked to elaborate on their avatars' lives and religious practices in a one-page paper that we called the "Avatar Description." In these descriptions, students supplemented their avatars' basic biographies with information about daily life and religion during the early Roman imperial period that they learned from readings and lectures during the first three weeks of our course. Some students chose to write as omniscient, third person narrators about their avatars' lives, while others chose to actively inhabit their avatars in their descriptions.[14]

After working on and producing Avatar Descriptions in the second and third weeks of our course, students engaged in Simulations A and B during the fifth and ninth weeks of the course, respectively.[15] Each of these simulations took place over the span of one or two class sessions.[16] Prior to each simulation, we presented students with a historically based scenario regarding participation in the early Christ movement. For Simulation A, which took place during our unit on the apostle Paul's authentic letters, students were asked to respond to the following prompt:

> Your avatar has been attending an assembly of Christ followers that meets in a Galatian town in the year 60 CE. During your visits to this assembly, you have heard two of Paul's letters read aloud (known in modernity as Galatians and 1 Corinthians). Your assembly has also been visited by one of Paul's opponents, a leader of the circumcision faction named Alexander. After learning about these two different gospels—one promoted by Paul, one promoted by Alexander— your assembly is now gathering to discuss what to do moving forward.[17]

For Simulation B, which took place after students had studied the canonical gospels, Acts of the Apostles, Revelation, and the pseudonymous Pauline epistles, students' avatars were located nearly a full century beyond the time period that they inhabited in our first simulation. Students were asked to respond to the following prompt for Simulation B:

> The avatars in your discussion section constitute one of several early Christian assemblies meeting in Rome in the year 150 CE. Recently, three Christian experts—a shipbuilder from Pontus, a priest from Smyrna, and a philosopher from Alexandria—have arrived in the city, and they are attempting to gain followers from the local assemblies. These Christian experts have visited your assembly, and they have each argued vociferously in favor of their version of Christianity and their canons. [Students were given a handout that contained the proclamations of the Christian shipbuilder, priest, and philosopher.][18] Your assembly has decided to discuss what to do moving forward (in discussion section). Then, your assembly will venture into the marketplace and attempt to convince other assemblies of the rightness of your decision (in our last class).

In the days leading up to each simulation, we asked students to think through their avatars' responses to the aforementioned scenarios and write down their thoughts in a "Pre- Avatar Activity (AA) Reflection." In these pre-simulation reflections we asked students to respond to the following questions: "What will your avatar do in response to the scenario that has been provided, and why will your avatar respond in this way?" Students then came to class and engaged in the simulations, inhabiting their avatars and navigating the scenario with their peers. One of the instructors—either the main instructor or the teaching assistant—played the role of narrator during the simulations. The instructor-narrator largely removed herself from the simulation, contributing only occasionally by elaborating on or changing aspects of the simulation in order to move the discussion forward. Immediately following each simulation, we held in-class debriefings with the students, in which we discussed what happened and what students learned during the simulation.

14 While we did provide students some time during discussion sections to share their Avatar Descriptions with their peers, we have made this sharing of Avatar Descriptions a greater focus in subsequent iterations of this course so as to make students more aware of the social relationships among their avatars.

15 We also asked students to think with their avatars in contexts beyond the simulations. For instance, during class discussions on *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* and the pastoral epistles, we asked students to consider how their avatars would have reacted to these texts' key themes and messages about gender and sex. These sorts of avatar activities, though, will not be discussed in this paper.

16 This is one major difference between our avatar activities and *RTTP* games, the latter of which occur over a period of several weeks. In subsequent iterations of our course, we have chosen to conduct both Simulation A and B during a single discussion section. Our goal in conducting the simulations in smaller class settings was to provide students with more opportunities to contribute during the simulation.

17 Rather than directly asking students to choose among Paul, Alexander, and the Roman religious practices in which they engaged, we tried to frame the scenario in a way that allowed students as much flexibility as possible in their reactions.

18 In this handout the shipbuilder proclaimed that the God of Jewish scriptures was a cruel and jealous God, and he denounced the use of Jewish scriptures in the worship of Jesus. He considered Paul's letters and the Gospel of Luke to be authoritative, and he gave money to a local assembly of Christ followers. The priest, on the other hand, promoted a canon that included the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, as well as Paul's letters, Acts of the Apostles, and Revelation. Finally, the philosopher encouraged avatars to accept his message because he studied with a man named Theudas, who claimed to be a student of Paul. This philosopher endorsed a five-gospel canon—Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the Gospel of Truth—and he also considered other apostolic letters to be authoritative. The shipbuilder, priest, and philosopher were modeled after Marcion, Irenaeus, and Valentinus, respectively. Students, however, were informed of these connections to historical figures only after the simulation had concluded.

We also took this time to address any historical inaccuracies that we and the students observed during the simulations.[19] After the debriefings, each student wrote a "Post-AA Reflection." In these Post-AA Reflections students recorded how their thoughts had changed as a result of the simulation. Specifically, we asked them to record their responses to the following questions: "Did your participation in this simulation change how you envision your avatar responding to the scenario that you were given? If so, how? What sorts of changes would you make to your Pre-AA Reflection now that you have participated in this simulation?"[20]

The Avatar Descriptions, Pre-AA Reflections, and Post-AA Reflections of participants in our study, as well as our typed transcripts of our participants' contributions during simulations themselves, constitute the data examined in our analysis below. I recorded a lecture on each theological topic and made viewing it, along with readings, part of the assigned work prior to class time.

Analysis of the Avatar Activities

In what follows, we assess our twenty-nine participants' engagement in three specific practices that we consider part and parcel of historical thinking as it is applied to the study of early Christianity:

1. Identifying the range of religious options available and appealing to potential Christ movement recruits in the first and second centuries CE.

2. Examining the ways in which social, economic, and political facets of Roman imperial culture conditioned inhabitants' religious activities and choices.

3. Recognizing the extent to which our modern perspectives influence our reconstructions of early Christian history.

These are not the only historical thinking practices in which we observed students engaging during our simulations, but they were among the most basic and vital aspects of historical thinking that we could reasonably expect our students to practice and develop during our simulations. The quality of our participants' engagement in these three activities, as well as the duration of their engagement, served as evidence of the extent to which students were building upon, refining, and deepening their abilities in historical thinking. We will analyze each of these practices in turn.

Examination of Practice #1

The first practice noted above—identifying the range of religious options available and appealing to potential Christ movement recruits in the first and second centuries CE—is an act of historical contextualization. In the periods and places of Roman antiquity in which we situated our students' avatars, there were numerous religious options for Mediterranean inhabitants, including traditional forms of Roman religion and opposing factions within early Christianity. The authority and legitimacy of various forms of Roman religion fluctuated according to time and location, but the worship of Jesus Christ was certainly not the norm within the Roman Empire until later periods of history. We repeatedly emphasized to students in lectures, readings, and discussions that early Christianity was an emerging religious movement in the first and second centuries CE. Early Christianity did not wield the clout that Christianity does in the modern United States. Moreover, we often stressed that no faction within the early Christ movement carried a stable identification as orthodox in the first and second centuries CE. In order to historically contextualize their avatars' actions, students needed to situate their avatars in this ancient religious landscape, rather than operate with the misconception that Christianity was the predominant religious movement of the period.

Our role-playing simulations—more so than course readings, lectures, and discussions—seemed to help many participants identify a wider range of religious options for their avatars, and become more open to the appeal of non-Christian religious options for their avatars.[21] This is best demonstrated through an examination of the changes in avatars' religious choices that occurred after each simulation. The vast majority of participants embraced Christian options for their avatars when they first encountered our simulation

19 These debriefings were modeled after the "postmortem" sessions of other history simulations, like those in *RTTP* games.

20 We purposefully posed open-ended questions in our Pre- and Post-AA Reflections: we did not want to overly determine the sorts of responses that students might have to our simulations, and we did not want students to adapt their responses based on what they perceived our expectations to be.

21 It is worth emphasizing that participants themselves did not become more open to the appeal of non-Christian religious options; rather, participants' avatars were becoming more open to these options.

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prompts, and a good portion of these participants gravitated toward the Christian position that was deemed orthodox in later periods.[22] After our simulations, however, avatars' overall interest in the Christ movement decreased markedly. For example, before Simulation A, twenty-three out of twenty-eight participants reported in their Pre-AA Reflections that their avatars would choose to follow a leader within the Christ movement: twenty stated that they would certainly or likely follow the apostle Paul (whose teachings were deemed orthodox by later Christians), and three stated that they would certainly or likely follow Alexander (the fictitious leader of the Christian faction that opposed Paul and was deemed heretical by later Christians). After engaging in Simulation A, however, twelve of the twenty-three participants who had originally chosen to follow a Christian faction decided to weaken or abandon their commitment to the Christ movement. Instead of joining the Christ movement, these participants stated that their avatars would either: (1) follow the religion of their husbands or masters; (2) worship traditional Roman deities; or (3) embrace indecision, open-mindedness, and/or multiple options (see Table 1).

Table 1: Religious Choices Before and After Simulation A[23]

Religious Option Chosen	Before Sim A	After Sim A
Paul's gospel [later Christian orthodoxy][24]	20 (Participants #1, #2, #3, #4, #6, #7, #8, #9, #11, #12, #13, #14, #15, #17, #19, #21, #24, #26, #27, #29)	9 (#1, #4, #9, #11, #12, #14, #20, #24, #26)
Alexander's gospel [later Christian heresy][25]	3 (#20, #25, #28)	2 (#8, #27)
Master's/husband's decision	3 (#10, #16, #18)[26]	6 (#2, #10, #13, #18, #25, #29)
Traditional Roman religion	2 (#5, #22)	7 (#5, #6, #16, #19, #17, #22, #28)
Indecision, open-mindedness, and/or multiple options chosen	0	4 (#3, #7, #15, #21)

We found a similar pattern of changes after Simulation B. Before Simulation B, twenty-four out of twenty-eight participants stated that their avatar would follow a Christian faction: twelve chose to follow the Christian priest (whose views were deemed orthodox in later periods of Christian history), nine chose the Christian philosopher (later deemed heretical), and three chose the Christian shipbuilder (later deemed heretical). After Simulation B, however, avatars' commitments to Christian options declined: now only fifteen out of twenty-eight participants stated that their avatar would join a Christian faction. Seven participants whose avatars had originally chosen to follow a Christian faction now either did not make direct statements on the matter of joining a religious movement, or they expressed that their avatar was undecided, more open-minded, and/or committed to multiple religious options. Three participants whose avatars had originally chosen to follow a Christian faction now expressed their avatars' commitment to the religion of their masters or husbands, or to traditional Roman religion. Only one person whose avatar had chosen a non-Christian option prior to our simulation chose to join a Christian faction after engaging in the simulation (see Table 2).

22 Most participants' Avatar Descriptions had highlighted their avatars' commitment to non-Christian religious options, so it was interesting to see that many avatars expressed great interest the Christ movement in their first Pre-AA Reflections.

23 Twenty-eight out of twenty-nine participants engaged in this simulation.

24 Participants placed in this row expressed their avatars' decision to follow Paul as either a certain choice or a favored and likely option.

25 Participants placed in this row expressed their avatars' decision to follow Alexander as either a certain choice or a favored and likely option.

26 Though Participants #10, #16, and #18 stated that they would most likely follow their masters' or husbands' decisions, they all also elaborated on reasons why they would choose to follow Paul if granted autonomy.

Table 2: Religious Choices Before and After Simulation B[27]

Religious Option Chosen	Before Sim B	After Sim B
The priest [later Christian orthodoxy][28]	12 (#2, #11, #14, #15, #16, #19, #20, #23, #24, #25, #26, #27)	7 (#5, #9, #12, #15, #20, #21, #26)
The philosopher [later Christian heresy][29]	9 (#1, #3, #7, #8, #9, #10, #13, #17, #21)	6 (#3, #4, #7, #11, #16, #17)
The shipbuilder [later Christian heresy][30]	3 (#5, #6, #12)	2 (#6, #19)
Master's/husband's decision	0	2 (#1, #13)
Indecision, open-mindedness, multiple options chosen, or unstated	3 (#4, #18, #29)	9 (#2, #8, #10, #14, #18, #23, #24, #27, #29)

Overall, these changes in religious choices suggest that many participants identified a wider range of legitimate and appealing religious options for their avatars after engaging in the simulations. The Post-AA Reflections of eight participants directly address this. After Simulation A, Participants #3, #6, #18, and #28 explicitly claimed that the first simulation enabled them to see that their religious options were not limited to Paul's gospel and the circumcision faction, but also included the worship of Roman deities. For example, Participant #6, playing a freedman who oversaw operations on his former master's farm, wrote the following after engaging in Simulation A:

> In this pre-simulation reflection, I felt like I needed to pick a side and so I went with Paul because he would give me the most flexibility. In the simulation, I witnessed a lot more general distrust and incredulousness about siding either way. It made me reevaluate whether my avatar would be so quick to worship a new god in the first place, especially since worshipping one or two gods his whole life has seemed to go so well for him.

Prior to engaging in our first simulation, Participant #6 felt as though his avatar needed to choose between Paul's gospel and Alexander's gospel. But after hearing the variety of opinions and voices expressed during our first simulation, Participant #6 deviated from his original assumptions about the limits of his avatar's religious options. Our simulations complicated the dichotomy that Participant #6 initially envisioned, helping him to see that there were more than two religious choices available to him. Thus, this student was able to better contextualize his avatar within the ancient Roman world, and to consider a broader range of perspectives within and beyond the burgeoning Christ movement.

Participants #16, #17, #23, and #24 made similar statements after Simulation B. These students wrote in their Post-AA Reflections that their avatars had become more open to the attractiveness of the Christian philosopher's teachings, which today are considered heretical by most Christians. For example, Participant #16, who inhabited an enslaved textile shop manager, opted to switch her avatar's allegiance from the Christian priest to the Christian philosopher after engaging in Simulation B. She wrote:

27 Twenty-eight out of twenty-nine participants engaged in this simulation.

28 Participants placed in this row expressed their avatars' decision to follow the priest as either a certain choice or a favored and likely option.

29 Participants placed in this row expressed their avatars' decision to follow the philosopher as either a certain choice or a favored and likely option.

30 Participants placed in this row expressed their avatars' decision to follow the shipbuilder as either a certain choice or a favored and likely option.

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> After this simulation, I think my avatar would actually be much more open to the philosopher's teachings. This simulation helped me realize that in antiquity, nothing was super familiar. The four Gospels in today's New Testament were still new and unique during antiquity. Since there are other gospels floating around as well, my avatar wouldn't have immediately discredited anything outside the four we know today.

Participant #16 had initially assumed that the religious option that was most familiar to her in the twenty-first century would have also been familiar to her second century avatar. But after engaging in Simulation B and participating in its accompanying debriefing—in which we stressed the lack of a fixed New Testament canon in the second century—Participant #16 realized that she had anachronistically applied her modern perspective regarding the authority of the four-gospel canon to her avatar. It seems that the simulation itself was instructive in this regard, highlighting the ambiguities and complexities in the decision processes that eventually led to a canon of Christian texts. It is also possible that our comments during the debriefing contributed to this student's recognition of her anachronistic views. Regardless of the exact reason for her epiphany, after Simulation B, Participant #16 was able to see that the religious options that were familiar to and authoritative for her did not necessarily hold weight for ancient people, whose religious choices were influenced by a different set of circumstances.

Overall, the evidence provided above suggests that our simulations—more so than our class lectures, readings, or discussions—helped students better identify the range of religious options that would have been available and appealing to their avatars. Although we spent time prior to the avatar activities teaching students about the range of religious options in the Roman Empire and the lack of authority wielded by the Christ movement in the early imperial period, many students were able to more fully realize the implications of these facts for early Christians' religious decision-making through participation in our simulations.

Examination of Practice #2

Practice #2—examining the ways in which social, economic, and political facets of Roman imperial culture conditioned inhabitants' religious activities and choices—is an act of historical perspective taking, which is also often called historical empathy. Religion, understood as a mode of human activity, is always linked to and affected by various social, economic, and political facets of the cultures in which humans are embedded. This is true of religion today, and it was true of religion in antiquity. Thus, in order to productively engage in historical thinking as it applies to the study of early Christianity, students and scholars of the early Christ movement must take into account the ways in which Roman culture affected Romans' religious perspectives and actions.

We observed participants engaging more deeply in Practice #2 as a result of their participation in the simulations, particularly with respect to their examination of the link between social subordination and religious autonomy. At the outset of our avatar activities, the Avatar Description assignment prompted students to consider the effects of their avatars' social station and life experiences on their religious activities. It was not surprising, then, to see participants demonstrating a basic awareness of how the social, economic, and political facets of their avatars' lives conditioned their avatars' religious practices in their Avatar Descriptions. Notably, though, once participants encountered prompts that introduced the option of following Christian leaders, participants had a more difficult time appreciating the ways in which the social, economic, and political facets of their avatars' lives might interact to limit and shape their participation in the Christ movement. Many participants initially declared their avatars' adherence to the Christ movement without much consideration of the effects that their avatars' social relationships, business pursuits, and political interests would have on their commitment to this new religious group. After engaging in the simulations, however, some participants acquired a more thorough understanding of the ways in which their avatars' reactions to the Christ movement would have been affected by such interests and positionalities.

Participants #24 and #5 stand out in this regard. Participant #24 inhabited an avatar named Rufus, who owned a local tavern frequented by other avatars. Rufus enjoyed a good relationship with his wife, who was an initiate of the Eleusinian mysteries, but Rufus was not as fortunate when it came to his physical health. Suffering from frequent back pain, Rufus relied on a gymnastic trainer and the god Asklepios for relief from his injury. Prior to engaging in Simulation A, Participant #24 weighed Rufus's religious options in reference to his wife's interests and his back pain. Eventually, Rufus chose to follow the apostle Paul because this decision would allow him to avoid experiencing the additional pain of circumcision. After engaging in Simulation A, however, Participant #24 noted that there were other aspects of Rufus's life that she needed to take into account when determining Rufus's religious practices: "I could have thought of his social status also, like would his decision on which gospel to follow affect his business at his tavern? Would he have talked about this with Kronion or Felix? (the frequents at his tavern)." Participant #24 carried this realization about Rufus's social situation into her preparation for Simulation B, writing in her Pre-AA Reflection: "Rufus feels like he can influence some people's thought since he is the owner of the tavern and local people tend to respect him greatly." Through her participation in Simulation A, Participant #24 came to

recognize a wider range of social and economic factors that would have influenced her avatar's religious choices.

Participant #5 also arrived at a more thorough and complex understanding of the relationship between his avatar's religious actions and business pursuits over the course of our simulations. Participant #5 inhabited an avatar named Cammilius, who was a middle-aged silversmith and president of a local association of craftsmen. Cammilius made a living selling small figurines of the goddess Artemis. From the start of our activities, Cammilius recognized the effect that his business would have on his religious actions, writing prior to the start of Simulation A:

> Recently I have been hearing about this Christ movement that is gaining followers. I am not happy about this at all. I have already talked with my fellow craftsmen during our local association gatherings. We as craftsman [sic] make a living off of creating shrines of our god Artemis for everyone to buy and enjoy. Since this Christ movement has spread, I have noticed that our business has been shrinking. Not only are we, the craftsman [sic], in danger of losing our business, but our god Artemis is in danger of losing her divine greatness.

Cammilius held this stance throughout Simulation A. At the start of Simulation B, Cammilius remained reluctant to join the Christ movement, knowing full well that it would put an end to his selling of Artemis figurines. But this time, Cammilius also considered adapting his business strategies to fit a new market:

> Recently, I have not been selling many shrines anyways since many people are joining the Christ movement and abandoning their previous gods, so it may be time to join the movement and reconstruct my business. As far as the three men who came to share their ideas, I most closely related to the ship builder from Pontus. Not only is he a fellow craftsmen [sic], like myself, but I liked what he said.

After Simulation B, Cammilius decided to follow the Christian priest because the majority of avatars had decided to do so. His business, though, remained his top priority. As Cammilius explained, he chose to follow the Christian priest because "it is in my business' best interest to agree with the majority." Through our simulations, Participant #5 was confronted with circumstances that prompted him to rethink the ways in which he might navigate his avatar's competing religious and economic interests. This led to a more robust examination of the way in which his avatar's business pursuits might condition and be conditioned by his religious choices.

Though both Participant #24 and Participant #5 chose to examine the links between their avatars' business endeavors and religious practices, one of the links that participants most commonly examined was that between social subordination and religious autonomy. Out of the eighteen participants whose avatars were socially subordinate to a master, patron, or male head-of-household, thirteen participants explicitly examined the ramifications of that relationship for their religious practices at some point during our avatar activities. Moreover, eight of those participants demonstrated an increasing appreciation of such ramifications as our activities progressed. This increasing appreciation can be seen most clearly in the written comments of Participant #13, who inhabited the avatar Aurelia, a young mother married to a wealthy Roman official. When Aurelia entered our first simulation, she recognized that her husband would make important decisions for her, but she also emphasized her desire to have religious autonomy and follow Paul. After engaging in Simulation A, Aurelia wrote that she now would be more likely to obey her husband's ideas than have her own ideas. Several weeks later, prior to Simulation B, Aurelia wrote that she would choose to follow the Christian philosopher, this time omitting reference to her husband. After Simulation B, Aurelia returned to emphasizing the attention that she would pay to her husband's actions: "Seeing that my 'husband' saw things differently, it made me realize that in a historical context, my opinions should probably validate my husband's and not contradict them. I would try to see the situation differently and try to imagine how he would respond to them."

There are two things that we found interesting about Participant #13's examination of the sway that her avatar's husband would hold on her avatar. First, despite the fact that Participant #13 had emphasized Aurelia's lack of religious autonomy after participating in Simulation A, she did not carry this realization forward into Simulation B. Instead, she approached Simulation B with an assumption of religious autonomy, and again realized the potential anachronism as a result of her participation in the second simulation. Many participants experienced similar regresses throughout our avatar activities. Second, Participant #13 seemed to struggle with her realization that Aurelia lacked the religious autonomy that the participant herself would be afforded in a modern context. In describing her recognition of her avatar's religious dependency, Participant #13 used phrases like "my opinions should probably validate" and "I would try to see the situation differently" (italics added for emphasis). We also saw other socially subordinate participants attempt to assert religious autonomy at various points in the activities. The most common strategy was to claim that their avatars followed their social superiors in religious practice, but not in religious opinions or beliefs (#1, #4, #6, #16).

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In sum, although a thorough examination of the complex links between Romans' religious activities and their social, political, and economic interests proved a difficult task for students, the simulations did help many participants pinpoint and analyze the major cultural forces that affected participation in the Christ movement. By inhabiting the lives of people from a range of classes, genders, and occupations, students were able to explore how various factors of Roman culture and daily life informed ancient people's decisions about religious practice.

Examination of Practice #3

Another vital dimension of historical thinking is the ability to identify the limitations of our own perspectives. No matter how hard historians try, we cannot fully rid ourselves of our modern mindsets. But we do strive to identify the limitations of our perspectives, as well as correct the anachronisms that result from bringing our modern mindsets to bear on our examinations of the past. Thus Practice #3—recognizing the extent to which our modern perspectives influence our reconstructions of early Christian history—is another element of historical thinking in which we hoped to see our students engaging. We expected, of course, that students would promote anachronistic views and engage in anachronistic behaviors in our simulations. Indeed, we hoped for this: we knew that our students, as novice historians, still operated with gaps in their historical knowledge and inconsistencies in their historical thinking, and we wanted our simulations to bring these problematic concepts and frameworks out into the open so that we could work to correct them.[31] By identifying the anachronisms that occurred during the simulations, we hoped that students would be better able to grasp the influence of their modern perspectives on their recreations of ordinary people's actions within the developing Christ movement.

Overall, students continued to use many anachronistic frameworks, concepts, and behaviors during and after the simulations. Among the most glaring anachronisms that remained with students throughout our avatar activities were the misconceptions that (1) belief was the most important element of ancient religious life, and (2) early Christ followers were drawn to the movement because of its emphasis on salvation through belief alone. For instance, many students argued that their avatars preferred the apostle Paul's teachings because of his emphasis on faith, which made his gospel easier to follow than that of Alexander. Not only did these lines of reasoning ignore the rigorous religious guidelines advocated in Paul's letters, but they suggested that participants had not fully digested previous classroom discussions about the importance of practice in Roman religion. Though we worked before and after the simulations to remind students that Roman religion was practice-based, many participants imported into their avatars' lives anachronistic views about the primacy of belief and faith. Students also often failed to take Roman social hierarchies into account when speaking during the simulations. In fact, during Simulation A, participants' own personalities were more likely to determine their avatars' level of engagement than were their avatars' social statuses and genders. Wealthy male politicians remained silent while tavern owners and women of low status took control of the conversation. Though we pointed out such anachronisms to students and saw some correction during later exercises, participants still found it difficult to work within unfamiliar social structures.[32]

While anachronistic tendencies such as these remained with many of our students during and after the simulations, we found that students were generally more open to recognizing and confronting anachronistic perspectives in post-activity debriefings and reflections. After exiting the simulations, students and instructors discussed their observations in a debriefing session, collectively identifying and analyzing anachronistic tendencies within the simulations. Students then individually wrote Post-AA Reflections, some of which explicitly discussed the influence of their modern perspectives on their engagement in the simulations. Such statements were most plentiful after Simulation B.[33] For example, Participant #18 wrote: "If I were to change my Pre-AA Reflection, I would take more into account the fact that I'm writing from a twenty-first century perspective, and it's hard to remove what we're used to from our opinions as the avatar in this activity." Participant #23 was even more specific:

> After the simulation on Thursday [the first day of Simulation B], I became more openminded [sic] to the philosopher because the idea of a fifth gospel would not have been terribly new and foreign in the time period. It made me realize that my opinions regarding the three experts were heavily influenced by what I know now in the twenty-first century with the four gospels in the New Testament canon.

31 Other scholars have recognized the inevitability and importance of anachronisms during history simulations. Carnes (2014, 255-259) effectively responds to criticisms of the anachronisms that occur during *RTTP* games. McCall, writing about students discerning historical inaccuracies in video game simulations, notes that "the inaccuracies in historical simulation games are actually a critical part of their effectiveness as learning tools" (2012, 21).

32 Students with avatars of lower social status also often asked us whether or not they should be voicing their opinions in assembly meetings, citing concern over their participation grade in the course. We assured them that active listening counted as a form of participation, but we ultimately let students determine the ways in which their avatars' social statuses would affect their participation in our simulations. Several students noted that this resulted in a built-in anachronism to our simulations: students were asked to participate in the simulations in ways that their avatars likely would not have participated in antiquity.

33 Perhaps this was because these anachronisms were directly addressed in the debriefing, or perhaps this was because students could see anachronisms more clearly at the end of our course.

Participant #8 provided the fullest and most articulate reflections on the extent to which modern perspectives colored our simulations. During our in-class debriefing after Simulation B, Participant #8 noted that the majority of students had chosen Paul in Simulation A and the Christian priest in Simulation B, and she suggested that students had chosen these two options because they represented positions that are viewed as orthodox within modern Christianity. As she stated in our debriefing session, "In this and the last avatar activity, a lot of people pushed for Paul and his authority, maybe because we're used to him being an authority figure, and we have a built in trust for him. The priest is closest to what we know as twenty-first century people." In the Post-AA Reflection that she wrote immediately following this debriefing, Participant #8 continued to emphasize the influence of students' modern perspectives on our avatar activities. Reflecting on the actions of her avatar, Antonia, who was a self-employed prostitute, Participant #8 wrote:

> Some people made comments during both the simulation and the debrief that were definitely aimed at me, saying that if we were truly in Rome I wouldn't have talked so much, or at least no one would have listened. It's not untrue —but I also can't imagine that a woman who lives and works alone and is financially independent wouldn't have some confidence in her own ideas and a fire in her gut that makes her speak up. I think the simulations are heavily influenced by our twenty-first century understanding of Christianity, but it was still really enlightening to see how others formed their arguments and imagine how that would have played out in antiquity.

What is perhaps most intriguing about Participant #8's reflection is that she recognizes the influence that students' modern perspectives wielded over our simulations, while also fervently defending her avatar's actions by asserting modern ideals regarding women's social and financial independence.

There were also some participants who purposefully embraced anachronisms in our simulations and wrote about their decisions to do so in Post-AA Reflections. This was most obvious in the contributions of Participant #3, who inhabited Diokles, a young male enslaved to a wealthy oil merchant. Diokles voiced his opinion several times throughout Simulation B, though he was careful to preface his comments with admissions of his social station and his lack of authority. After Simulation B, Participant #3 reflected on Diokles's actions, writing: "I think it would have made sense for me to back up a person with higher authority than [sic] asserting my own opinion, but I found other people's statements frustrating so I just made my own despite my avatar's identity as a slave." This participant recognized the anachronism of Diokles's actions, but refused to be encumbered by the social rules of Roman antiquity.

Though students' post-simulation reflections continued to reflect unidentified anachronisms, there was at least a growing awareness of the anachronisms present in these simulations among many students. Helping students to identify, unpack, and correct these anachronisms was in fact one of the most fruitful products of the simulations, which seemed more effective than other forms of assessment in exposing misconceptions and ahistorical modes of thinking. Participants, by recognizing that their twenty-first century perspectives inevitably played a role in how they viewed and engaged with history, were able to interrogate more deeply their positionalities as readers of historical texts, and further dismantle some of the preconceived notions that initially shaped their understanding of the early Christ movement.

Conclusion

In this article we have examined how the use of avatar simulations in our "Introduction to the New Testament" course affected student engagement in three practices that enable historians to reconstruct Christian beginnings: (1) identifying the range of religious options available and appealing to potential Christ movement recruits; (2) examining the ways in which social, economic, and political facets of Roman culture conditioned recruits' religious activities and choices; and (3) recognizing the extent to which our modern perspectives influence our reconstructions of early Christian history. Our assessment suggests that our simulations helped students advance their abilities in historical thinking subtly but perceptibly: on the whole, participants made incremental progress in their abilities to historically contextualize and empathize with ancient Mediterranean people's behaviors and decisions regarding their participation in the early Christ movement. Certainly, the qualitative nature of our analysis above, as well as the small number of participants in our study, precludes us from generalizing our findings. Yet our analysis of student learning via our avatar simulations does largely align with the existing scholarship referenced in Section 2, which argued that history simulations help cultivate students' abilities in empathizing with and historically contextualizing the actions of past humans. Though our history simulations differed from other scholars' simulations in various way—for example, in our focus on everyday people or our emphasis on imagined historical situations—we still observed our students engaging in acts of historical empathy and contextualization. Yet several questions remain. For instance, what other aspects of historical thinking can we reasonably expect our students to engage in during these simulations? And might it be possible to conduct a more quantitative study of the promotion of historical thinking via our simulations? In future instantiations of these simulations, then, we would like to identify a fuller range of the interpretive practices that we can reasonably expect our students to

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engage in during our simulations, with an eye to further assessing the impact of our avatar simulations on students' historical thinking. We have also considered administering an ungraded assessment, such as a quiz, after each simulation to measure the extent to which anachronisms and misconceptions persisted among our students. Such adaptations to our avatar activities might provide us a more complete picture of the effects that our history simulations have on our students' historical thinking abilities, thus helping us to further ensure that our students leave our classroom as better historians than they were when they entered.

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ARTICLE

Teaching Metaliteracy in the Religious Studies Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This paper reflects upon the collaborative work between a professor and a librarian who constructed a course on religious communes in the United States implementing the seven elements of metaliteracy as put forth by Jacobson and Mackey (2013). The shifting terrain of information literacy is hard enough for librarians to traverse, but it can feel insurmountable for professors in the classroom. Working side by side with a librarian can be one of the most fruitful ways for professors to advance in this field. The seed for this project was a collective intent to create lifelong learners with strong habits of inquiry rather than merely teaching students discrete search strategies and skills. By using technology and team-based learning, the collaborators hoped to open up the students to a critical yet empathetic understanding of religion and to help them develop as informed users and creators on the internet.

KEYWORDS

metaliteracy, metacognition, embedded librarian, instructional technologies, cults, new religious movements, Synanon

This paper reflects upon the collaboration of a tenured professor of religious studies and a recent tenure-track humanities librarian (the teachers) in developing a course entitled "Religious Communes in the United States." At the time, both taught at Notre Dame de Namur University (NDNU). NDNU is a small Catholic liberal arts university that serves approximately 1700 students with class sizes ranging from nine to thirty students per class, averaging a faculty-student ratio of one to twelve. Religious studies are general education (GE) courses at NDNU; the courses must therefore serve a variety of interests and are assessed by their ability to foster critical thinking, teach written communication, information literacy, and oral communications, as well as engage students in the school's mission.

The Professor

Despite being a Catholic university with required religious studies courses, the professor observed that when students study religion there is often a strong gut reaction—of discomfort, protective love, or even, hatred. Students can be dismissive of religions or spiritualities outside of the mainstream and so fail to analyze and understand their complexities or even, often,

to understand them to be religions. By moving the subject of religion away from traditional world religions to new religious movements (NRMs), she hoped to enable students to think about religion overall and its effects on society and individuals more easily. What is religion and how does it interplay with society? How does it critique or accept social norms? In the spirit of analyzing and understanding religious motivations and faiths she also did not want students falling into the easy trap of viewing new religious movements as "cults." She hoped that analyzing one religious commune in depth would allow students to see how all religions might have a combination of the utopian and the dystopian. Little work has been done on teaching NRMs but that which has points to similar issues with the subject and similar solutions (see Zeller [2015] and Gallagher [2007] on overcoming resistance to studying NRMs). Engaging students in active learning disrupts their preconceptions and biases as they become the ones who teach themselves and each other. This can then be expanded to any religious studies course so that students come away with a more engaged and open attitude to religions other than their own. As religious studies scholar Zeller notes:

> [T]raditional pedagogies predicated on the professor as fount of knowledge transferring said knowledge to receptive students simply does not work very well when teaching NRMs. Students possess too much resistance, and the cultural pressure against taking new religious movements seriously is too strong. Rather, instructors must utilize techniques that are student-centered and engage students in active learning, since only the students themselves can teach themselves to overcome their presuppositions and assumptions. (2015, 123)

The professor noticed that her students tend to view religion and research similarly—as things perhaps imposed upon their lives that they experience in a passive manner. One of her goals for this course was to teach students that both religion and research are alive, changing constantly, and that students themselves can be part of this conversation, not as passive receptors, but as engaged actors.

The Librarian

Meanwhile, on the other side of campus the librarian was becoming increasingly frustrated with the one-shot information literacy instruction model (a single session conducted by a librarian on invitation by the course instructor to teach their students to locate, evaluate, and use needed information effectively). She reached out to the professor to discuss the inadequacies of this model. Despite being an ardent supporter of the library, the professor concurred that she too found the one-shot instruction sessions ineffective. What she always loved about research was the joy of the chase, the mazes and false turns, the eureka moment—and she wanted to share that joy with her students. In her view, one-shot library visits were helpful in moving students forward with an assignment, but did not help move them towards this feeling of joy. Moreover, she noticed that while students included the proper resources in their references after a one-shot library instruction, they rarely actually integrated these sources fully into their papers; they culled quotes to stuff their work without truly being in conversation with the references. The traditional one-shot model offers limited opportunities to make a real impact on students. It does not build in them a solid foundation of information literacy or dispositions that help them succeed academically and also lead to lifelong independent learning skills.

The professor and librarian thus shared many of the same teaching goals. Both wanted students to understand that learning does not entail accumulation of information, and research is not simply searching for, locating, collecting, and summarizing information. Rather, education involves learning, unlearning, and relearning of concepts, or what Zeller calls, "unsettling and resettling" (2015, 129). Furthermore, both learning and research are active and interactive; are solitary, and at the same time, collaborative processes. In addition they wanted students to understand the value of information in multiple formats and with varying levels of access, to develop the flexibility to move from one format to another, and to be able to make connections, draw comparisons, and determine gaps in information found. Lastly, they felt that students could learn new technologies and create and share digital resources in a safe, collaborative environment.

To provide students with such transformative learning experiences, they decided to implement Thomas Mackey and Trudi Jacobson's metaliteracy model (2014) in their teaching practice and course design. They knew that the task at hand was too enormous to be accomplished through traditional lecture-based course sessions interspersed with a few lecture-based library sessions. They committed to designing and teaching the course collaboratively, guided in part by the metaliteracy model, creating and sustaining an inclusive learning community where there was ongoing, sustained communication and support between the course instructor, the embedded librarian, and students. Students were taught metaliteracy theory as the course progressed and journaled regularly about how they were researching and learning.

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What is Metaliteracy?

Since the term "information literacy" was first coined in the 1970s, it has undergone several revisions to stay in step with the constantly changing information landscape. In a 1974 report written on behalf of the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, Paul Zurkowski defined information literates to be those who "have learned techniques and skills for utilizing the wide range of information tools as well as primary sources in molding information solutions to their problems" (1974, 6). When Zurkowski's report came out, information was mainly text-based and primarily available in carefully curated collections. An information literate individual would be able to determine the nature and scope of the information needed; locate information sources from a curated collection, independently or with help of a librarian; and evaluate its relevance to their topic or interest. Therefore, teaching students to use library resources and tools, and retrieve librarian-mediated information, was enough to help them become information literate.

On the other hand, the information landscape of the twenty-first century is instant, dynamic, uncertain, burgeoning, open, participatory, and democratized. It is marked by blurred boundaries between creators and audiences, an absence of curation, and a preference for sharing over privacy. In such an environment, simply teaching students how to determine their information needs and how to locate, utilize, and cite their resources is not enough. It requires teaching students to become active, empowered learners who can navigate and participate in this complex information landscape. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Framework adopted in 2016 provides an expanded definition of information literacy as a "set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning" (ACRL 2016). The revised definition and the ACRL Framework draw heavily upon the concepts of metaliteracy, as set forth by Jacobson and Mackey (2013), that views students as consumers and creators of information in collaborative spaces and demands behavioral, affective, cognitive, and metacognitive engagement with the information ecosystem (ACRL 2016, 2). The seven elements of the model include the ability to:

1. Understand format type and delivery mode
2. Evaluate user feedback as an active researcher
3. Create a context for user-generated information
4. Evaluate dynamic content critically
5. Produce original content in multiple media formats
6. Understand personal privacy, information ethics, and intellectual property issues
7. Share information in participatory environments (Jacobson and Mackey 2013, 87)

While these elements are aimed at library sciences, the first four are equally critical in teaching religious studies and this paper will define each element in discussion about this particular class on communes.

Course Topic, Structure, and Learning Communities

The course, "Religious Communes in the United States," began with an overview and discussion of NRMs, their portrayal in the media, and possible biases against NRMs. A historical overview of religious communes in the United States followed, enabling students to explore common themes (family, property, work, women) in depth. The class spent time throughout the semester analyzing negative portrayals of NRMs in the mainstream media, creating a counter-environment to the general cultural environment that misrepresents and demonizes these movements (Wiersma 2016, 95-99). This was accomplished by listening to podcasts on cults, discussing the narrative of cults found in popular culture (from Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* [(1887) 2011] to *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* [Fey et al. 2018]) and noting similar prejudices in the students' own study of the religious commune of Synanon.

For the last seven weeks of the semester, students were grouped into teams for an in-depth research project on one aspect of

Synanon (history; belief system; major figures and places; and women/minorities/children).[1] The professor chose Synanon in part because it is a topic on which very limited scholarly content exists, particularly from a religious studies context. Synanon began as a drug rehab in Santa Monica, California in 1958 but expanded to become a religious commune in 1974, moving to Northern California, near to NDNU. The commune fell apart in the 1980s due to tax evasions and bad behavior on the part of the leadership. Despite there being little academic work on Synanon as a NRM it does have a strong presence on the internet and in popular culture.[2]

The librarian designed three library sessions to include discussions in groups, group learning activities, and hands-on searching of online archives curated by ex-members, news reports, and legal documents. Each librarian-led session was followed by research-only sessions in the library where students worked on their research assignments in teams with the feedback, direction, and support of their professor and the embedded librarian. The discussion-based library sessions and research-only sessions were planned to avoid passive acquisition of lecture material and encourage students to engage with their learning process more actively. As Reale in her book *Becoming an Embedded Librarian* points out:

> Learning begins to shape in a learning community when students grapple with new ideas and concepts, navigate through the messy, confusing process of understanding the concepts, and clarity slowly evolves as their ideas are critically and respectfully questioned, and they are encouraged to fine-tune or refine their ideas and perspectives based on conversations and diverse viewpoints in the learning community. (2016, 87)

These designated research days prepared students to purposefully collaborate with their team members, draw on each other's strengths, learn from and with each other, and divide and carry out responsibilities to ensure successful completion of team outcomes.

The second half of this paper examines how the seven elements of metaliteracy were implemented in this course. There is overlap between assignments and elements as the teachers found that some elements were more difficult—and more important—for students to grasp than others. This is true of the first element: understanding format type and delivery mode.

The Seven Elements of Metaliteracy

1. Understand Format Type and Delivery Mode

This first metaliteracy element was implemented in all aspects of the course—lectures, readings and assignments, and embedded library sessions. The course materials included a combination of books, peer-reviewed and newspaper articles, websites, blogs, films, online videos, oral history narratives, as well as fictional work (an early Sherlock Holmes story dealing with Mormons [Doyle (1887) 2011]). Parting from the traditional research paper, students were required to share their research and actively comment on each other's research through peer teaching and the use of online collaboration tools such wikis, blogs, videos, and podcasts. Led by the librarian, the class discussed how each of the online formats are different and suitable for different kinds of content but also how the information presented in various formats supported and complemented each other and allowed them to present their research more comprehensively.

The librarian introduced students to the idea that research is not merely seeking discreet answers to problems but is characterized by experts offering and negotiating varied competing perspectives as part of an ongoing conversation, and that an unequivocal answer or solution might or might not be established through this process (ACRL 2016, 8). With technological advances in scholarly communication, experts might choose to communicate their research perspectives formally (books, peer-reviewed articles, interviews with other experts) or informally (social media) where novice learners and experts at all levels can join the conversation. Students were made aware, as Jacobson and Mackey state, that "the value of information

1 These teams were organized and assessed using methods outlined by Michaelsen and Sweet (2008). Students were put into teams based on a series of questions involving their availability and affinities. They filled out assessments of themselves and their team members twice during the semester. While students had generally negative opinions of team-based work at the start, this system of accountability helped ease the process and the majority of students reported a positive experience at the end of the semester.

2 *Synanon* (Quine [1965] 2010) stars Eartha Kitt and Edmund O'Brien. It is a largely positive portrayal of early Synanon. Another film, *Attack on Fear* (Damski [1984] 2004), gives a grimmer portrayal of the later part of Synanon, focusing on the journalists from the *Point Reyes Light* who won a Pulitzer for their investigative writing. Rod Janzen's 2001 monograph on the subject is one of the few academic works on the topic.

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does not correspond to its packaging, or *wrapper*" (2013, 87). As Jacobson and Mackey rightly point out, students are often taught to determine the authority and reliability of information based solely on its type or modality: "In academic settings, blogs and wikis may not be seen as academic, and thus, discounted as reliable sources in either its format or the way it's received" (2013, 87). This issue was reiterated during an in-class learning activity in which students looked at primary and secondary source materials, academic and non-academic blogs, and scholarly books and articles. The professor and librarian made sure that some of the selected blogs, articles, and books were written by the same author, using for example, *Philosophy: A Short, Visual Introduction* (2015) by Scott Paeth of DePaul University and his blog, *Against the Stream* (2019). The librarian clarified that the length of time it takes to get an article published changes the conversation; the results are supposed to have a universal quality which transcends time. Blogs, on the other hand, are a quick and personal way for experts to share information and get feedback from colleagues, often in preparation for further published work, or, in other cases, on a subject which is ephemeral. While the professor and the librarian were able to convince students of the value of information in non-traditional delivery modes for scholarly communication, students struggled with establishing the expertise and credibility of authors publishing in open and social network environments. Students did learn to appreciate the fluidity and movement in academic research, however; one student wrote in her journal, "By looking at articles and seeing whom they cite in their work I was able to go back and see what the original article was about… I was able to see how each article built on the next and offered something unique about the conversation."

Students often have difficulty distinguishing primary from secondary sources, particularly when their formats are identical. Studstill and Cabrera (2010) note that many of the definitions professors use to describe primary sources are confusing to students and inadequate in preparing them to do research with any sophistication. Being aware that the same source can shift from being a primary to a secondary source, depending on the questions one is asking, is an important step in a student's development. Studstill and Cabrera point to the importance of context sensitivity in evaluating a source as primary or secondary and argue that religious studies questions fall within two categories: descriptive and non-descriptive (2010, 89). When asking a descriptive question ("How was 'The Game' played at Synanon?") then "any direct representation of the topic is a primary source" (Studstill and Cabrera 2010, 90). (In this case, the Synanon museum website's audio files). However, the issue is more complex when the question is non-descriptive ("How did 'The Game' played at Synanon affect American society?") In this case, the authors point out, research will be most effective if students use scholarly secondary sources as well as multiple primary sources. Students had issues identifying primary sources and secondary sources. The librarian and professor began addressing this problem by doing several exercises found in the Studstill and Cabrera article (2010). Still, the problem persisted. While students could easily identify the primary sources when asking descriptive questions, they often misidentified sources or used them as secondary sources while identifying them as primary sources.

In addition to the variety of information available online and in the library, the professor had chosen Synanon because of its relative modernity and geographical proximity to the university. This allowed the introduction of a dynamic format type: people who had encounters with Synanon. Don Stannard-Friel, a sociologist who had experienced the Synanon Game as a young sociologist,[3] and a woman who had been a child in Synanon and who had worked with Stannard-Friel, were invited to come and speak to the class. One student interviewed a past member of Synanon on their own and another visited the original Synanon building in Santa Monica. These meetings allowed the students to realize that their research was about real people with complex lives; that "cults" or religious communes should not be dismissed easily, as the popular press does. Interactions with these people also contradicted some information students had found in other sources and added new information, complicating the picture. The students were particularly intrigued by the fact that they had information which the person who lived on the commune for years as a child did not have. By using these "experts" as sources, the students themselves contributed new information to the study of Synanon.

2. Evaluate User Feedback as an Active Researcher

The librarian discussed how Web 2.0 technologies and applications have made it possible for users at all levels—from mere observers to experts—to enter scholarly conversations and generate content.[4] This phenomenon has taken away the authority formerly granted to a select few experts to shape the research conversation and has democratized information; users now have access to a vast body of information and a wide range of perspectives. Such an environment requires students to continuously apply a fact-checking and critical thinking filter to sift through what is usable and unusable and determine what needs further research. Using examples of user comments on blogs, websites, and YouTube videos that students read as part of their coursework, the librarian and professor demonstrated how to differentiate between research-worthy comments that contain critical information and comments that are irrelevant or opinion-based. Relating to this exercise, they urged students to evaluate all information, whether it is the information

3 Stannard-Friel is the author of *Harassment Therapy: A Case Study of Psychiatric Violence* (1981) which covers therapies influenced by the Game.

4 There is scholarly dispute over whether or not the Web 2.0 has actually democratized access to information, which cannot be covered here (Inefuku 2017; see also Ess 2018).

source such as a book, article, website, a blog, or video or information about that source such as unfiltered and unedited reviews, rating, comments, and feedback. As part of their assignment, students were required to comment on each other's wikis and blogs. Students were able to recognize the varying quality and relevance of their classmates' comments and correlate this to their own differing levels of engagement with class, assignments, and their own ownership of their class performance. This hands-on exercise was a preparatory step in making them aware of the "need to differentiate between experts in the field and observers and participants, without discounting the views of these effectively contributing through social media" (Jacobson and Mackey 2013, 88).

Mackey and Jacobson (2014) point to the opportunities and obstacles posed by Web 2.0 and the omnipresence of Google. On the one hand, the ability to find previews and book summaries or even digitized versions of books on Google, as well as ratings and comments on social media sites, might lead the learner to expand the possibility of locating resources. On the other hand, finding this range of information might lull the information seeker into believing that they have found everything that can be found to satisfy their information need and they may abandon their search prematurely (Mackey and Jacobson 2014, 71-72). The professor and librarian continually urged students to understand that they are bound to experience information overload and that to make the most of the information they have available at their fingertips, they need to be focused and active in their research process.

3. Create a Context for User-Generated Information

The teachers addressed the information generated by people related to Synanon in some way while working with this element of metaliteracy. As previously stated, the team assignment required students to research one aspect of Synanon in depth. There is a considerable amount of information on the web about Synanon, particularly primary sources, and the movement is recent enough for students to be able to track down people who had experience with Synanon, had written on the subject, and were willing to be interviewed. In such research circumstances, where familiar markers like books and peer-reviewed articles are missing, it is all the more important that learners have developed strong habits of critical thinking—with which they can recognize the relevance of the information they find, situate the information in the process, and understand and determine the context, time, and location on their own. In the absence of comprehensive resources, information is available in discrete units—websites, personal narratives, videos of re-enactment of Synanon activities, FBI reports, news articles, audio clips of interviews—produced by journalists, key players, participants, members, observers, and passersby. To be able to recognize the voice and the purpose of the information one needs to understand the context in which the information has been produced. While the teachers both discussed the importance of contextualizing content, this was something that the students found most difficult to grasp and put in practice. As NRM scholar Cowan (2007) notes, print resources are scarce for NRMs and students must therefore learn to navigate the web critically.

A primary text which all of the students turned to was Paul Morantz's website (2019), which was a particular issue. Morantz is the lawyer who was bitten by a rattlesnake Synanon members placed in his mailbox in 1978. He maintains an extensive website on the history of Synanon, including many primary text documents. However, his interpretation of the events is, as one might imagine, biased, as he was a major player in the story of Synanon's demise. Students tend to shy away from this sort of material rather than grappling with how to use it, yet this is exactly the sort of material they will continue to encounter and have to contextualize throughout their lives, whether they go on to graduate school or not.

4. Evaluate Dynamic Content Critically

In addition to being exposed to a vast array of information where it is difficult to establish the credibility of contributing authors and separate the expert from the novice, learners are faced with information that is dynamic and fluid. Some researchers share results and perspectives even when their work and research is ongoing and continue to update their social networking sites until their research project is completed and they have published their work formally. On the other hand, novice experts and individuals, who are able and eager to create content online, are constantly adding, editing, and deleting content from this vast body of information. The librarian stressed the importance of being alert to these changes, and of being flexible as the content or the delivery mode of the content changes and requires users to adapt. As Cowan notes, the fluidity of the internet is one of the great pedagogical advantages in studying NRMs, allowing students to see their movement in almost real time (2007, 299). This lesson can then be extended to more established religions, which may seem monolithic and timeless to students at first glance.

With limited well-researched information available on Synanon in traditional scholarly formats, students were encouraged to locate information online. One of the early class activities was a crowd-sourcing exercise where students posted sources they had selected to the virtual post-it board, Padlet (2020), and then discussed them in class. The discussion was effective in revealing biases and emotions, serving to jump-start the critical thinking process (Wiersma 2016, 96). Not surprisingly, students were drawn to Wikipedia.

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Rather than banning the site, the professor showed students the "inner workings" of Wikipedia (its revision history) and had students develop their own, private, wikis.[5]

While the librarian-led sessions and demonstrations were useful in helping students understand the importance of critically assessing all content they come across online, what was most impactful was their hands-on experience in creating and maintaining wikis, blogs, and the class website together in groups. Students were expected to present the descriptive elements of their research by means of a wiki page and present their analysis of this information in blog entries. Students witnessed content on their own wiki pages develop over time, added to and edited by different members, synchronously or asynchronously. They saw how their own understanding and analysis of the topic evolved over time as they wrote the different blog entries.

5. Produce Original Content in Multiple Media Formats

Creating and distributing information in multiple formats in participatory environments is an important element of Mackey and Jacobson's (2014) metaliteracy model and the teachers were successful in implementing this for the most part. As noted previously, most course assignments required students to create original content in various formats, both in teams and independently. Students wrote online reflections on readings and shared class discussions with the professor on the university's learning management system. Collaborating in teams, students created private wiki pages where they provided summaries of basic background and descriptive research relating to their specific topic. Their analysis and interpretation of the topic was presented in four blog posts over the seven-week assignment period. Students were encouraged to write engaging and thought-provoking posts and indicate their openness to conversation that would motivate others to respond. All students were required to participate and engage with each other in the open blogosphere and comment on each other's posts. They were also required to comment on wikis that were maintained by teams other than their own. Finally, they created a podcast or a video. To the teachers' surprise, students were not eager to create audio or video content and, except for one group, opted out of this requirement. Instead they chose to perform in class. One member from each of the four groups teamed up to work on a class website on Synanon using the website builder tool Wix (2020). Each of the wiki pages and blogs created and maintained by the four teams, and a podcast created by one group, were then organized and could be accessed from a single website, making it a comprehensive site which all the students could access and use to inform their own work. Even though the students shied away from using audio and video content creation technologies, they understood how the nature of content determines the format most suited for it. What surprised the teachers was students' reluctance to learn, engage with, and create original content with content creation technologies. Initially, students found all assignments that required them to create in social media formats challenging. Working together in learning communities with sustained help from other students, the professor, and the librarian, students came to appreciate and take pride in their work on the wiki pages, blogs, and Wix page. One student wrote of the experience: "After the project was completed I saw that I worked with a lot of different kinds of media and technology. I learned how to add on to a Wix site, blog, create a wiki page, and journal about research. I feel a little more comfortable working with all those different types of things."

6. Understand Personal Privacy, Information Ethics, and Intellectual Property Issues

During the library sessions and research days, the librarian repeatedly emphasized that just as it is important to work collaboratively, and to gather information from a variety of sources and in multiple formats, it is also important to respect the privacy and intellectual property rights of those sources, irrespective of whether the content creators are people or institutions, or whether the information is available for free or is behind a paywall. Along with establishing the identity and credibility of a content creator, the librarian demonstrated how to understand usage rights, locate what license the content was published under, and ensure that all attribution requirements were met when content was used or repurposed for student research projects. She also trained students in locating materials labeled for noncommercial usage, and in providing correct attributions for creative commons licensed content. Evaluation of the wikis, blogs, and class website indicated that students for the most part provided citations when necessary and used images and other media that were labeled for noncommercial reuse. In the final weeks of the class as the teachers sought the Institutional Review Board's approval for possible publication of their work, students had a first-hand look at respecting personal privacy as part of engaging in a participatory, online community. The students understood how the teachers would use their work and gave written consent for student-generated data to be incorporated in research. Students knew from the outset that this was a new course and that the teachers were experimenting with teaching metaliteracy in the religious studies classroom. When the teachers explained how the class had inspired them to work collaboratively on a paper, students were generally enthusiastic about this possibility. This further strengthened the teachers' claim that knowledge is built in collaboration.

5 In a second iteration of the course, the professor worked with Wiki Education (2020) to create assignments that led students through the process of evaluating, editing, and posting Wikipedia articles. It was an invaluable—though time intensive—experience.

7. Free-Flowing Contributions: Sharing Information in Participatory Environments

As noted, students were expected to create and publish information in teams, using online collaboration tools, keeping a global audience in mind. The sharing of this information took place in stages. Initially, the wikis and blogs were open only to the specific teams as content was being created and refined collaboratively within the group. After a few weeks, the wikis and blogs were shared with the entire class, to encourage engagement and feedback from all. The teams then used this feedback to further refine their work. The benefit of sharing team projects was manifold: students were able to view the wikis and blogs created by other teams before the final assignment was due, which inspired them to modify and refine their own work; they were able to see how their specific projects were parts of a larger project and which gaps needed to be filled so the separate parts fit together to create a whole. Moreover, as metaliterate learners they had to "strive for independent democratic participation, while being open to free flowing contribution from others" (Jacobson and Mackey 2013, 90). In contrast to individual research papers, written in isolation and only seen by a professor, these larger team projects gave the students a greater sense of responsibility for the quality of content, compliance with copyright and privacy laws, and usage rights. They shared information which they found but could not use in their own work with others who could use it, rather than stuffing it into their work, as is often the case in the traditional research paper. Viewing other teams' work led to a healthy spirit of competition as they saw others' strengths and learned from them, altering their work along the way.

In addition to expanded competencies of collaborative creation, repurposing, and sharing of digital materials, "central to the metaliteracy model is a metacognitive component that encourages learners to continuously reflect on their own thinking and literacy development in these fluid and networked spaces" (Jacobson and Mackey 2013, 84). To engage students in such metacognitive practices, the teachers required them to maintain a research journal throughout the semester. Students were encouraged to critically assess their search process—to refine it to find better sources, and to dig deeper. They learned to adapt to new technologies and to the cognitive changes happening within themselves.

Conclusion

One noticeable common thread in the student journal narratives is a journey from feeling confused and overwhelmed to feeling a sense of ease and comfort with the research process. Students also displayed an improved sense of skill, confidence, and clarity pertaining to their research. For example one student wrote:

> When the project was completed, I felt that I've grown significantly. All of the sharing of information made it easier to understand Synanon. There were many new search methods I got to use such as rearranging keywords, taking words already used from certain articles, and going on news websites and using those same search terms in there.

Another impressive student statement about difficulties with sources that looked similar and repetitive was that "just reading carefully for maybe slight differences in accounts or new insights solves these problems. Patience and careful reading is how to get around this."

Students demonstrated a shift in their understanding of religions as well. One student noted, "Learning about each respective commune was interesting because although there were similarities, every commune was different in its own way. As strange as it might sound I found myself outside of class considering what beliefs could be turned into a baseline for a commune."

The journal entries proved helpful not only to the students but also to the professor and librarian as they prepared for a second iteration of the class, reflecting upon their first experience. This led to some changes, including working with Wiki Education (2020) on public wikis and cutting back on the videos and podcasts which had proven to be one assignment too many. In addition, the elements of metaliteracy were discussed more consistently and students were asked to reflect upon them in their journals throughout the semester.

This collaborative teaching experience was of great benefit to the professor as she prepared other religious studies classes as well. Having learned to think about metaliteracy concretely rather than thinking about information literacy as a vague need as she designed her classes, she also felt more freedom in assignment preparation. She recognized that students' potential to think critically and empathetically was opened up when they were given assignments which fell outside of the classic research paper and which forced them to engage more intimately with the material at hand. Watching a student giddy from having interviewed a past commune member, seeing students' pride in their fully designed webpage, hearing them engaging critically with podcasts, it was evident that

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students had learned in a holistic manner which they could transfer to other courses. They had also developed an empathetic view of NRMs.

While this exercise in metaliteracy was aimed in particular at challenging students to looking at NRMs from a new, less biased angle, these methods and the explicit use of metaliteracy skills in the religious studies classroom can help us engage students in any religious studies subject which challenges students as they come to understand the fluid nature not only of research but also of religion. Working in teams and concentrating on research as a skill in and of itself, outside of writing assignments, helps students develop a deeper understanding of particular religious issues and enjoy the ambiguity of certain aspects of spirituality rather than fearing not getting the correct answer.

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ARTICLE

Combining Accessibility and Pedagogical Effectiveness in a Hybrid Theological Education Program: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

As of 2017, the Association of Theological Schools had seen an increase in online course enrollment of 200 percent over ten years. It is therefore worth exploring in some depth the potential challenges and strengths of online and hybrid programs. This article describes one hybrid online-residential program, the Alternative Clergy Training at Sewanee (ACTS) program at the School of Theology at the University of the South, familiarly known as Sewanee. Based on the experience of this program and contemporary research on the strengths of online and hybrid programs, it is argued that hybrid learning has significant advantages in its own right, perhaps especially for those who may be considered "hybrid clergy," the deacons and bivocational priests for whom the program was designed.

KEYWORDS

online learning, hybrid, bivocational, distance learning, accessibility

As of 2017, the Association of Theological Schools had seen an increase in online course enrollment of 200 percent over ten years (Scharen and Miller 2017, 3). Online and hybrid programs make theological education more accessible to a broad range of students, and some argue that they are at least as effective as traditional face-to-face programs (Scharen and Miller 2017, 3). For many, this shift may be at best an unwelcome necessity, as increases in accessibility are presumed to come at the expense of sacrifices in pedagogy. Yet others present online and hybrid programs as exciting new learning contexts, with their own distinctive strengths and weaknesses.

In this article, I will explore some disadvantages and advantages of a hybrid program of theological education as reflected in one such program, Alternative Clergy Training at Sewanee (ACTS). In particular, I argue for the suitability of a hybrid program to what may be thought of as hybrid ministries: the diaconal and bivocational priestly ministries that this program is specifically designed to serve.[1] Thus, after a brief overview of the program, I will consider this notion of "hybridity" and the implications it has had for how we have designed this particular program. These illustrations highlight some of the strengths and weaknesses of hybrid learning as suggested by our own experience and borne out by broader research. The strengths and weaknesses of such programs give the lie to the assumption noted above that what is good about hybrid learning is necessarily what is most

1 It bears emphasizing that in applying the term "hybrid" to these ministries, I in no sense mean to diminish them or present them as something other than fully legitimate orders of ministry (just as my description of hybrid education will emphasize that it is not a lesser form of theological education, but an important model in its own right). I only wish to highlight the formal similarities between these kinds of ministry and this form of education.

similar to a traditional classroom—that is, the face-to-face component. Taken together, the insights gleaned from considering the ACTS program viewed in light of contemporary research on online and hybrid learning indicate that this type of program has significant advantages, perhaps especially for deacons and bivocational priests.

I make these observations not as an expert in online or hybrid pedagogy, but rather as an educator and administrator seeking to incorporate current research in a practicable and effective manner. In addition to directing the program since 2017, I teach the "Christian Ethics and Moral Theology" module, and have taught the "Ministry in Contemporary Society" module in the past. Accordingly, the challenges and learnings I offer here reflect both perspectives, that of director and that of instructor. In particular, I emphasize what I will describe as the counterintuitive character of some features of this style of learning in the hope that others in a similar position and with similar presuppositions might come to shed those and to appreciate more fully the distinctive strengths of hybrid programs.

Most of the data specific to the ACTS program come from anecdotal or informal observation, supplemented by formal student evaluations where possible. One of my first actions as director was to initiate online student evaluations of the modules and the program, in order to assess student satisfaction and pedagogical effectiveness. Since these evaluations have only been in place for one cycle of modules as of this writing, we have very limited longitudinal data at this point. Nonetheless, the evaluations have been helpful in confirming, clarifying, and expanding upon feedback from more informal sources.

Overview of the Program

The ACTS program is a hybrid online-residential theological education curriculum at the School of Theology at the University of the South (familiarly known as Sewanee) intended for persons preparing for part-time bivocational priestly ministry and for the diaconate. It is situated in an Episcopal Seminary that is, in turn, part of a university owned by dioceses of the Episcopal Church. The program works with Episcopal dioceses to identify students for whom a full-time residential MDiv program is not a feasible option—for example, individuals with jobs that they will maintain during their future ministry and from which they therefore cannot resign, as well as students preparing for diaconal ministry, which is traditionally unpaid in the Episcopal Church. Since its start as the Non-Degree Theological Studies Program in 2014, enrollment in the program has ranged from three to sixteen. The diaconal aspect of the program was formally added in 2019, although students and dioceses had previously used the program for that purpose. The overarching goal of the program is to provide students with the academic preparation to begin their ministries effectively; the students' dioceses are expected to attend to other aspects of their preparation, such as spiritual formation and field education. A more focused teaching goal is to enable students to apply their learning in their particular ministry contexts, which are typically small, often rural, churches, and to reflect on and better appreciate the distinctive calling of their bivocational priestly or diaconal ministry.

The program combines intensive residential education with online distance learning. Each course (or "module," in the nomenclature of the program) begins with a week-long residential period, followed by several months of distance learning, and concludes with another week-long residency. Two modules run concurrently, and there are two terms per year, beginning in January and in June, for a total of four modules per year. The program comprises eight modules, based on the areas of theological education named in the Canons of the Episcopal Church: "Old Testament and Preaching," "New Testament and Preaching," "Theology, Including Sacramental Theology," "History, Including Episcopal Church History and Polity," "Christian Ethics and Moral Theology," "Pastoral Theology," "Prayer Book and Liturgy," and "Ministry in Contemporary Society." In place of "Pastoral Theology," diaconal students take a module called "Diakonia" that covers the history, theology, and practice of the diaconate. Students may enroll in the program at any point, and can take whatever modules they or their diocese deem necessary.

Hybrid Education for Hybrid Clergy

To a certain extent, the design and administration of this program reflect an intuition that bivocational priests and deacons might be particularly well served by a hybrid program of this nature. Of course, the initial motivation for establishing a hybrid program was necessity: students who expect to continue in their current vocations are often unable to commit to full-time residential study, but we were unwilling to sacrifice the residential aspect of theological education completely (which will be discussed further below). Nonetheless, in the time since I became director of the program, the faculty and I have worked to strengthen the program based on a sense that the formal similarity between hybrid study and the "hybridity" of serving in

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a bivocational context might be a strength for the program to build on. Bivocational priests and deacons, in different ways, exercise ministries that integrate two different contexts: they perform specific functions within the institutional church, such as celebrating sacraments or fulfilling particular roles in the liturgy, and they have, as part of their distinctive vocation, a call to carry out their ministerial work in the wider world. The task of integrating these two contexts into one coherent ministry is a central part of these vocations. In many ways this parallels the structure of hybrid programs that combine a face-to-face component that is more directly situated within a traditional seminary structure (both literally and figuratively) with a distance-learning component more directly engaged with students' home contexts. Here too, the task of integrating the two contexts is essential.

One thing that many of us involved in the program have observed in our modules is that students in the ACTS program show a high level of interest and facility in drawing connections between their professional and ministerial contexts and the curriculum relative to their residential MDiv counterparts. It is one of the joys of teaching in this program: because students are already involved in lay or diaconal ministry, a secular vocation, or both, they continually relate the subject being addressed to their own context. So, for example, a lawyer and veteran regularly brought his experiences in those areas to bear on discussions of questions in ethics such as truth-telling and just war theory. A practicing psychologist, a nurse, and a hospital chaplain in the same class enriched discussions of medical ethics. This is not simply a matter of drawing on personal experience in class discussions, as most students do. ACTS students are mindful of their unique position as bivocational ministers, and express this in their observations and discussions, often prefacing questions with allusions to it. A representative example would be something like, "As someone who will be both a priest and a lawyer/doctor/teacher, how will I be able to speak about this in both contexts?"

Our sense was that a hybrid program could build on this distinctive positioning. By educating students in both places—their home context and a residential seminary—the program could be designed to maximize this kind of situated reflection. We have attempted to do this in a number of ways. First, we have encouraged faculty to assign projects or practical assignments based in a student's ministry, rather than essays, as course assignments. Depending on a student's context, they may choose to submit a sermon, newsletter article, or Sunday school curriculum. Such assignments invite students to make clear connections between course readings and the needs of their ministry contexts; they also, of course, allow students to produce something that will be of immediate use to them, and get feedback from instructors to improve the submitted material. When these assessments occur during a module, rather than after its conclusion, they can also illuminate subsequent class topics and discussions.

Some modules lend themselves readily to this engagement between course material and ministry. For example, during the distance portion of my "Christian Ethics and Moral Theology" module, which focuses on applied issues in ethics, students present case studies from their own ministries that engage the particular ethical topics of the class. After a focused discussion of the assigned texts, students take turns reflecting on sexual ethics, war and peace, economics, and environmental ethics with examples drawn from their experiences in schools, churches, and a prison. Other students and I have opportunities to ask questions and add reflections; as instructor, it is often necessary for me to make possible connections with the readings clearer or to focus discussion on the more pertinent elements of the case. All the participants in the discussion reflect on ways the presenter might approach or respond to the challenges or problems they face. This use of case studies has helped students see more clearly how topics in moral theology relate to matters of direct import to their ministries, and has brought reflections from their ministries to bear on their consideration of the course material.

Another module where this aspect of distance learning is particularly salient is "Ministry in Contemporary Society." In the most recent iteration of that module, during the distance learning portion, students submitted a variety of assignments designed to engage their communities and ministry contexts. One of the major assignments was a stewardship sermon prepared with the students' contexts in mind. And for much of the content of that module, students were invited to propose topics and questions that emerge from their own ministries. The module also encourages students to look beyond their own contexts to engage topics: students are asked to submit a recorded podcast interview with a community leader outside their immediate (Episcopal) faith tradition, and to visit a place of worship of another religious tradition and submit a written reflection on the experience.

These attempts to facilitate learning in students' contexts during the distance portion are framed by the residential periods at the beginning and end of each module. These residential portions further strengthen the distinctive hybridity of the program in two ways. First, especially in the opening residential portion, these periods establish a strong learning community.

During residential portions (a total of four weeks per year), students are in class together for approximately four hours per day. They form relationships that foster collaborative learning and will help sustain their online discussions.

Second, the residential periods provide important content that can help students engage their ministry contexts. The chronology of some modules is designed around this goal. For example, some modules move more contemporary or applied topics to the online portion so they can take advantage of the residential portion for establishing fundamentals at the beginning and addressing additional themes at the end, incorporating students' experiences and reflections from their contexts. Students can master key topics or themes in face-to-face meetings, apply those ideas in their particular contexts and reflect on them together online, then return to bring those reflections together with new themes or considerations. These kinds of changes can make the overall trajectory of the module seem haphazard, so it is important to communicate clearly with students how the various elements of the course relate to one another.

For example, in "Christian Ethics and Moral Theology," a typical progression in a traditional classroom setting might move from sources and principles of ethics to topics of applied ethics such as sexuality and the environment. This reflects a relatively common idea of how ethics works—beginning with sources and articulated principles then moving toward application to timely issues. The hybrid module, by contrast, begins with sources and types of ethics (during the first residential period) and concludes with principles for ethics (during the concluding residential period), with applied ethics during the intervening distance period. Thus students are introduced to theoretical and methodological concerns during the first residential period, when they have more opportunity to engage with the instructor. They also establish a learning community that will support their reflections during the distance portion. Both of these features help facilitate meaningful reflection and discussion on contemporary applied topics during the distance portion, where students have the opportunity to relate the topics in applied ethics to situations in their own lives and ministries. These reflections in context then inform discussion of additional themes when students return for the concluding residential component.

Taken together, these efforts integrate online learning both with students' daily lives, on the one hand, and with the residential component, on the other. They also relate to the program's specific goal of preparing students for bivocational ministry in small congregations, and of helping them see the distinctive strengths of this form of ministry. At its best, bivocational ministry highlights the relationship between the church and the world, inviting reflection on mission and evangelism in and with local communities. Bivocational ministers can at times be particularly well equipped to facilitate this reflection, since they operate professionally both in and out of the church. By using the distance-learning portion of the ACTS program to invite students to integrate course content with their ministry contexts, we build on the program's distinctive identity.

The Challenge and Promise of Hybrid Learning

I have presented what I take to be the potential strengths of a hybrid program for bivocational ministry based on the formal similarity between the hybridity of this ministry and the hybridity of the program. The support for this idea is mostly anecdotal: informal feedback from students, professors' observations, and written assignments suggest that the students do engage the modules in this way, reflecting back and forth from context to seminary, and that they find this aspect of the program to be beneficial. Formal research would be needed to make a more convincing argument that hybrid programs do indeed work well for training bivocational clergy. In our case, small sample size and the lack of longitudinal data from before my time as director have limited my ability to make such an argument.

These reflections on the suitability of a hybrid program for bivocational clergy also indicate some strengths and weaknesses of hybrid programs more generally, features that are in fact supported by broader research. While this research was not a part of our initial intuitions about the structure of the program, it does support many of the choices that were made. More importantly, being aware of these particular features of hybrid education—what works, and why it works—enables our program and others like it to enhance the strengths and mitigate the weaknesses of hybrid theological education.

This is especially important because some of these strengths and weaknesses may at first seem counterintuitive, at least if one approaches hybrid education with assumptions like the ones I initially brought to it. I assumed, like many others, that the strengths of hybrid programs would lie mostly in the residential portion—that is, in the aspect of the program most similar to traditional classrooms—and that the weaknesses would be primarily related to the distance portion. In other words, I viewed hybrid theological education as derivative of traditional face-to-face learning, and assumed it would be effective to the extent to which it replicated or approximated that model. However, our experience has shown, and research bears out, that this is not

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the case. While distance learning through online media certainly presents some initial challenges in program design and execution, the more substantial challenges and strengths of a hybrid program are more evenly distributed between the two components of the modules.

I begin these considerations where the program begins, with the residential component. While this is the part most similar to a traditional face-to-face classroom, with many of the same characteristics, it also presents its own strengths and challenges that go beyond those of its more traditional counterpart. Delamarter and Brunner point out (2005) that hybrid courses can actually increase student-teacher interaction and class connectivity when compared to traditional face-to-face classes. This increased connectivity begins in the initial face-to-face sessions, where a learning community can be established through intentional practices of socialization (Delamarter and Brunner 2005, 152). In the case of the ACTS program, as noted above, this residential component begins and ends each of the modules. During residential portions (a total of four weeks per year), students are in class together for approximately four hours per day. This is supplemented by corporate worship, shared meals, and programmed fellowship. Interestingly, students have also been proactive in initiating social activities, organizing meals together, welcoming and orienting new students to campus, and planning excursions. They thus take advantage of the opportunity provided to "jump-start" (in Delamarter and Brunner's [2005] words) the learning community during this intensive period. This emphasis on connectivity carries over into effective online interactions that nourish the community of learning through the distinctive features of online communities (which will be discussed below).

There are also, however, distinctive challenges to the residential component of a hybrid program. A demanding class schedule that is sustained for two weeks at a time leaves students and instructors exhausted. Students have less time to read and process material during residential periods; they typically have to read most of their assignments beforehand, which may not be most conducive to comprehension. While the total number of contact hours for the term (including the distance portion) is roughly equal to many of the residential MDiv courses, faculty may feel the need to cover as much material as possible in the limited residential time, which may feel rushed as a result. It is particularly important to be aware of these challenges precisely because this is the aspect of a hybrid program that feels most familiar to faculty and students. It is tempting to approach the residential portion as if it were simply a standalone face-to-face course. Delamarter and Brunner note the importance of redesigning this component of a course with an eye to its particular characteristics and to integrating the two aspects of a hybrid course into a single unified course (2005, 151–52).

Our experience in the ACTS program reveals a further counterintuitive feature of the intensive residential component. In a program designed to make theological education more accessible, four weeks of residency per year may be challenging, if not prohibitive, for many students with full-time jobs and families, even when those weeks are divided between June and January. Yet evaluations indicate that most students appreciate the demanding nature of the program. Moreover, this relatively high residential requirement allows students to experience some crucial aspects of seminary life: participation in worship and community life and the formation of a supportive learning community. Thus, in addition to the pedagogical benefits and drawbacks of the residential period of a hybrid program, the difficulty of meeting the residential requirements of the program has proven to have pedagogical impact in itself, forcing students to prioritize and plan carefully.

If it seems at first that the drawbacks to a hybrid program would be mostly concentrated in the online portion, the aspect most dissimilar to a traditional classroom, then research and experience again counter this assumption. There are certainly significant start-up costs to the online classroom, in terms of acclimating to the technology, establishing consistency, and navigating a different conversational format (Delamarter and Brunner 2005, 155). Literature on online learning is insistent that in whatever format, online discussions require adept and consistent faculty facilitation and moderation (Delamarter and Brunner 2005, 151; Bach, Haynes, and Smith 2007, 112). Nonetheless, when designed and facilitated properly, online classrooms prove to have distinctive advantages that not only approximate those of a traditional classroom, but indeed may actually improve upon them.

Research indicates that students generally experience the quality of discussion and engagement in online courses as being higher than in face-to-face courses (Scharen and Miller 2017, 32). The effectiveness of online learning in this area may be greatly dependent on the mode of learning: synchronous (real-time interaction, such as a videoconference or chat) versus asynchronous (delayed-time interaction such as the use of a message board). While synchronous modes of interaction have been shown to be more conducive to building a strong sense of community, asynchronous interactions tend to be more intellectual in character, at least for the most challenging types of content (Oztok et al. 2013, 89). Again, the quality of the discussion is highly dependent on the instructor's active involvement in facilitating it, in all modes of interaction. In some cases, shy students have indicated that they feel more able to participate in such discussions, and some students feel that online discussions mitigate the perception of racial or cultural divides sometimes experienced in face-to-face interactions (Bach, Haynes, and Smith 2007, 112). It seems likely that these effects would be most significant in non-visual forms of synchronous or asynchronous interaction, such as online chats or message boards.

Thus it seems that a combination of regular asynchronous interactions and synchronous video-conferences is most able to take advantage of the pedagogical potential of online learning (Oztok et al. 2013, 92–93).

Our program currently centers on synchronous videoconferencing for its online component. Given the relatively small size of the classes and the user-friendliness of the platform, video conference discussions have proven accessible and effective, based on student evaluations. In my module, these sessions usually combine a short background lecture accompanied by visual aids, followed by discussion of related texts. Students participate readily and converse with the instructor and one another comfortably, and discussions have been substantive and engaging. One student noted the effectiveness of the lectures and visual aids in this context. The effectiveness of the platform does not completely overcome the difficulties of online discussions, and some students remain bothered by the "awkwardness" of the online medium. To these difficulties are added the same challenges that confront any class discussion: some students dominate, others participate less. In an online setting, it may be more difficult for the instructor to monitor and respond to such discrepancies. However, the program's small class size mitigates this difficulty somewhat. At the same time, some past modules (including an earlier version of my own) have relied on asynchronous methods of engagement, and as noted above, there may be strong reasons to return to these in some contexts, or to combine synchronous and asynchronous interaction in a single module.

Again, it is essential to design a hybrid course as an integrated whole, combining online and residential portions thoughtfully. In the ACTS program, as I have described, some modules have done this by scheduling more applied or practical content during the online portion. Some research seems to confirm that this indeed builds on the distinctive strengths of online learning: online settings are more conducive to students' integration of coursework with work or ministry. The literature refers to this as the contextual aspect of hybrid courses. Delamarter and Brunner describe it thus: "these programs can encourage students to view the situation as a theological education being brought into their lives as opposed to putting their lives on hold while they do a theological education" (2005, 134; cf. Scharen and Miller 2017, 32). They note that this aspect of such programs not only affects students' integration of their learning outside the classroom, but it also transforms the discussion within the classroom: "it can change the nature of the interactions that characterize the learning environment: from theoretical discussions about possible future scenarios in ministry, to the enrichment of ministry already in progress" (Delamarter and Brunner 2005, 154). Moreover, when the course is structured in the way I have described with applied issues during the online portion, then the reduced anxiety around participation and the diminished perception of racial or cultural divides that some students report in online forums may make discussion of challenging or controversial topics more productive in that setting. That said, research is mixed on the effectiveness of synchronous versus asynchronous interaction in these regards, and so the means we use to emphasize the distinctive capacities of online learning will have to be carefully considered.

Accessibility and Pedagogy

Based on feedback from our main constituents, students and their bishops, we believe the structure of the ACTS program takes advantage of the pedagogical, social, and spiritual benefits of a residential seminary while also capitalizing on many of the strengths of online learning. In terms of learning outcomes, data from General Ordination Exams (GOEs) of the Episcopal Church suggest that the program has been educationally satisfactory by that particular standard, though not as effective as a residential MDiv program.[2] It will be necessary to implement additional evaluation standards more specific to the goal of this program—that is, preparing clergy for effective bivocational and diaconal ministry—to measure the program's educational effectiveness more directly (cf. Scharen and Miller 2017, 33).

More significantly, however, this program continues to build on one of its guiding intuitions: the sense that hybrid learning might be particularly well-suited to what might be called the hybridity of bivocational priests and deacons. Modules are designed to highlight the respective benefits of residential and online learning in order to maximize students' opportunities to integrate classroom learning with their ongoing work and ministries. By maintaining a relatively high residency requirement, we not only provide more opportunities to enhance learning and group cohesion and offer students an experience of a residential seminary community, we also challenge students to commit fully to their theological formation and to plan and prioritize accordingly. Additionally, by emphasizing the contextual aspect of hybrid learning, we enhance both the online and the residential components of the program, and facilitate practical learning in students' ministry contexts. As has been noted, there are areas where we must be more intentional about structuring modules to play to these strengths; like many institutions, we are still coming to understand and realize the full potential of online learning.

2 GOE test takers are scored as "Proficient" or "Non-Proficient" in each of six canonical areas. In 2016, 2017, and 2018 combined, a majority of NDTS students were rated "Proficient" in at least five of the six areas (sample sizes for individual years are too small to be useful taken separately).

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What all of this makes clear is that hybrid programs do not necessarily require sacrificing effectiveness in order to increase accessibility. Hybrid and online learning are not simply better-or-worse approximations of a face-to-face classroom; they are new pedagogical environments that present new opportunities as well as new challenges that can enhance learning opportunities. Delamarter and Brunner put it poetically: with hybrid and online learning, "colors on the teaching palette multiply" (2005, 150). What is more, these new environments and new color palettes may be precisely what is needed to prepare leaders in a changing church. What could be better than non-traditional education programs to prepare clergy to imagine the non-traditional forms of church that are becoming more and more necessary? While learning Bible and church history, students in hybrid programs are also practicing novel ways of interacting, of facilitating conversation, and of nurturing community. As both hybrid education and hybrid clergy become more common, the new color palettes they bring to ministry may provide the flexibility and creativity the church will so urgently need.

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THE WABASH CENTER
JOURNAL ON TEACHING

SPECIAL TOPIC

Introduction to the Special Section on Critical Incidents in Teaching

Thomas Pearson, *Editor*

ABSTRACT

The three short essays gathered in this Special Topic were submitted in response to the journal's Call for Papers on Critical Incidents in Teaching. A "critical incident" is a memorable, significant, or unexpected moment experienced in the classroom. Subjecting such moments to careful critical analysis can reveal important facets of the purposes and practices of teaching. Essays by Alison Downie, ("Who Speaks When?"), Eunyung Lim ("Teaching 'Greek for Ministry' in a Multicultural Classroom"), and Nermeen Mouftah ("'I Want to Love Islam, I Really Do, But. . .': Islamophilic Classrooms in Islamophobic Times").

KEYWORDS

Stephen Brookfield, critical incident questionnaire, writing prompts for scholarship of teaching

The three short manuscripts published in this Special Topic section were submitted in response to the journal's 2019 call for papers, requesting short manuscripts that describe and analyze a particular critical incident in teaching. A "critical incident" is a memorable, significant, or unexpected moment in the classroom. Subjecting such moments to careful critical analysis can reveal important facets of the purposes and practices of teaching.

The call for papers was inspired by Stephen Brookfield's discussion of "critical incident questionnaires," designed to help students to become more reflective learners (1995, 114-139). The call for papers asked authors to become more reflective *teachers* by unpacking the learning processes in a particular classroom moment.

Each of the essays first provides a factually based description of the event—the who, what, when, where, and why of the incident (like the prologue to any good novel, play, or movie). Then the essays move to an analysis of what this incident means to the author-teacher. The essays show how the authors puzzled through the various complicating factors that made decision making in this situation a more difficult process than it originally might have appeared to be on the surface. Third, the essays reveal what the author has learned from the incident. "What do I know now that I wish I knew then; and, had I known it, how might I have perhaps acted differently?" The essays conclude by identifying the personal and professional tools, skills, and attributes that one needs in order to meet the challenges presented by the critical incident.

Although this is not currently a specific call for papers, the journal would always welcome submission of manuscripts of 5,000 words or more developed along similar lines using these writing prompts.

ESSAYS INCLUDED IN THIS SPECIAL TOPIC SECTION

Downie, Alison. 2020. "Who Speaks When?" *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* 1 (2): 41–48. https://doi.org/10.31046/wabashcenter.v1i2.1717.

Lim, Eunyung. 2020. "Teaching 'Greek for Ministry' in a Multicultural Classroom." *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* 1 (2): 49–54. https://doi.org/10.31046/wabashcenter.v1i2.1718.

Mouftah, Nermeen. 2020. "'I Want to Love Islam, I Really Do. But . . . ': Islamophilic Classrooms in Islamophobic Times." *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* 1 (2): 55–62. https://doi.org/10.31046/wabashcenter.v1i2.1716.

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THE WABASH CENTER JOURNAL ON TEACHING

SPECIAL TOPIC

Who Speaks When?

Alison Downie
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

ABSTRACT

When one angry student refused to follow my discussion structure in a class on diverse Christian views of gender and sexuality, I was unable to keep other students in the room safe from his harmful tirade. After this student refused to apologize in aggressively disrespectful language to me in a private meeting, I petitioned for university sanction. The student responded to my request for a disciplinary hearing by launching a social media campaign to discredit me and my reasons for requesting this hearing. This awful class and the subsequent related events, including the administrative response to the social media outrage, have led me to a deeper understanding of what it means to embrace responsibility while at the same time recognizing and accepting that I am not in control. This is one of three essays published together in a special topic section of this journal on critical incidents in the classroom.

KEYWORDS

transgender, sexuality, feminist pedagogy, Christianity, social media, classroom discipline

In my first year as a tenured associate professor, I experienced the worst class of my life in what I had expected to be a dream course, in both content and format: an upper-level seminar surveying Christian views, historical and contemporary, on the human person, sin, and salvation. While most of my teaching load is large introductory classes which students take to fulfill a core curriculum requirement, this elective course had only about a dozen students. Then, in a nightmare session, one angry student refused to follow my discussion structure and erupted in an angry, hurtful tirade, from which I was unable to keep other students in the room safe. This awful class and subsequent events have led me to a deeper understanding of what it means to embrace responsibility while at the same time recognizing and accepting that I am not in control.

Course material on the human person included an overview of historical Christian teachings that women do not image God as men do, womanist critiques of racism in Christianity, and disability theology on persons with dementia. As we studied contemporary Christian diversity on gender and sexuality, the Nashville Statement, signed by evangelical leaders who assert that “a homosexual or transgender self-conception is inconsistent with God’s holy purpose in creation and redemption” was required reading (Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood 2017, Article VII). The class session devoted to discussing that reading and this position was lively but respectful. The student who upended the next class did not attend this session.

From the first day of the course, a traditional age male student I had never taught before regularly sought to dominate class discussion, when he was present. A pattern had quickly emerged, in which he made extraneous comments unrelated to and demonstrating no familiarity with the assigned reading, in an apparent bid simply to hold the floor. Early in the term, I spoke to him privately in the hall immediately before class, to say I would limit the number of times I acknowledged his desire to speak because I wanted to encourage discussion by some of the quieter members of the small class, which was about evenly male and female. I am a white female and the class was predominantly white, with only two students of color. He laughed and told me to go ahead if I wanted to, but that he had been in classes with many of these students before, and they never talked.

I was taken aback by his reply, but it was time to start class, so I did not respond directly. That conversation did not change the pattern. I settled into a routine of using pair/share discussion structures, largely as a way of limiting time spent in whole class discussions when this student was present. I thought I was being sensitive and might be able to build rapport with him by avoiding direct confrontation, while also not letting his comments dominate class. When he expressed interest in process theology during a class discussion, I brought in one of my books on the topic to loan him. Unfortunately, in hindsight, I think he interpreted my indirect approach as evidence of weakness and perhaps felt emboldened by my nonconfrontational strategies.

Shortly before midterm, in the session immediately following discussion of the Nashville statement, I opened class by playing transgender Christian Reverend Paula Stone Williams's 2017 TEDx talk, in which she explains how living as a woman has made her aware of sexism in a profoundly new way (Williams 2019).[1] Before showing the video, I explained that we would have a minute of silence after the talk, for students to gather their thoughts. Then, for this session, female students would be invited to respond first, with male student responses afterward. Given the topic, the foundation of previous material, and the class dynamics, I still think it was a good plan.

As it happened, just as I noted the time after the video ended to track a minute for silence, the student I have described launched into scattered comments, the theme of which was denying the reality of everything Williams had just said about her own experience. This included comments to the effect that no one can be a woman just by dressing like one, that Williams deserved to lose all her friends since she had lied to everyone about who she is, that economists have proven there is no gender wage gap, and on and on and on. He was extremely loud, angry, and his face fiery red. While he was speaking, a visibly upset student left the room without a word.

My instinctual response was to regain the floor, thinking I could somehow go forward with my planned discussion on Christian diversity regarding gender and sexuality. But that reflexive response failed for at least two reasons. Firstly, I am soft-spoken; I had to shout to be heard over the student, and it took several attempts. Struggling to be louder than he was, to tell him he was out of order and had to stop immediately, I inadvertently acceded to the tense, hostile, combative atmosphere he had established. Though I thought I was properly asserting my authority, I competed with him for dominance and, in hindsight, wish I had not done so.

Secondly, my attempt to go forward with what I had planned was doomed. This student's rage had shattered any sense of safety in the room. I finally made myself heard, saying that he had to stop speaking or leave the room. He asked if I was telling him he had to leave in such an aggressive and hostile way that it was clearly a threat. Perhaps I should have said yes. As I had been struggling to regain the floor, I considered calling campus police but decided not to, and did not to order him to leave. Instead, I replied that if he stayed in the room, he had to comply with my discussion rules. It was his choice. The power battle between the two of us effectively silenced everyone else, and his intense hostility dominated the space even when he stopped speaking. Discussion simply was not possible. But in my determination to establish control, I did not see that. Resolved to show I was in charge, I plowed through the rest of that session. I wish I had not.

It was a late afternoon class, and when I got home that evening after another obligation, I discovered that the student who had silently left the room had emailed me right away through use of a smart phone, while still in the building, to apologize for walking out of class. That email read, in part, that the angry student's "blatant transphobia was putting me on the verge of a panic attack. I didn't feel safe in that classroom." That last sentence cut out my heart.

Until we communicated about this incident I had not known that this student was trans. Not only had I not kept this vulnerable student safe, but they had suffered deep distress because of inappropriate behavior in my class. This student, who had attended every session and was always prepared, who only a few weeks before had approached me after class to say how much they were enjoying the course, felt so unsafe because of this incident that they felt unable to return to the classroom. I received permission from my dean to instruct this student in one-on-one sessions for the remainder of the term, but they did not complete the course, despite my best efforts to keep them engaged and encouraged. They also told me they were not returning to the university after the semester's end. We stayed in touch through email a bit, but not for long. I remain haunted by how I failed this bright, engaging student who certainly has the capacity for a successful undergraduate education.

1 Rev. Williams has since given another TED talk with her son. Both are available at her website (Williams 2020).

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After a great deal of self-reflection, I now regularly rehearse what I wish I had done in that awful class, hoping to inscribe a new reflex. Though it now seems obvious, a strategy suggested to me in a therapy session never occurred to me in the moment. I wish I had waited until the student reached the end of his response to the video (assuming that must have happened at some point). Then, in the first minute of his voluntary silence, I wish I had said something like, “Wow! Now we all know what ‘X’ thinks! But I’d like to know what everyone in the room thinks. Please take out a sheet of paper and write out your responses.”

This strategy would have de-centered the student controlling the space with his anger. I imagine students pouring out their reactions, collecting their papers, and then dismissing class with a comment about responding to what they all said during our next session. I have not been able to imagine that next session, however. Nor have I been able to imagine a scenario in which the trans student feels safe enough to stay in the room through the outburst and reach that opportunity to write out a response. Though I am responsible for what takes place in my classroom, as this experience forcefully brought home to me, I am not in control. However, if I had let go of my insistence on being in control by waiting for the student to run out of things to say, perhaps I could have given the silenced students a safe space in which to respond to the violation of our class atmosphere.

It is not surprising that my sense of responsibility manifested in a reflexive grab for control. The many years I lived by juggling adjunct contracts and then the years leading up to tenure required me to prove myself over and over. The structures of academia insist upon this. For example, my institution requires all non-tenured instructors to be observed twice each semester by two tenured faculty; over many years, I have accumulated a thick stack of observation letters attesting to my teaching ability, the effectiveness of my course design, and various classroom strategies. But all this documentation and explanation of teaching strategies, class plans, and carefully worded policies on syllabi blur distinctions between responsibility and control.

The truth is that no matter how carefully I explain course policies or plan a class session, no matter how conscientious I may be in modeling respectful interaction to create an atmosphere of respect in class, I am not able, finally, to control another adult’s behavior. I see now that for years, I have equated responsibility, maintaining control, and ensuring safety: a powerfully appealing but illusory calculus. When I later discussed this incident and how I wish I had responded at a faculty-only workshop, a male teacher responded by saying, “That would never happen in one of my classes!” No, probably not.

Never mind that the faculty member who made this comment does not teach comparably controversial material. Perhaps more importantly, the professor who made that comment is a white male. The authority of white male professors is not challenged by students as the authority of professors of color and female professors often is, particularly in controversial matters which students may find personally threatening or emotionally upsetting.[2]

A discussion structure stipulating first silence, then female before male response, was a consciously feminist pedagogical strategy in a portion of class studying sexism and challenges to it within Christianity. Only one student chose to reject my authority by demanding to speak first, in open hostility. Significantly, this was a white male.[3] This student had not objected to prior discussion of arguments that women do not image God as fully as men, yet he said I had no right to “force” students to listen to a trans Christian describe her experience. In his comments, the white male student explicitly refused to acknowledge Reverend Williams’s reality.

Subsequent events also quickly took a turn I could not have anticipated or prevented. The angry student and I had a previously scheduled appointment on the morning following the classroom incident, to discuss his research project. When he arrived, I addressed the events of the previous class. I began by asking if he was experiencing any personal circumstance that might be causing him difficulty in managing his emotions, especially anger. He laughed as he said, “No, there’s nothing.”

2 I draw upon literature analyzing student evaluations to make this assertion, particularly Mitchell and Martin (2018), MacNell, Driscoll, and Hunt (2015), Miller and Chamberlin (2000), and Andersen and Miller (1997).

3 Though I believe sexual orientation is also relevant to analysis, I limit comment to what I observed directly. For the sake of transparency on the topic of sexuality, I am heterosexual.

I then explained the university academic disciplinary procedures and asked him to acknowledge responsibility for inappropriate behavior with an apology. He refused. He not only felt no apology was necessary, but made comments about me, the course, my department, and the discipline of religious studies which made it clear he had decided to treat me as an adversary and the course as a battle ground. Since we were in my office, I took notes as he spoke, in full view, to document what was said.

Because of the way he refused to acknowledge any inappropriateness in his behavior, I decided to take the next step in the disciplinary process and applied for a hearing to have him removed from the roster. This request required approval by my departmental chair, my college's dean, and the university provost; a hearing board, composed of faculty and students appointed by the provost's office, would then decide whether he remained in or was permanently removed from the course.

Before the hearing date, the student launched a social media campaign claiming that I had violated his free speech. The day of the hearing, the website *Campus Reform* ran a story repeating the student's claims (Gunter and Devlin 2018) and *Red Ice TV* posted a Henrik Palmgren interview with the student on its website (Palmgren 2018). The following day, *The Daily Stormer* website posted a link to an interview with the student by Vincent James, who is associated with *The Red Elephants* site.[4] The night after the hearing, local police knocked at my door after I was in bed to investigate a complaint that I had made a threat of violence against a local church. A few days later, an interview with the student was aired by Tucker Carlson, which has had two million views (Carlson 2018).

I live in the small-town, rural area in which my regional state university is located, in an open carry state. I had seen openly displayed revolvers on campus long before this event. But now photos of me, my street address, and my home had been posted online, and comments on vile chat sites said I should be raped or shot. I took down my personal Facebook page, but not before it had been flooded with obscenities. My university email was inundated with hateful messages and many other university personnel and departments received vitriolic messaging and phone calls. Campus police made extra rounds on the floor of my department.

Disciplinary hearings are intended to be confidential, and decisions are normally communicated only to the relevant parties. The structure of this hearing provided time for the student and I to each present a statement and respond to each other's statements. I had made my case and waited to hear from the board. I never did. In a press conference ten days after the hearing, the president of my university, without any prior contact with me, announced that he had "decided to indefinitely pause the formal university process without resolution" (Driscoll 2018). The decision of the hearing board would never be announced. Despite having scrupulously followed all university procedures to ensure responsible behavior, I soon learned just how little control I had in matters of university decision making. The rules changed under my feet with no notice.

Weighing in on matters of free speech in his press conference, the president alluded to a blog post of mine, published two months prior to this incident, which had been weaponized in the media frenzy. When the police came to my home investigating a report that I had made threats against a local church, they had quoted a creative interpretation of one sentence in that blog post. This deliberate misuse of my words lay behind the president's statement that

> In a free society, people with opinions you don't like are allowed to exist, are allowed to speak, and can call you names. People are even allowed to write essays that use violent metaphors to describe their feelings about a challenging situation without fear of punishment. (Driscoll 2018)[5]

Evidently, to the president's mind, public shaming of a faculty member did not constitute punishment, because he went on to say, "As I see it, a more thoughtful application of the IUP Way would probably have resulted in a reasonable resolution of the matter, with significantly less anger and anxiety" (Driscoll 2018). He also announced that he had asked "a senior faculty member with significant experience in the First Amendment and a long career as a successful classroom teacher

4 *The Daily Stormer* link to the video is no longer live, though it is discussed on the site (Jones 2018). The same interview was posted at *Red Elephants* YouTube Channel (James 2018).

5 In the blog post (Downie 2018) I had used the rather unfortunate metaphor of a Molotov cocktail; unfortunate in that it is shop worn. If only I had known how well cited this metaphor would be, perhaps I would have found a more original expression. The blog dealt with the internal experience of anger, shame, and the effort to process these.

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to join the class as a monitor and a mentor for all" (Driscoll 2018). Predictably, once this white male professor/monitor (or my babysitter, as he was later called in various media) was in the room, the formerly disruptive student never again made extraneous comments unrelated to the course or attempted to dominate class discussion, no matter how controversial the material.[6]

It was made clear to me that if I complied with administrative decisions about handling this public relations nightmare, all would go well. The implication was, I understood just as clearly, that should I speak publicly about this matter without proper vetting, I would not be protected by university legal counsel, should the various lawsuits threatened by many, who also claimed to have deep pockets, be forthcoming.

The dynamics of one class session, during which one hostile voice dominated the classroom, was intentionally replicated and amplified across various social media, gaining absurd embellishments, distortions, and outright fabrications from the start, all predicated upon the assumed narrative that I had unfairly silenced this student because of a personal agenda. Not only was I unable to control what was being said about me, I was also unable to talk back without risking my job and/or bankruptcy by potential legal fees.

I believed it was responsible to choose silence, for a time. That grueling choice has taken more of a toll on me than the threats, mockery, falsehoods, and vicious emails, which I still occasionally receive.[7] As I see it, now that it is not likely I will be fired or bankrupted by a lawsuit, (though I could be mistaken), my responsibility has shifted to speaking about these events.[8]

The scholarship of teaching and learning represents a community discussion to me, a dialogue which has enriched and strengthened me as an educator and as a person. I benefit greatly from the classroom stories, pedagogical reflections, and tactics others share and expect to continue to do so. Some would counsel that I leave this story behind and move on. Why exhume a painful past? Some will not understand that I need to speak about this event precisely so that I can move on. Though this happened to me, the story is not only personal. The personal and private is also the public and the political.

More than a year after this ordeal, I enjoy the privilege of a comfortably anonymous middle-class life. With tenure, I no longer worry about whether I will get a teaching contract or have health insurance. I regained the pounds I lost when I could not eat or sleep normally for weeks. I no longer fear a brick through my living room window or an unknown number lighting up my phone. I can buy groceries without fearing I will be accosted by an outraged Breitbart reader who thinks I pose an imminent danger to all local Christians. I can park in a faculty lot without fearing my tires will be slashed or my car egged. This routinely assumed relative safety is a privilege denied not only to those who have been fired or forced out of the classroom by social media campaigns, but also to veiled Muslim women and turbaned Sikhs, to Jews, to immigrants, to those with visible disabilities, to all persons of color, to LGBTQ persons, and the list goes on.

In graduate school I came across a statement by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel in an anthology of his writings, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity* (1996), which unnerved and frustrated me. It made me deeply uncomfortable and for a long time I found it baffling. I have been chewing on it for nearly two decades: "In a free society, some are guilty, but all are responsible" (1996, 225). Though I expect to continue having difficulty assessing and addressing my guilt, even if or when I am not guilty, and, I would add, even when I am not in control, I am responsible. I hope I demonstrated responsibility by not speaking for a time, but now I believe responsibility entails speaking.

6 It is important, though digressive to the flow of this essay, that I stress my enormous respect for and undying gratitude to this generous colleague, who spent countless hours supporting me. The incident occurred at midterm, so a great deal of the semester remained. Indeed, once I learned that the student was to remain in the course, I was deeply grateful for this professor's presence, which enabled me to feel safe in the classroom. I must also thank so many in my campus community. My department chair issued a letter of support for me. The dean of my college signed a statement of support that all the chairs of every department in my college wrote and distributed through university email. The director of the women's and gender studies program, as well as the campus chapter of the faculty union to which I belong also issued statements of their support of me to the entire university through email. I am also deeply thankful to each of my departmental colleagues, our administrative assistant, student office workers, and to the many people on campus who supported and encouraged me with personal notes. Though I was entirely off social media, I know that many also supported me in personal postings on Twitter and Facebook. I also must thank Paula Stone Williams for her gracious, generous support and for agreeing to speak at our campus the following semester for a nominal fee. It was a great pleasure to meet her and an honor to bring her to our campus.

7 These are now sporadic and unpredictable. I happened to receive about a dozen while I wrote this essay. A petition to have me fired continues to accumulate signatures, more than 2,000 on May 29, 2019 (Player 2018).

8 I am grateful to others who discussed these events when I could not, including David P. Gushee (2018), President of the American Academy of Religion, and Michael Vasquez (2018).

Being the target of outrage for several weeks has given me a fleeting taste of what it might be to live with a constant sense of threat from people who despise without knowing me, people who are outraged and threatened by my very existence. Though the event was short-lived, the caricature of me that lives online will outlive me. Though the event was short-lived, my increased awareness of privilege must not be. And though I am not in control, if I am to be responsible, the ordeal which initiated my tenure must also direct how I use the privilege accorded by tenure to speak.

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THE WABASH CENTER
JOURNAL ON TEACHING

SPECIAL TOPIC

Teaching “Greek for Ministry” in a Multicultural Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Teaching and learning a biblical language such as Greek can pose a set of pedagogical challenges in a multicultural classroom where the instructor and students have different cultural assumptions about language learning. Reflecting on her encounter with a student’s question regarding why ancient Greek grammar operates the way it does, the author explores how this critical incident helped her recognize the cultural diversity in the classroom and develop a new pedagogical toolkit. In particular, the author employed multi-sensory activities using music and visuals to foster the students’ motivation and bridge the gaps between different cultural assumptions. This experience eventually led the author to another pedagogical insight: Teaching and learning Greek at a seminary are critical to building much-needed intercultural competency for informed ministry in the twenty-first century. This is one of three essays published together in a special topic section of this journal on critical incidents in the classroom.

KEYWORDS

Greek, biblical language, second-language learning, pedagogy, cultural diversity, activity-based learning, multisensory teaching, intercultural competency, seminary education, ministry

“Professor, I don’t mean to challenge you, but could you please explain to me why the Greek personal pronouns are declined so varyingly while some of the forms sound exactly the same?”

There was almost dead silence when a student interjected this question in the middle of my lecture.

“I am not challenged, and that’s a very good question, but. . . ”

But. . . what? While I was searching for words, I looked around the classroom and immediately noticed some faces tense with vexation and others full of curiosity. Inevitably, it took me some time to process the contrasting body language in order to find the right tone and length for my answer. However, I do not remember what I said to the student. My primary memory of the incident is of having no clear answer to provide at that moment.

Only three weeks into the fall semester of 2018, this “critical incident” happened in my “Greek for Ministry” class, a pathway course to biblical studies at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.[1] My classroom consisted of fourteen mostly first-year MDiv students in their twenties. Although the majority had no previous experience learning a biblical or ancient language, they courageously chose this course before taking other Bible classes, with much hope and excitement that they would be able to read the New Testament in Greek. However, soon after the semester began, my students’ enthusiasm started to

1 For the definition of “critical incidents” in teaching, see Brookfield (1995, 114–139).

cool. They quickly began to struggle with the horrendous number of paradigms they had to memorize before moving on to the next lesson. Certainly, I had predicted that learning this archaic language would by no means be easy for anyone. In all honesty, however, I had not taken care to dig deeply into the realm of “why?” until the student asked me the question. As a first-year faculty member, I was busy preparing to explain grammar rules and functions, assuming that students would eventually digest whatever was written in the textbook and whatever they were told to memorize.[2]

However, the unexpected question my student raised alerted me to a fundamental aspect of teaching: Instructors’ assumptions about their classes do not necessarily match the assumptions that students bring to the classroom. Even among students, a variety of cultural and educational backgrounds have affected their expectations about the course subject—in this case, about how an ancient language works. As I reflected on this critical incident that fall, I realized how important it is to acknowledge such different assumptions, especially when teaching in a multicultural classroom. This essay is a story about how I worked with different cultural assumptions and learning styles and about the pedagogical insight I gained in this process. The critical incident led me not only to develop a set of creative teaching strategies but also to see the benefits of language learning in a twenty-first-century seminary context.

Since the tense moment I experienced in class, I have long thought about the implications of the “why” question for my teaching. In fact, for the rest of that semester, I often witnessed puzzlement, if not confusion, about why ancient Greek grammar operates the way that it does, not only from the particular student who raised the question but also from others. Yet, as I started seeing certain patterns in their struggles, the grounds for my students’ uncertainty and curiosity became clear to me. Those “why” questions stemmed from their native languages—mostly English—because their mother tongues were so natural for them that they had not considered that other language systems might work differently.[3] One of the reasons the varying endings of a Greek noun posed a challenge to my students is that they had never used different endings to nouns in a sentence to express a syntactical relationship. For instance, in an English sentence like “I love coffee,” we know that the noun “coffee” functions as the direct object of the verb “love” because “coffee” comes right after the verb. In other words, we do not need to add a different suffix to the noun in order to establish this relationship; the word order signifies it. Most students are used to basic English rules like this example, but Greek presents many cases of complex grammar and usage that do not exist in English. For the majority of my students who grew up speaking only English, certainly the natural basis on which to understand another language is English. They tend to assume that English grammar principles, syntax, and nuances will likely apply to ancient languages as well.

In order to learn Greek as it is, then, it seemed essential for them to break this habit of English-grounded thinking. However, would emphasizing the huge linguistic difference between Greek and English be pedagogically effective? Or, would any linguistic theory or etymological study help to reorient students toward a Greek way of thinking? In a speed-learning class like mine, it was nearly impossible to dive into the deep reservoir of history and culture within which a particular language’s grammatical structures and usage are firmly embedded. Thus, it would make no sense to track down all the origins of the Greek grammar and morphology over one semester. In fact, the most honest and least time-consuming approach to learning Greek would be to just accept the way things are in that language.

When my thoughts arrived at this reality, I could finally recognize another kind of difference in the classroom that was significantly affecting my teaching. Before the critical incident, I had not realized that there may be a huge gap between my students’ language learning experience and mine. Although it is true that ancient Greek and my mother tongue (Korean) have no cognation with each other, I am used to working with a heavily inflected language, as Korean has a complex grammar system in which varying endings of a verb indicate tense, mood, voice, and even the degree of respect. Moreover, whether consciously or unconsciously, I am already accustomed to accepting the ways things are in several different languages, partly because of the excruciating language requirements that I had to complete during my doctoral program and because learning foreign languages (such as English and German) was an essential part of the general education curriculum while

2 In retrospect, my past self seems to have believed that there is no better pedagogy than the traditional “banking model” when it comes to language learning (cf. Freire 2005, 71–86). In this “banking model” of education, “the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat” (Freire 2005, 72).

3 According to Robert M. DeKeyser, five different variables “interact in L2 [i.e., second language] acquisition: the characteristics of the L2, the influence of the first language (L1), the role of age, the role of individual differences in cognitive and affective ‘aptitudes,’ and the role of learning context, be it the native-speaking environment or the classroom” (2005, 2). The author notes that “[w]here the semantic system of the L1 is different from that of the L2, . . . the learning problem is serious and long lasting” (5) and introduces several cases in which learners find it difficult to establish the form-meaning link in a second language due to the absence or redundant presence of certain grammatical rules they are familiar with (DeKeyser 2005, 7–11; see also 13).

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I was growing up in South Korea. However, my students' experiences contrasted sharply with mine when I looked into their profiles.[4] I noticed that only three or four students could actually speak or read a second language; the rest of my class had yet to learn a language other than English. Thus, my experience was not something that I could generalize to my students. Rather than asking them to break their habit of thinking in English, I should have stopped taking for granted that my students would learn Greek in the same manner that I did![5]

Clarifying my own and my students' different assumptions was a turning point in my class preparation. I put away my vague hope and expectation that my students would digest lessons without difficulty and began to remind myself that telling them to unconditionally accept "the way things are in Greek" is not the best way to teach this language. However, I could not water down what my students were supposed to learn. In addition, it was neither efficient nor pedagogically inspiring to ask them to rely heavily on translation software and online morphological analysis tools when they had yet to learn key Greek terms and basic grammar rules. Therefore, I instead chose to acquire a new pedagogical toolkit, embracing my students' uncertainty and curiosity while fostering their motivation.[6] What kinds of learning methods, then, has my class adopted since the critical incident?

First, I learned that it is pedagogically productive to teach from commonality rather than from difference between languages. This is also a basic step in acknowledging students' background knowledge and cultural contexts. When a certain Greek rule did not make clear sense to us, we turned to examples or analogies drawn from English (or other languages that some of my students already knew).[7] For instance, as a way of showing that each language has irregularities but still presents some patterns within itself, I gleaned a case from American English. Referring to "mother," "mortal," and "mob," I encouraged my class to see that the vowel "o" can be pronounced quite differently. I also noted that although we do not know why the pronunciations are different, we can find certain patterns in the differences by learning other words in which similar consonants are placed after the "o" (e.g., "other," "orbit," and "obligation"). This comparative approach was particularly helpful when my students tried to "feel" how the Greek vowels "alpha (α), iota (ι), and upsilon (υ) may be short or long," depending on the word (Croy 1999, 2).

Second, we utilized a common medium of communication for all humanity: music. When the critical incident happened, my students were already overwhelmed by the different endings of the first and second declension nouns, yet they were about to learn another set of paradigms: Greek personal pronouns. If there is no other way to master them except memorization, what would help us remember them more painlessly? Having asked myself this question over and over, I finally came up with music. In the week following the critical incident, I played a YouTube recording of a funky drum loop with strong beats and asked my class to recite the paradigms according to the rhythm: "Α τός, α το , α τ , α τόν . . . . " Moving from a low 100 BPM rhythm to a faster one at 120 BPM, everyone read the Greek forms out loud, over and over again. To our pleasant surprise, the Greek paradigms turned into a rap as we tapped them out and even danced to them. Everyone left class laughing, with a clearer sense of how the Greek pronouns are declined.

Third, combining the first and the second approaches above, I often prepared multi-sensory activities that include voice, text, and visuals.[8] This method particularly helped accommodate my students' different learning styles. For example, I put some famous modern songs into ancient Greek and offered a sing-along time in class. When it was time to learn the Greek imperative and –μι verbs, I did not go directly into the details of those forms and conjugations. Instead, I distributed partially translated lyrics of "Let It Go" from the Disney animation Frozen, turned on the A/V projector, and showed a sing-along music video: "Μέθες τό, μέθες τό, . . . δε σταμαι (let it go, let it go, . . . here I stand)." My class was singing this familiar refrain in Greek while watching Elsa's feisty acting on the screen. A possibly demanding

4 Prior to the first class meeting, I asked each student to fill out a student information sheet in order to survey my students' educational backgrounds and learning styles.

5 As Steven G. McCafferty and others point out, the focus of language teaching is on learners, not on teachers; this learner-centered approach leads to the acknowledgement that students "have a variety of second language styles," which also necessitates "the utilization of multiple strategies" to teach second languages effectively (McCafferty, Jacobs, and Iddings 2006, 24–26).

6 Fostering students' motivation is identified as a benefit of using activity-based learning in the classroom, the pedagogical principle undergirding my teaching methods. For more details, see Galindo (2020).

7 For example, when I explained that the plural form δελφοί in Greek could be translated as "brothers and sisters" despite its male gender, I took an example from French: the masculine plural form, "étudiants," literally means male students but it can also be used when referring to male and female students together.

8 As Linda B. Nilson shows, "all students learn more and better from multiple-sense and multi-method instruction" (2010, 237).

Greek class turned into a karaoke, and this interactive activity helped to ease the difficulty my students would have likely felt in memorizing the conjugations.

While these teaching tools did not necessarily answer "why" questions about Greek, they at least helped keep us from getting stuck in "why's" unfathomable realm. Many of us instead found this variety of pedagogical methods engaging, effective, and even meaningful for our ongoing learning.[9] The course evaluations I received from my students at the end of that semester reflect such learning experience. To quote some of them: "[Dr. Lim's class] was challenging, but she made it engaging and I enjoyed the interactive nature of it. It felt more accessible than I was expecting it to be"; "I loved that she spent time putting modern songs into Greek, her use of memes, and other pop culture references throughout to engage us and make the class fun"; "[This course] gave me new insight into how learning Greek would continue to benefit my ministry." The fun multi-sensory activities helped us open our minds to this ancient language, observe its patterns, and feel the cultural ethos that was once inscrutable and so unfamiliar to us. By using interactive learning methods, both the instructor and students participated in a collective effort in which all strived to bridge the gap between different assumptions and find the commonality that exists beyond diverse cultural and educational backgrounds.[10]

This collective experience is precisely the reason that I believe the critical incident also led me to see the benefits of teaching and learning Greek in a multicultural seminary context. For many of my students, my class was their first time taking a course with an Asian female professor in order to learn a language that Western academia has long claimed to own. English-speaking students were learning ancient Greek from a Korean instructor. Apart from the complexity of the Greek language, our class already presented a lot of unpredictability and learning dynamics stemming from the demographic differences and cultural diversity. As three or even more different cultures converged in the classroom, sometimes they collided, and other times they waited to be heard and accepted.[11] After all, our journey to understand Greek from diverse backgrounds encouraged us to practice patience, improve our sensitivities to linguistic and cultural differences, and revisit our own assumptions about the lives of others. Teaching and learning Greek became an important avenue along which we paused for new voices, ventured the unpredictable, and struggled to figure out other people's ways of life in a different place at a different time. As a seminary professor, I see that these attributes are much-needed for informed ministry in twenty-first-century America, where many different voices co-exist, but some are left unheard or even unwelcomed. In order to help seminarians build intercultural competency, we might need to teach them to learn a biblical language, preparing them to work with many "why" questions ahead.

All of a sudden, my course title made true sense to me: Greek *for Ministry*.

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9 This experience resonates with Brookfield's point: "The ways that culture, history, and personality determine how events are experienced . . . [gave me] the idea that different people learn differently. . . . when [students] hear, week after week, how people sitting next to them have a completely different reaction to what goes on in class, the reason why I use a variety of approaches starts to make sense" (1995, 121).

10 Concerning the importance of interpersonal intelligence in language-learning classrooms that "involves showing respect to others and knowing how to understand and interact successfully with peers," see McCafferty, Jacobs, and Iddings (2006, 25).

11 What we witnessed corresponds with Trinh T. Minh-ha's observation: "The understanding of difference is a shared responsibility, which requires a minimum of willingness to reach out to the unknown" (1989, 85).

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SPECIAL TOPIC

"I Want to Love Islam, I Really Do, But . . . ": Islamophilic Classrooms in Islamophobic Times

Nermeen Mouftah
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ABSTRACT

This essay reflects on a critical incident that occurred during a seminar discussion about the age of Aishah at the time of her marriage to the prophet Muhammed. I take students' discomfort with the material and their expression of emotions—especially their desire to love Islam—as an opening to think about the opportunities and challenges of working with students' emotions in the classroom. I begin by problematizing love (or the want of it) as an Islamophilic response to students' awareness of the dangers of Islamophobia. I then go on to entertain the possibility of embracing love as a 'productive' emotion that offers insights into the study of Islam and Muslims. While I caution against the traps of Islamophilia, I take love as an important and perhaps overlooked dimension of pedagogy. This is one of three essays published together in a special topic section of this journal on critical incidents in the classroom.

KEYWORDS

Islam, emotions, frustration, love, Islamophobia, Islamophilia, gender, sexuality

I Want to Love Islam

One student spoke while others shifted awkwardly in their seats.[1] "I want to love Islam, I really do. But. . . " We sat together in anticipation of the remainder of the sentence, but her point was clear. This student had tried to imagine Islam as good, and here, in week six, she was running out of steam.

In Fall 2018, seventeen bright juniors and seniors sat in a semi-circle in Jordan Hall at Butler University. They were enrolled in the seminar "Islam, Gender, and Sexuality." That day's class was part of the theme Women in the Quran and Tradition. They had read from Kecia Ali's *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Quran, Hadith, and Jurisprudence* (2016). There was a palpable sense within the group that their patience was being worn thin. The chapter that had pushed them to their limits was "The Prophet Muhammed, His Beloved Wife Aishah, and Modern Sensibilities." Students struggled to contribute to the discussion. The chapter opens with a prophetic tradition (*hadith*) as epigraph: "Aishah narrated that the Prophet married her when she was a girl of six and he consummated the marriage when she was a girl of nine" (2016, 173). Ali's interest lies in how contemporary Muslims grapple with the ethical implications of the hadith. For the students, the hadith seemed too similar to the false claims of Islamophobes that they were skilled at challenging.

1 I am grateful to the lively seminar students who participated in these discussions, and especially to those who generously allowed me to share their words. I would like to thank Aun Hasan Ali, Rose Aslan, and Junaid Quadri for their critical comments and suggestions on earlier drafts.

Only in the nineteenth century did Aishah's age at the time of marriage become a matter for discussion for polemicists. Muslims have reacted in various ways, from asserting the authenticity of the hadith, to questioning it. Some Muslims theorize a later date of marriage, while others cast the union as normal in its historical and geographic context. Aishah bint Abu Bakr (613/614–678 CE) holds special reverence, especially for Sunnis, in the Islamic tradition. She is the source of much of what is recorded about the prophet Muhammed's life, and he is described as having had a special fondness for her.

I was prepared for the classroom frisson. Most students had prepared a 300-word reading response on Moodle prior to class. In their responses, they shared their confusion: "Much of this chapter just left me frustrated because I didn't know how to feel." The posts presented a class in crisis. I decided to postpone my lesson plan to respond to them. In what may have seemed obvious to many, I opened our session by asking: What makes this topic so uncomfortable? Why did you find it frustrating?

Two students shared how in reading about the relationship, they kept thinking about their younger siblings, and were unable to imagine that they would be prepared for a sexual relationship at such a young age. Another seemed to test the waters of what could be shared at a moment when their professor asked them to describe their reaction to a text. "The idea of her being that young, well, it is. . . " (face scrunched up) "disgusting." I facilitated the discussion, offering very little response to their reactions, calling on students, one after another, to share.

Eventually we made our way to some of my planned questions: What are the ethical and methodological issues that Ali raises? What does the debate tell us about polemics and apologetics? What assumptions do various interpreters make about Aishah's body (and puberty)? In other words, I wanted to treat this topic with the same kind of critical inquiry we had used in other classes. As an illustration of Muslim discussions of the hadith, we watched a clip from a lecture by Georgetown professor Jonathan Brown titled "Why are you agitated about the age of Hazrat Aysha?" (2012). In the video, an audience member asks Brown to comment on the hadith that mentions the age of Aishah. Brown responds: "You seem agitated about this. What is your agitation? Why are you so uncomfortable?"

"I'm not so uncomfortable about it. But some people are."

"What makes you uncomfortable?"

"But I'm not. Bu, bu. . . "

"What makes you uncomfortable?"

"In the context of now. . . [inaudible]."

Brown rubs his chin. Another audience member intervenes: "I think the question has something to do with later sources. Ibn Hisham and Tabari. . . ." The second questioner framed the question as one about how to navigate various authoritative texts that speak to the issue. Brown explains some theories of how Aishah must have been older than the hadith mentions and refutes them. The questioner follows up to reassure him: "My question isn't an ethical one. It's about the science of hadith."

The clip demonstrated for students a sample of how some Muslims discuss and try to understand the hadith. Compared with Ali's chapter (2016) that treated the subject as a challenging ethical quandary, one student summed up the contrast between the two approaches: "Brown seems very certain of himself" (2012).

Love Hurts: Islamophilia as an Anxiety of Islamophobia

Let me state from the outset that none of my course objectives include cultivating a love of Islam. I do not say this proudly to set colleagues at ease. The active verbs I employ on my syllabus as course objectives include asking students to identify, analyze, appreciate, apply, develop, refine, and interrogate. Notably, none of these include honing the correct feeling for the study of Islam.

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In fact, for a course on Islam, gender, and sexuality, love is conspicuously coy.[2] I carved out only a small space to explicitly contemplate love in the tradition by reading excerpts from Omid Safi's *Radical Love: Teachings from the Islamic Mystical Tradition* (2018). Students explored *eshq*, passionate love for the Divine, through poetry. Admittedly though, this is a rare moment in a course that examines issues of marriage, family, and sexual desire and practice with very little attention to the complex emotion of love.

I take up my student's comment, "I want to love Islam, I really do," not as a riposte to what I take as a naive or misguided confession, but as an opening to think about the different ways in which love might work in the Islamic studies classroom. I begin by problematizing love (or the desire for it) as an Islamophilic response by students with a keen awareness of the dangers of Islamophobia. I then go on to entertain the possibility of embracing love as a "productive" emotion that offers insights into the study of Islam and Muslims. While I caution against the traps of Islamophilia, I take love as an important and perhaps overlooked dimension of pedagogy. I am interested in when love gets in the way of our study, and when it can enrich and guide it. The central questions the episode raises are: Is there a right emotion for our study? And can the right emotions set us up for the right relationship to our subject? I approach these questions in a spirit of experimentation and make some pedagogical suggestions on how to draw attention to the role of emotions in student learning.

Before turning to love, however, I want to consider the "but" in the student's comment, since it is the "but" and ensuing silence that drives the conflict of the scene. Looming in the silence was a student stretched to her relativist limits. In muting herself, she expressed a concern to not be insensitive. She was clearly not alone. The class was unsettled. And while I had no intention of making them comfortable—Ali is explicitly unsettling her reader as she grapples with the hadith—my prodding failed to interrogate how feelings were a part of our reckoning with the hadith. While I gave students the space to elaborate on their personal reactions to the chapter, I did not draw analytic attention to their reactions. Instead, I viewed the airing of their feelings as a first step to moving on and making the analytic observations that marked what I took as the stakes of discussing Aishah's age. The students' discussion of their feelings allowed them to cope with the ethical questions raised in the chapter. At the same time, focusing on students' reactions appeared to be the direct response that polemicists wished to elicit. Ali draws our attention to the role of polemics and apologetics in the debate about Aishah's age. Directing students' attention to how polemical modes shape the discursive field would be an effective way to harness the discussion of their feelings.

The incident shows the need to address emotions within the classroom. The students described their confusion and frustration as negative emotions. The want for love is part of their desire to embrace Islam. I believe this desire that I call Islamophilic is related to students' awareness of and desire to combat Islamophobia. I often include a critical reading on Islamophobia early in the course to help us address the misrepresentation of Muslims, Islamic history, and contemporary manifestations of anti-Islam and anti-Muslim bigotry, particularly in Euro-America.[3] This framing is essential for excavating how we know what we know about Islam and Muslims. During office hours, I guided a student as she refined a research question for her term paper. In her formulation she suggested that Muslim women are always foreign. When I pointed out that there are Muslim women in America, the student appeared chastened: "I didn't mean to be" and here she mumbled, "Islamophobic." In another office hours meeting, a different student mentioned her own surprise at just how much of her previous knowledge of Islam was based on Islamophobic sources. The mumble and astonishment are signs of something cracking. Students could uncomfortably recognize Islamophobia. But the class on Aishah suggested that Islamophilia ought to be a concept to work with and through as well.

The incident prompted me to return to Andrew Shryock's edited volume, *Islamophobia/Islamophilia: Beyond the Politics of Enemy and Friend* (2010). One of the insights gleaned from this collection of essays is that Islamophobia and Islamophilia are not opposites, but rather are two sides of the same coin. Where Islamophobia is "a generalized fear of Islam and Muslims" (2010, 1), Islamophilia is "a generalized affection for Islam and Muslims, [that] comes with its own political costs" (2010, 9). Islamophilia appeals to those ready to embrace an image of Islam or Muslims that counters mainstream depictions of an enemy. As critical as Islamophobia scholarship is, it cannot adequately address the disposition with which many students join the seminar: a desire to love Islam.

2 On the specific challenges and distinct approaches to teaching Islam, gender, and sexuality, see Haqqani (2019), Khoja-Moolji (2014), Mahmood (2012), and Tidswell (2013).

3 The resources to teach on Islamophobia have multiplied in the last decade. Some selections that include a focus on the United States include Green (2015), Beydoun (2018), Ernst (2013), and Esposito (2011).

I previously found it difficult to take seriously the dangers of Islamophilia. In a context of sometimes hysterical and other times subtle forms of Islamophobia, I assumed Islamophobia to be a serious impediment to understanding the Islamic tradition and Muslim communities; I did not take into account the motivations and orientations of many—if not most—students who enroll in my classes: to better understand a religion they know is widely misunderstood. This positioning makes them susceptible to wanting to love, which can lead to recoiling when they discover differences that challenge their values and norms. For this reason, while exploring Islamophobia must remain a critical part of our study, Islamophilia should similarly be explored as a critical framing concept. In addition to assigning readings from Shryock's (2010) collection, classroom activities can include debates as to whether a scholarly or media source is an example of Islamophilia. The Brown lecture (2012) is another possible source around which to frame such a seminar discussion, a suggestion to which I return below.

Not only did I fail to understand the significance of Islamophilia, I did not appreciate its alliance with Islamophobia, and how critical it is to address the two together. Both Islamophobia and Islamophilia set up Islam and Muslims as either good or bad. Both reach for an Islamic essence and construct a totalizing image of Islam as an object and Muslims as a monolith. The frame is claustrophobic. It limits our conversations. If Islam is not bad, as the media reports, students hoped that their university classroom would tell them that Islam is good. These students persistently broke down binaries in our seminar. But the stubborn interdependence of Islamophobia and Islamophilia, fear and affection, are not so easily untied.

However, just as Islamophilia can be employed as a critical concept, it has its limitations. The pairing of Islamophobia and Islamophilia relies on a framework of secular criticism, as Shryock points out, one that is not interested in “Islam as a doctrinal system,” but rather takes “Muslims as social actors” (2010, 18). While this move disrupts taking Islam as an object and effectively captures a diversity of experiences and interpretations, within the religious study classroom it occludes any possibility of a relationship to the study of Islam and Muslims except as a perennially outsider's endeavor. An approach that twins Islamophilia with phobia privileges looking in, whether the observer is non-Muslim or Muslim, as the grounds on which to understand the tradition and people who relate to it. It presumes a critical detachment. In other words, the relationship of Islamophobia and Islamophilia makes sense in a world of secular criticism. It leaves no room for love.

Tastes and Sensibilities: Love as a Pedagogical Technique

In questioning the place of love in the classroom, I am not quite ready to leave it aside; I do, however, want to carve out a different relationship to it. Brown's video (2012) and the questions posed by his audience represent a different kind of Islamophilia than those of the seminar students. Had members of Brown's audience been present in Jordan Hall that day, they likely would have retorted that our conversation circled around personal tastes. Their primary concern, as they described it, was to the textual tradition and its methods of learning and preserving knowledge. Brown's repetition of “What makes you so uncomfortable?” echoed my own foray into the lesson, but to different effect. The video clip demonstrated Muslims asking questions in a different vein than those of the seminar's and revealed a different driving force. They implicitly asked: what kinds of questions are the right questions for our sacred texts? Critically pursuing how emotions work means to be aware of how they motivate, how they are often conflicted, and how they may appear in unexpected places. While the idea of love in the Islamic tradition for many implies the mystical tradition (as the course reinforced through our reading of “radical love” poetry), Brown and his audience (2012) may similarly be moved by a love of the tradition and a love of prophet, just as they (to some of my students' horror) eschewed questions of ethics. The wavering love of my students was based on a desire to love the other, not oneself, and not one's tradition. These different kinds of Islamophilia pose their own pitfalls and potentials.

My own ethnographic work on Quran education guides me to see emotions as potentially productive human responses that enable learning (Mouftah 2019). Much work in the anthropology of Islam is attentive to practices that learners apply to their lives to cultivate correct or virtuous feelings.[4] In the future I will draw attention to students' emotive responses and contrast them with those grounded in ideal Islamic education, where one's affective response is not considered natural, but is instead the site of cultivation. In her essay on deploying aesthetics in Islamic studies classrooms, Manuela Ceballos describes the concept of *dhawq*, or taste, and the significance of honing *dhawq* as critical to discernment and ethical refinement: “Even though the individual may have certain intuitive predispositions, part of the role of Islamic education is to

4 On the role of emotions in performing and listening to the Qur'an, see for example Gade (2004; 2002) and Nelson (1985). Beyond Qur'anic education, see for example, Hirschkind (2013) and Ware (2014).

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channel these subjective inclinations and to guide the student to appreciate spiritual beauty, to find pleasure in that which is good, and to guide and correct her affective responses to ethical matters (2019, 22).

My aim is not to recreate the methods and dispositions of classical Islamic education, but rather to decenter the methods of our seminar and contemplate the potentials of an epistemology that situates tastes, sensibilities, and emotions as integral to learning. Appreciating this form of education at this stage of the term would also lay the groundwork for their study of Muslim women's bodily practices that seek to develop desire for prayer and pious dispositions. Students read Saba Mahmood's seminal "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival" (2001). They were challenged and intrigued by women who endeavor to hone shyness as a virtue. Centering on emotions earlier in the course would allow students more traction in thinking about the cultivation of virtuous feelings more broadly, and not exclusively related to women's modesty.

The Right Emotions for our Study, the Right Relationship to our Subject

Institutional constraints may add to the Islamophobia/Islamophilia bind. Colleges and universities seem to want to offer courses in Islam to counter popular misunderstandings, and in doing so to construct an Islamophilic point of entry to our courses. Students are afraid to not love Islam. For some, loving Islam is politically progressive. For others, it is Christian. And for yet others, it is a rare moment for them to appreciate their tradition. But the desire for this love to be one that expects to like everything it discovers leaves us in shallow waters. It reduces a religious tradition to the fickle tastes of Facebook likes and loves. The challenge is to recognize the parameters that such judgments place on the conversation and then push against those confinements. To enable this push, I suggest we experiment with the place of emotions in the classroom.

Insights based on the incident lead me to two, at times opposing, suggestions: the first is to be just as aware of Islamophilia as we are of Islamophobia. The second is to call attention to how emotions impact our learning. We can redirect questions around student feelings, especially sentiments of confusion and frustration that leave much to be untangled. What does it mean to love Islam? What do the powers of disgust or revulsion tell us about ourselves and our subjects? Is it possible to bracket—even temporarily—our feelings towards our material? How do we know when to trust our feelings, or when they inhibit our understanding? Interrogating how emotion works adds complexity to the classroom. Calling attention to feelings does not need to be indulgent, but can further open up other course materials that are premised on understanding emotions for religious knowledge and practice. I want students to notice at what moments we love, and at what moments we see our love challenged. The seminar need not take our wavering feelings as the guide for our study, but instead as data to help us understand ourselves, our times, and our relationship to the people, places, texts, and debates that make up our study.

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ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THIS SPECIAL TOPIC SECTION ON CRITICAL INCIDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM

Pearson, Thomas. 2020. “Introduction to the Special Section on Critical Incidents in Teaching.” *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* 1 (2): 39–40. https://doi.org/10.31046/wabashcenter.v1i2.1500.

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THE WABASH CENTER
JOURNAL ON TEACHING

CONVERSATION

Conversation on the Scholarship of Teaching

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ABSTRACT

This Conversation was recorded during the final weekend meeting of the participants in the Wabash Center's Colloquy on Writing the Scholarship of Teaching (2017-2018). Over the previous year, each of the Colloquy participants had been developing their own essay on a topic in the scholarship of teaching religion and theology. The conversation begins with reflections on the scholarly peer review process, but quickly expands to debates about the contours of the scholarship on teaching and the value of this literature—both as an author and a reader—to cultivating a successful teaching practice.

KEYWORDS

writing about teaching, peer review, mentorship, genre, scholarship, SoTL, audience, transferability, gatekeeping, iteration

Thomas Pearson[1] Let's start by discussing the prompts *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* provides for peer reviewers. You've been developing essays for the journal, which has involved writing and receiving peer review, based on these prompts. How relevant did those prompts seem to you as an author, and as a reviewer? What was your experience of being held accountable, so to speak, to these particular prompts? Did they prompt relevant feedback for what you were trying to achieve as an author and for what you were trying to communicate to the author you were reviewing? How would you compare them to the *Teaching and Learning Inquiry's* review prompts we've looked at (2020)?[2]

Hussein Rashid As an author I really liked the prompts. They help by indicating clear directions on what I should be thinking about as I write. When I sent my draft off to my external reviewer, I was asking myself, have I hit all of these points? It helped me anticipate and fill possible gaps.

1 Conversation participants, in order of appearance: Thomas Pearson (Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion), Hussein Rashid (Barnard University), Eugene V. Gallagher (Connecticut College, emeritus), Mindy McGarrah Sharp (Columbia Theological Seminary), Lea F. Schweitz (Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago), Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand (Middle Tennessee State University), Zandra L. Jordan (Stanford University), Benjamin E. Zeller (Lake Forest College), David B. Howell (Ferrum University), Almeda M. Wright (Yale Divinity School), Martin Nguyen (Fairfield University), Kwok Pui Lan (Candler School of Theology), Heather White (University of Puget Sound), G. Brooke Lester (Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary), Beverley Foulks McGuire (University of North Carolina, Wilmington).

2 The link to the "TLI Review Form" is at the end of the second paragraph (https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/TLI/about#PR).

On the reviewing side, it was very helpful to be instructed that I should be writing to the author, not the editors. It made me realize that I had responsibility to another human being. This is a problem with a lot of the peer reviews. It's easy to feel responsible instead to the computer screen, which is inherently alienating, and I think sometimes causes me to be a bit more caustic then I intend to be because I'm only talking to the screen, not another human being. My academic training is to be critical and address my critique to the editor. I never realized how far that had taken over my process for writing peer reviews until I got this form asking me to write for the author.

Eugene V. Gallagher

There are a couple of different roots for this. First, the Wabash Center ethos of hospitality is focused on supporting faculty to have the conversations they need to have, rather than dictating the content of what they should talk about. Secondly, we've learned that it is not helpful for a reviewer to strike out at an acute angle, saying "Here's what your article should have been about"—criticizing the author for not writing the article that the reviewer would have liked to have written on the topic. It's much better to try to stand alongside the author and try to help them write the best version of the essay that they want to write.

Thomas Pearson

There's a little a bit of tension there. As an editor, I spend a lot of time talking authors through what the scholarship of teaching is. I'm often responding to an article which is not framed or focused appropriately for our journal. But I'm very careful to compliment them on what they have written. It becomes a question of whether it's appropriate to the scope and mission of the journal. I can tell them, "This is very interesting; it's written really well. If you want to publish it in our journal, here's what we need you to do."

That's the tack I try to take because we often get submissions from very accomplished authors but they don't understand the genre we're publishing in the journal. Writing about teaching is not something that's learned in graduate school. So potential authors often don't know that they don't know how to write about teaching. Editing this journal is a real teaching process, involving a lot of long emails. I'm not actually trying to help them write the best article they want to write. I'm trying to help them write the best article that I see potentially for the journal—without saying that what they've written is bad. I often see more possibilities in the article than the authors seem to. Sometimes I just want to write it for them.

Mindy McGarrah Sharp

The sense of mentorship you are talking about is important. What you're doing is mentoring authors to say what they can uniquely contribute to the field in a way that makes the best contribution to the scope and mission of the journal. I'm wondering what it would look like to have a specific prompt that was a mentorship charge to peer reviewers.

In my peer review, I thought of mentorship as sort of a preamble to the comments I made to the author, and my peer reviewer made the same kind of preamble in her comments to me. It's like an invitation to the author to go back to the article and bring it to the next level. It's more than an affirmation. "This is what you're doing well and here's where I look forward to seeing you write more." Peer review can become something that encourages the author to get back to work on the piece. Sometimes reviews can feel so demoralizing that I just want to throw the manuscript out and start again or do something else.

Lea F. Schweitz

I appreciate the way the prompts hold the genre loosely. I noticed that in the other rubric we studied, the sections emerged so clearly named from the frameworks presented (Teaching and Learning Inquiry 2020). The way that the fit in the genre is cast, it felt much more restricted in the other examples. In the prompts for The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching, the fit for the genre is still really open to hold what the author wants to contribute—whether it's the disciplinary field or religious studies or seminary teaching. I appreciate that the mentoring in the genre is held loosely, so that the shape of the genre can adjust as people's best contributions find their way into it. The prompts hold space for them.

Jenna Gray Hildenbrand

I was struck by the use of the word "sympathetic" in the opening lines of the instructions: give "a sympathetic analysis . . ." and "offer suggestions that will help an author write the best possible version of the article the author intends to write." I think that's what opens this up to mentorship.

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Zandra Jordan Shifting the topic somewhat, I'll say that I like the four categories (focus and argument, analytical leverage, organization and development, scholarship of teaching), each elaborated with a series of questions. But I often struggled with overlap, especially between the first one and the third one.

As I read the article to write my review, I would jump around from category to category as a comment would occur to me. I didn't write the review in the order dictated by the prompts. As I read, I would start putting a comment under one category, and then decide that it belongs under another one instead. Then I would write, "see also under number three." This isn't necessarily a problem, but I think there is some bleeding into other categories.

Benjamin E. Zeller I think that number two and four overlap ("Analytic Leverage" and "Scholarship of Teaching"). I've done three or four peer reviews for the journal now. The first time, I remember I typed all the answers for number four into number two. And then when I got to number four I said, "Oh, wait, this material in number two belongs down here instead." But I'm used to it now. This last time I think I just put all the comments into number two and then I cut and pasted down to number four after the fact. I find it impossible to talk about analytic leverage for an article about teaching unless I'm talking about its use of the scholarship of teaching.

Thomas Pearson We see a lot of interesting submissions that draw on theorists in their academic-content field, so to speak. They'll have a theory of ethics, or communication, for example, that they use to gain analytic leverage on what they're experiencing in their classrooms.

Hussein Rashid As I've been writing my essay, my writing group has been helping me fill in some of the SoTL material, but what I'm really using for analytical leverage is my discipline. How do questions about religious literacy and Orientalism affect the way in which I construct the content of a course? I'm putting in the SoTL material after the fact. It wasn't part of the original scope.

The paper I reviewed wasn't SoTL-rich, but it felt like there was enough analytic leverage to analyze what was happening in the classroom. Somebody with more background in SoTL could certainly put in that material, but it felt like a very complete paper without explicit references to SoTL material. It was still very much focused on the classroom and teaching and learning.

David B. Howell It just strikes me that one advantage of having an article that is more SoTL rich is that SoTL is able to make public our thinking about what's going on in our classrooms. If you include references to SoTL literature then you're connecting to what's already out there in the public. For example, you're writing your paper about teaching your "Intro to Islam" course. I may never teach that intro course. But I do teach other intro courses, and if you're connecting your analysis with some of the SoTL material it might make it easier for me to transfer the principles about what you're discovering in your Islam course to my biblical studies course. So the SoTL material may help readers who aren't as directly involved in your specific project or the content of your course to apply it analogously to their own teaching context.

Almeda M. Wright The way that I read the fourth prompt is somewhat different from how I read number two. It's not necessarily how much SoTL material an author references, but do they show how their argument is connected to another conversation in the scholarship. Have they shown me the debate around teaching Islam, for example. Or, my article is about gender and diversity in the classroom, and my intervention is a different side of that debate. As I was reading Mindy's paper, I was asking whether there is a conversation that she's connecting to. And not just quoting it, but expanding that conversation.

Eugene V. Gallagher Often my job as an editor is to point authors to the conversation they should be joining. We sometimes get first-time submissions from authors who have been widely recognized as good teachers. They think it's enough for their article to report on their practice. And I can see that they're effective teachers, and what

they're describing is innovative and maybe even original. But is that enough? Can a reader transfer that description to make sense of their own teaching context? Is it just description, or is the analysis sufficient if there is no recognition of the principles that are at stake, principles that apply more abstractly to different teaching contexts?

Martin Nguyen

I've been thinking about Hussein's example of the "Intro to Islam" course, and what role SoTL plays in an article like that. And David's point that referencing SoTL literature might make the article accessible to teachers in other fields. But on the other hand, for readers who are in Islamic Studies, it's not necessarily the SoTL literature that draws them in. It's the analytic leverage from their disciplinary field that they're already familiar with—that's what's going to make the article appealing or not.

Almeda M. Wright

This raises the question for me about who the journal audience really is. "Teachers of theology and religion" is such a broad banner, including so many disparate disciplines. I don't know if I feel comfortable writing for such a broad field. It's like I'm writing to the lowest common denominator. So what would be appropriate analytic leverage? I could write it one way, or I could write it another for a different audience. How broad is my audience? I need to pick my audience. What is the audience that fits with where my heart is for this article?

Kwok Pui Lan

Since I am the relatively new Associate Editor, I often find it is my role to question how we define the parameters of what counts as the scholarship of teaching. Gene and Tom have been doing this for longer than I have, and I am the first racial minority to serve as an associate editor of this journal. This makes me keenly aware of whether the journal is serving racial minorities. The demographics of theological education are changing rapidly. Currently 38 percent of students in ATS accredited schools are racial and ethnic minorities. That is quite high. So the question needs to be asked how we equip teachers of all different backgrounds to teach a diverse body of students. And so from my vantage point, the scholarship of teaching is not just pedagogy in the classroom. Whether I can be an effective teacher is not just how I handle classroom dynamics. That is only a small part of it. How should we understand the broader parameters of scholarship about teaching?

That is why I keep returning to Patricia and Gene's article on "Sketching the Contours of the Scholarship of Teaching" (Killen and Gallagher 2013). It names different genres in the scholarship, and presses us to name what we are looking for and where it fits.

We received a Forum of short articles describing a quilting exercise the authors had participated in as part of a Wabash Center Early Career Workshop (Parks et al. 2019). In the original version of this submission, some of the authors connected the exercise to their racial and ethnic identities, but did not talk about teaching at all. Gene, Tom, and I had a very interesting conversation about how this collection of essays could fit into the journal or not. Is it enough to reflect on your identity? Your vocation? Or do you need to show how it connects to your teaching practice?

Hussein Rashid

The Wabash journal always struck me as too narrow and not relevant to what I'm doing. Too Christian focused; too narrowly focused on classroom mechanics. But it was Martin's involvement with the Wabash Center blog (2020), raising questions about minority status, Islamic Studies, and what voices are present, that led me to look again. So there may be value in being explicit about people's situation informed by race, gender, class, sexuality, and other identifiers.

Eugene V. Gallagher

For me, the bottom line is transferability. Can the insights of an article be generalized so as to be transferable to other teaching contexts and other course content areas? It can't just be about you, the author. You have to have a sense that there are other people involved in the conversation you want to join. Now, I don't ever say that an essay on theological education needs to reach people teaching "Intro to World Religions"; we have a sense of a pretty broad spectrum. But the idea of making your thinking public through publication suggests that you have some kind of audience in mind. It needs to be more than just you.

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Thomas Pearson

From theological education to religious studies is a pretty broad spectrum. I'm not always sure they represent two sides of the same spectrum or maybe two different spectrums altogether. I'm working with a group of authors who are writing about using modern language "communicative pedagogy" techniques when teaching biblical Hebrew. They're very articulate about their teaching practices and the learning challenges students face—but how many of our readers have this problem in their classrooms? How is this transferable beyond teaching biblical languages? Is there something here for other readers to learn?

And then too, I hear what Pui Lan is saying, that a focus on the mechanics of classroom teaching can exclude the identity and vocation issues that are rightfully central for many faculty. Excluding these questions sort of brackets, or makes normative, a particular historically white identity of the teacher and the student.

Heather White

Thinking about the question of audience and transferability, those things can often be presented as quite neutral, but really it's an issue of gatekeeping. I was struck by a prompt in one of the peer review forms we looked at for comparison. It asked about the "appropriateness of insight" in the article. And when you start asking about what is "appropriate," the gatekeeping function becomes really evident.

So it's important that the reviewer's responses are not yes or no answers (as they are in some of these forms), but that the reviewer takes the opportunity to expand and develop what makes this essay appropriate or not. "Appropriate for whom?" And it could be the case that the audience being imagined for *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* is narrower than it could or should be. We need to push at this gatekeeping function. There are critical questions around audience and what is "appropriate" that need to be continually highlighted.

Thomas Pearson

That's very helpful. I'm struck by how much gatekeeping is inherent to the definition of any journal, of any field. Graduate programs are all about gatekeeping. Which school of thought are you in? Where do you publish? And the scholarship of teaching is different because we don't learn this in our graduate programs, we're inventing it on the job, so to speak. And there's a range of venues for writing about teaching—everything from the ATS's *Theological Education*, to the AAR's *Spotlight on Teaching* (and *Spotlight on Theological Education*) and the AAR-Oxford Teaching Religious Studies Series, and the much broader field of scholarship on teaching emerging from the Carnegie CASTL model (2020), and how that practice has been picked up by different disciplines in the academy.[3] We're all doing this somewhat differently; we're all inventing or defining a field by our publication and review process.

At the Wabash Center we tend to construe our work as simply supporting faculty conversations about teaching, not determining what those conversations need to be. But with the journal we're playing a real gatekeeper role, defining what counts as scholarship on teaching for our journal—what that conversation is about. Of course, we do this unconsciously and implicitly in our other programing as well.

Almeda M. Wright

The question arises, then, whether the peer reviewers are trained to reflect on the parameters of what counts as scholarship on teaching for the journal. There is more than one way to write an article on teaching. Not every article needs to be of the "show and tell" variety, analyzing classroom practices. Is this reflected adequately in the prompts for review? These prompts function as a rubric for assessing the article. Where, then, really, is the gatekeeping getting done?

Kwok Pui Lan

I'm also thinking about it from a marketing point of view. In another life I might have sold used cars. You have to think about whether the journal is something that your colleagues are going to want to read. Some of our colleagues will be looking for something to help them in their teaching techniques. Others will not see the value of that. They need to be persuaded. We need to think about what is relevant to our colleagues today. Our faculties are under so much stress. Higher education is not a very healthy environment right now. From a marketing standpoint, some of the articles we publish need to address

3 ATS's *Theological Education* (https://www.ats.edu/theological-education-archives); AAR-Oxford *Teaching Religious Studies Series* (https://www.aarweb.org/node/237); AAR *Spotlight on Teaching* (http://rsn.aarweb.org/spotlight-on/teaching); *Spotlight on Theological Education* (http://rsn.aarweb.org/spotlight-on/theo-ed); and the Carnegie CASTL model (http://archive.carnegiefoundation.org/scholarship-teaching-learning.html).

these wider issues. Because otherwise many of our colleagues may not see the relevance of reading an article on how to teach a specific topic. It's not something they think they really need to learn. We need to get them in the door; we need to make the journal more visible. We need to be addressing the bigger issues that are shaping the teaching environment, so that people might be interested. Otherwise we're just preaching to the choir. We have to be constantly asking ourselves, what are the big questions, the big issues, shaping the field in theological education and undergraduate contexts? That way we can generate interest.

Mindy McGarrah Sharp: I had a colleague who responded to a previous call for papers on teaching in precarious institutions. It was quite a conundrum, because as an untenured faculty member this colleague was quite vulnerable in the institution's precarity. And it wouldn't be possible to provide anonymity. Sometimes the most important issues are the most difficult to write about, because we're vulnerable to them. This is true for contingent faculty as well.

Hussein Rashid: Additionally, writing about teaching doesn't usually count toward promotion and tenure. There's no one for whom this counts as part of their scholarly work in their discipline. So trying to get authors to write for the journal must be difficult, especially for contingent faculty.

Benjamin E. Zeller: I would push back on that some. I know that as chair of my department at a liberal arts college, when I'm looking through CVs to hire full- or part-time colleagues, the one that says "Wabash" is the first one I'm going to call.

David B. Howell: I guess context matters, in all sorts of ways. At Ferrum College, where I've become dean, we have a new faculty orientation program and regular activities to help faculty develop as teachers: monthly lunches, book groups. Teaching is very important in our tenure decisions. You have to have the ability to think about and talk about your teaching. The Wabash journal, and the scholarship of teaching, can give new faculty that language. And that's necessary for success at Ferrum.

G. Brooke Lester: At my institution, a tenured faculty member with Wabash experience just asked me to write some text for the faculty handbook to set a faculty policy for how publishing in the scholarship of teaching should count toward contract renewal, tenure, and promotion. And it passed through the faculty unanimously. But I don't know that this would happen everywhere. It takes leadership from senior faculty members to change a culture, to change these requirements.

Hussein Rashid: I think those are great stories. But you have to realize that you're sitting in a position where you can make those decisions. We have to realize that we're living in a world in which something like 80 percent of the professoriate is now contingent faculty.

Jenna Hildenbrand: I think it's important to go back to what Pui Lan was saying, that we need to be addressing bigger issues than just classroom practices. Hussein is writing an article on how ideas of religious literacy and Orientalism create challenges for how he teaches his Introduction to Islam course. We have said that SoTL literature can be a bridge to make this analysis transferable to other teaching contexts. Unfortunately, there isn't much SoTL literature on these kinds of big issues. Or, another example would be my article with Rebekka King on aligning our courses, discipline, institution, and profession. I'm hearing Pui Lan say that these bigger issues aren't being addressed by SoTL literature.

Beverley McGuire: There is literature on these topics, though. Look at the research being produced in schools of education. If you're in conversation with the folks who are running your center for teaching excellence, or with your school of education, then you're putting yourself in conversation not only with the research but also with what's happening on your campus.

Jenna Hildenbrand: Yes, that's right. That's what we are trying to do in our article—align with all these different stake holders. There are multiple bridges for transferability.

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Beverley McGuire — Right, but you need to adopt the language of educators. Terms like alignment and assessment are the language of educators and administrators. And if we don't reference it as such, if our articles are written as though we invented these concepts ourselves, then we're not seen as entering and furthering this already robust conversation, and writing in *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* will not be seen as legitimate scholarly activity. You need to be putting yourself into the conversation. This is what the center for teaching excellence is trying to do on my campus – to have a larger conversation on our campus, so that the SoTL work we do will count toward tenure and promotion. But to count in this way, we need to be referencing SoTL research.

Hussein Rashid — Listening to these comments and thinking about the individual essays in my writing cohort, we were all in some way dealing with the issue of religious literacy. Now, a prominent book in my field, which has changed a lot of the conversation in our discipline, is Richard King's book *Orientalism and Religion* (1999). He doesn't name it as such, but about a third of his book is critiquing the notion of religious illiteracy. There's a lot of SoTL literature about meeting students where they are, to work with the knowledge they bring with them into your course, to start with that as a basis for understanding your field. But this is a problem when a lot of their knowledge is racist, Islamophobic, and orientalist. It's a real problem. So here our disciplinary research really needs to critique, or contribute to this SoTL literature on pre-knowledge.

Eugene V. Gallagher — I like the King example. I think what you're talking about here is taking our disciplinary scholarship and "SoTL-izing it." If you take this disciplinary knowledge seriously, it has real implications for teaching. My task can be to tease out the implications, to point out how this should be affecting curriculum design, course design, and teaching in the classroom.

It's helpful to realize that there are proximate SoTL conversation partners from within our own discipline. You don't have to read a whole wall of books about teaching before you can say anything about your classroom. There are teaching implications in these scholarly works. That's where I'm often disappointed in the Oxford series on teaching. Many of the essays review all this important scholarly stuff that you should teach, but they don't get around to addressing the question of what implication this new scholarly literature has for how we teach.

Beverley McGuire — I like that idea: to take an important book in your field and SoTL-ize it. How does it change how you teach?

Mindy Sharp — Exactly. That would be fun. Not just how it changes things for students, but also how it changes things for where I am, and where I fail myself and my students and my guild, from my old training and habits that make it hard to innovate. That's what I wrestle with in my article. I want teachers to be reflecting on their own malformation – to do this work well, so that we can do this work of the scholarship of teaching and learning well together.

Thomas Pearson — We're going to turn now to discuss how participating in the scholarship of teaching and learning has, or could, change the way you actually teach. We're going to hear first from Gene and Pui Lan and then open it up to everyone to discuss.

Eugene V. Gallagher — My engagement, historically, goes back to when my former institution decided to have a teaching and learning center, and I was the only one nominated to be the director. I felt that position imposed on me the responsibility for serving as a broker between the faculty and the vast scholarship on teaching. So that's when I started reading this literature. I think my experience working in and on SoTL has expanded my consciousness of possibilities and expanded my attention to why I'm doing what I'm doing. I have found both of those possible.

I still have teaching moments where I'll be doing something that's not working particularly well, and I'll be fanning through my mental Rolodex, "Oh, I remember a book that said something relevant about this." It might have been a couple years ago, but I'm able to draw on it sometimes in a just-in-time (or often just a little too late) fashion. But I still find the slog through vast amounts of this SoTL stuff sometimes frustrating. It's not always, for me, news I can use. But I've gotten better with my decisions over the years about what I should read, which helps a lot.

Kwok Pui Lan: Like Gene, my encounter with the scholarship of teaching really began with Wabash. It was almost twenty years ago when I participated in a Wabash workshop for mid-career faculty. We were given a list of articles about teaching and could get copies of any of the articles on the list. That was when I first read the essay "The Seasons of an Academic Life" (Knefelkamp 1990). I was also exposed to a lot of articles on teaching from the perspective of racial and ethnic minorities.

Since then I have had the opportunity to serve on the leadership team of several workshops, and meet people who are very serious about teaching. I have learned so much from these conversations and have been able to put into practice some of the things I have learned.

For example, in one of the workshops I learned about something called "enduring understanding." Students are exposed to many new ideas and understandings in my course—ideas about the Bible, mystical accounts of creation, and contemporary religious issues. A workshop participant taught me to ask this question at the end of the course, "what are three enduring understandings that you want to remember and carry forth." This has proved to be very helpful for my students. In another example, a Wabash workshop participant taught me to introduce formal debates in the classroom, which require students to assume different positions and explore different arguments that they otherwise would not consider. I've also learned how to pay attention to learning outcomes. I am not a big fan of the assessment exercises we have to do at our schools. But I have learned that I have to be aware of what the mechanism is to measure the learning outcomes. Relying on student evaluations is not enough. As editors we are always pressing authors to explain how they know if a particular teaching strategy they have described actually works or not. So now I'm always asking myself that question as well. How do I know if it works?

Hussein Rashid: When I was a graduate student, my graduate advisor was adamant that we use the Bok Teaching and Learning Center on campus. It's a great center. They used the phrase, "the craft of teaching." They knew the theory behind what they were saying, but they never really engaged us with that theory. They always focused on the practical aspects for improving classroom experience and course design. It was not until I came to Wabash that I realized that there is a whole scholarship behind what they were teaching me. It's been fascinating for me to discover how much of my understanding about teaching has been informed by that scholarship without knowing it existed. Now I'm going back and reverse engineering in a sense, which is giving me a new level of intentionality to why I'm doing what I'm doing in the classroom and what I'm hoping to achieve. I feel like I'm completing the circle.

David B. Howell: The scholarship gives me a language or a lens to understand what I'm experiencing in the classroom. Until you have a name for something, often times you don't really see it. So I think the scholarship of teaching has allowed me to become more aware of classroom and learning dynamics, and to pick up on what students are experiencing.

Zandra Jordan: My discipline, the field of rhetoric and composition, lends itself to paying more attention to the student experience. When teaching writing, we teach it as an iterative process, using multiple drafts and revisions to scaffold toward larger assignments. So, there are often multiple opportunities to see how students are learning and to think about what that may mean for your teaching practice. All of this is built in to composition as a discipline.

At the same time, as we all know, being an expert in your subject matter is not the same as being able

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to teach it well. So I think whatever one's subject matter is, it's helpful to be able to take a step back and consider, what am I actually doing and how am I helping students come to a deeper knowledge and understanding of this material in such a way that they can employ it. The scholarship of teaching helps us do that. It's important to have institutional support for investing the time needed to engage these questions. That's one of the reasons why Wabash is such a gift, even for someone whose field really lends itself to that kind of questioning and investigation. We all just get busy, and it's easy to get into the routine of work and family and whatever else is going on and not make time to take a step back and consider how students are learning and how one's assignments are connected to the goals that we say matter for the course. That can very quickly get lost in the busyness of the routine of being in academia.

Thomas Pearson

What I really like about the Randy Bass essay, "What's the Problem?" (1999), is that it helps to articulate the sense of teaching as an academic pursuit, that there academic questions you can ask of teaching.

When you said, Zandra, that "writing is an iterative process," I was thinking that teaching too is an iterative process. You're going to be teaching the course again next year. I think the base-level of teaching as an academic activity is just to stop and reflect on your own teaching. The more you can turn that into an academic problem to be analyzed and addressed, I think, the more fulfilling teaching can be. We are trained as academics.

So we are always trying to articulate what the value is of the scholarship of teaching that I read—how does it actually impact my teaching? But I think the greater impact is the scholarship of teaching that I write. To have identified an intellectual "problem" in your students' learning, designed a response to that problem, and then analyzed the whole process through writing—that can be transformational.

Lea F. Schweitz

I've been frustrated because my schedule over the past five years has not allowed me to teach a single course for a second time, and most of my teaching has been team teaching. My article has helped me think about modules within courses, and these modules are iterative, even if the course as a whole is not. Thinking of this lack of iteration as "a problem" has allowed me to think about how to modulize my teaching, and thereby rethink my teaching again as an iterative process.

Thomas Pearson

One of the challenges I face in my job is how to make the scholarship of teaching available and accessible and valuable to faculty who are too busy to read it. It's just so overwhelming to see bookshelves of this stuff lining the walls. Perhaps a professor needs to think more about how to grade assignments. I can point them to twenty-five books they can read on that. It's just not very helpful. I need to give them a one page handout or a single helpful article or website with links.

So I'm curious, Gene—you started our conversation describing yourself as a "broker" of teaching resources for your faculty, and for yourself, really—how do you decide what to read and when? Do you pick it up when you're not thinking of anything specific, like summer reading, and then you continue to think about it over the years and come to apply it? Or are you more likely to have a specific problem in mind, the way Randy Bass describes, and you set about to research it and go find an answer?

Eugene V. Gallagher

Probably both. I think one important thing that Pui Lan pointed out earlier was that when you get involved with a community of people who have some shared conversational topics, that gives you an agenda for reading. When I came back to Wabash a second time and a third time and kept hearing about, let's say, Stephen Brookfield or Donald Finkel, I decided that I should probably order those books and make sure they're on my desk (Brookfield 1987, 1990, 2009; Brookfield and Preskill 1999; Hess and Brookfield 2008; Finkel 2000; Finkel and Arney 1995). To be a responsible conversation partner, there are certain things I think you need to read.

The other thing I'd say is that I tend to benefit from bite-size nuggets. That's why I still like the Teaching Tactics we publish in the journal. Even when they're not something I'm likely to try in my own classroom, they're worth reading just for that sense of contrast. And then there are publications like The Teaching Professor (now a blog), which is comprised of short and easily digestible summaries of longer essays or a body of literature.

So, I think there are different registers of involvement, from just a baseline familiarity to keep going, and then every once in a while sitting down for a couple weeks and working with some specific literature, say on classroom discussion. And then if I'm trying to write something, then I've got to really dig in and find out what other people have been saying.

There are different modes of engagement, different reasons for engagement.

Martin Nguyen

Writing this essay, and being in conversation with others in this colloquy has greatly deepened my appreciation of the scholarship of teaching. Now I am much more likely to dip into it with questions from my teaching. When I think of where my colleagues in the field are going with their questions about teaching, however, it tends to be blogs (which Wabash provides) or a teaching workshop at a conference (which Wabash also organizes). But honestly most of them are going to Facebook. I think we all know of Facebook groups where people come to ask questions and share resources and strategies. Of course, I find this very useful, but it also seems very similar to what we criticize our students for doing, which is going to Google for their research.

Hussein Rashid

Yes, and I'm thinking of a Facebook group for Islamic studies professors in which some of the suggestions and exercises are flat-out atrocious, because nobody's thinking about what it means for our discipline. "If my students like it," seems to be the standard. What are we actually teaching them? We can't really talk about that in a Facebook group because it is not the space in which to have that conversation.

Martin Nguyen

Maybe we can think of the Facebook group as a gateway to the blog, which in turn is a gateway to the conference workshop, which is a gateway to the Wabash Center itself or *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching*.

Beverley McGuire

I'm intrigued by that: "Do students like it." I can see an analog in the student evaluations of our teaching. The forms are trying to measure student engagement, but the focus should be on student learning. We know that our tenure and promotion is based on things like "Did students like it." But to be a professor with integrity we should be concerned about what students are actually learning, and helping to facilitate that learning.

Almeda M. Wright

Just a caveat: I really want us to be careful to make sure that "liking it" and "learning it" are not mutually exclusive categories. Likewise, I am clear that students can be engaged in a rigorous debate, and hate it. So engagement is also not a standard of whether or not they "liked it." There's room for a lot of nuance in these categories.

I was also thinking, in response to Hussein, that maybe the criteria that students "like it" is too low a bar, but at least the Facebook group has some sort of criteria. At least they're looking for answers. Because a lot of people are just teaching the way they were taught and not even trying to look for different activities or different assignments that might enhance students' learning (or engagement, for that matter).

I want to second the notion of teaching as an iterative process and Facebook and blogs as gateways to further reflection on teaching.

David B. Howell

To follow up on Gene's mention of The Teaching Professor, there are other publications such as Faculty Focus, which provides a daily short nugget about teaching, based on or excerpted from the literature. These can pique my interest in something that I then investigate further, or is at least on my radar screen.

These sorts of publications are not going to be tied to our specific discipline or field of teaching. But I've been teaching in a one-person department for a number of years and have found that getting involved in teaching and learning conversations is a way to talk to colleagues in other departments. They have introduced me to all sorts of perspectives and writing that I would probably never have come into with.

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I like coming to Wabash and having the disciplinary discussions but I have found these cross-disciplinary conversations and the more general-focused SoTL literature valuable precisely because it gets me out of my discipline.

Kwok Pui Lan

When I need to learn something, I often watch those "do-it-yourself" videos on YouTube. There are videos on fixing the plumbing, cooking a dish, and everything else. Students, too, rely on Facebook and YouTube for what they need to learn. Everyone is learning this way today. So how can we tell teachers that they need to read a long article on teaching? No one has time. We need to make it easier, digestible. That's why we have some shorter essays in the journal, and Conversations with teachers, which can be easily consumed. We should be making short videos, just two or three minutes long. We have to realize that today people are learning in lots of different ways, not just reading long scholarly articles.

Thomas Pearson

I hear what you're saying. And I think that's the key to making teaching resources available. But I want to maintain a space at the end of the spectrum for sustained scholarly reflection on our teaching practice, because it's through focused effort that we improve. There's the old adage that the one who does the work does the learning. So that's an important reason to continue writing the scholarship of teaching, and maybe a reason to continue reading it. Maybe. But probably not the best way to market it.

G. Brooke Lester

One of the ways that the scholarship of teaching and learning has affected my teaching is that it helps me to relax more. In the movie Philadelphia (2014), there's a line that Tom Hanks uses as a mantra when things are in crisis: "Every problem has a solution. Every problem has a solution." In the model I was given in graduate school, there wasn't even talk of design. The course syllabus and the way things were done, that was just how things were. You didn't talk about whether you could do it this way or that way instead.

It all seemed like a well-oiled machine that existed before us and would exist after we were gone. For me, that was associated with a kind of distance and studied formality between the instructors and the students. There was nothing to be questioned—which meant that when I started teaching and things would go wrong, it seemed like there was nothing to be done about it, because this was just how the machine worked. It was before me, and it would be after me.

But through the scholarship of teaching and learning and other avenues I became aware that you can tinker with a course, and you can tinker for intentional reasons. You can try something else and have a plan. So now when I'm teaching and something's not working, I can just admit that it's not working and I can try something else. The first time you have a flat tire, it's a nightmare. But by your fourth flat tire, it's easy to recognize and it's not an emergency; "Oh, yes, it's a flat tire. I'm just fixing a tire."

With that idea, I find that over time I've been much more able to relax with my students and not try to be like the great inscrutable Oz behind a curtain about the elements of the course. I'm comfortable to let the machinery show a little bit, and my activity to show, because they're adults. I've been really grateful for how I'm able to have more informal, more relaxed, more honest professional relationships with my students, with all the gears and duct tape of the machinery showing—to let them see me changing the tire sometimes in mid-course.

I don't know if anybody else has had experiences with this. I see a correlation between these two things: that the course is a machine that's always in need of repair and always needing parts swapped out; and a growing ability to be vulnerable to my students and not have to keep up a façade all the time.

David B. Howell

Brooke, I think what happens is that we accept teaching as a public act. On the one hand teaching is the most public thing that we engage in. We interact with dozens or hundreds of students through a semester. But on the other hand, it's all kept very private from colleagues, from peers. The scholarship of teaching makes public what's going on in the classroom. So you're participating in that, and you see the vulnerabilities and the failures as well as the successes; it frees you up in saying, "Okay, I'm not the

only one who fell flat on my face, and I can learn." Or, "it was a really good positive experience." Usually, it wasn't because I was good but because the students took over. So it's sort of making public what's going on in classrooms, and I think it frees us up.

Zandra Jordan

It's important to remember what Mindy reminded us of earlier, that some people are positioned in a more vulnerable place, which makes writing about teaching a different experience. I think it's important that we question who can do this work and what kinds of risks they may be taking when they do it.

Almeda M. Wright

There's so much layered in that, and I think also layered in what David was sharing about making certain things public. There is so much vulnerability.

I feel there's an assumption, because I'm a religious educator, that I should know lots about teaching. And I'm invited often to share at faculty meetings different strategies for how to be more inclusive, for example, or different strategies for how to teach X, Y, and Z in ways that are attentive to, say, different learning outcomes. And this is a blessing and a curse. This year in particular, I was up for review, and I felt myself thinking "No, this is not a time for people to come and observe any of my classes." I felt strange that this was my gut reaction, because in other years (when I felt my position was more secure and I was less vulnerable) I felt like "of course. This is what I do. Come. Let's have fun."

So the dynamics around this are very interesting, and I'm not certain how we break or resist those dynamics in order to create cultures and systems that value this type of communal reflection on practices that many of us share—even if we're doing it in the little fiefdoms in our classrooms.

What I have gained in particular from my time at Wabash, but also from reading more of the related literature on teaching, is that SoTL pushes me to think about my teaching and the scholarship of teaching more. Usually we go to SoTL when we encounter a problem. But there's sometimes when people presume that you are good at something, and the literature makes you pull back and say, "Well what was it actually in that thing (assignment, activity, and so forth) that worked? Can we repeat this?" Maybe it was a great semester, but I don't actually know if we can do it again next time. Maybe it was just a fluke. So that has been helpful for me, in the end, to reflect again and wonder what really did we do and how did that work? And this critical reflection helps us to be more intentional for future teaching.

Thomas Pearson

So that brings you back to what Brooke was saying earlier about the importance of intentional design, and continuously tinkering with that and fixing flat tires to see if it works better now. I see that as crucial to success in teaching. But then, at the same time, there is the performance of the design, the execution. It seems to me that the design is more the site of the scholarship of teaching. That's where you can SoTL-ize things. That's where you can analyze and reflect, and that's where the public review of teaching takes place. But the performance can be so spontaneous, intuitive, personal, so personality driven. It's a persona. As Almeda was just saying, you don't really know why that went so well or what it was. You just find yourself inhabiting a space with your students and all this amazing stuff is happening.

There's certainly a relationship between the two, but it seems like the intentional design aspect is a lot more susceptible to our academic analysis. I think of what Pui Lan said earlier about the boundaries of what counts for the scholarship of teaching, and where reflection on identity and vocation fit. I wonder if a lot more of that comes out under the performance part of teaching, the persona. And as Zandra was reminding us, how that kind of performance is available, accessible, to some people and not to others and there's a lot of vulnerability and power and bias about that.

Kwok Pui Lan

There is also the assumption that teaching only takes place in the classroom, which I constantly resist. Teaching has so many dimensions. You are in the classroom with students, and then you go to chapel to worship, sharing a very different kind of experience with them. I think this experience is equally and sometimes even more important. Think of the professors that had the most impact on you. Someone could be a lousy teacher, but they have offered you a way into a new field that is so important to you.

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I think there is a cultural difference here. I contributed a chapter on East Asian perspectives to a book on mentoring. In the Confucian way, teaching is modeling, teaching is about life. Teaching is not just about knowledge. It's more about wisdom. And how do you teach that? That is a very tall order. That is why I think that sometimes Asian or Asian-American colleagues coming from that culture have such a high expectation for teachers. I really liked what Brooke said about relaxing. You meet other people who are also struggling. You don't need to be perfect the first time. And then, too, there is a body of literature that shows that if you are a racial minority or a woman you tend to get worse student evaluations (Barsow 1995; Reid 2010).

G. Brooke Lester

I'm reminded of Mindy's essay, which analyzes what happens when a given design is realized by a particular instructor, with a particular group of students, at particular historical moment, under particular circumstances—and how important all those intersections are, no matter what the design.

Mindy Sharp

I think the Bass article (1999) is helpful here because when everything was falling apart in my class, I could have said, "Well, this class is just a terrible class," or "I'm a bad teacher," "I'm the problem," or "the class is the problem." Instead, trying to figure it out I realized that my own disciplinary research in pastoral care, which I wasn't planning to teach in this class, can help me enter really difficult classroom moments with curiosity and wonder, and that I could try to invite the students in that way. I wouldn't have talked about it in the way that Bass talks about it, but it was really helpful to me to think about how "the problem" is a site of curiosity and wonder. It's not necessarily the solution to throw out the rubric and all the design and the vocation and everything else.

At the lowest point, I had asked every student to come see me individually, and they did by the end of the semester. One said, "I'm just not willing to learn anything from you." And I said, "You can hold that opinion, but I don't feel that way about you. You're still a student in this class, and I think we can still learn together." But it took curiosity and wonder and patience and prayer and everything else to be able say this is a space of learning and try to make it so—even when things are going so badly. You don't necessarily learn that in doctoral programs.

Almeda M. Wright

And you also don't necessarily get that from your centers for teaching and learning.

Mindy Sharp

Right.

Almeda M. Wright

Sometimes there is such a focus on design that we don't know how to describe or write about execution or performance. You need a good design, but the best-laid plans can go really wrong. And then how do you regroup? There is more literature about how to regroup when you have not designed well and things go wrong. But with such varied contexts and such varied personalities, we need to learn how to make tweaks and changes through out, so that we hold our best designs tentatively, and hold our designs in ways that we recognize that they need to be implemented with grace and finesse. It's an art, and not a science.

Mindy Sharp

Yes. And remember that we learn too. I'm not just there to teach. I'm also there to learn.

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THE WABASH CENTER
JOURNAL ON TEACHING

FORUM

Introduction to the Forum on Dr. James H. Cone as Teacher and Mentor

Kwok Pui Lan
Associate Editor

ABSTRACT

Dr. James H. Cone (1938-2018) is widely considered the founder of black liberation theology. He had a transformative impact on generations of his students at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. In the semester following his death in Spring 2018, six of his current and recent doctoral students were gathered to share brief reflections on their experience of Dr. Cone as an inspirational teacher. This Forum collects their edited presentations in six short essays by: Nkosi Du Bois Anderson, Adam Clark, Isaac Sharp, Colleen Wessel-McCoy, Thurman Todd Willison, and Jason Wyman.

KEYWORDS

James Cone, graduate students, black liberation theology, teaching

Dr. James H. Cone (1938-2018) is widely considered the founder of black liberation theology. His groundbreaking works *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969), *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970), and *God of the Oppressed* (1975) challenged racism in the American church and society and articulated a liberation theology from the experiences of black people.

Dr. Cone joined the faculty of Union Theological Seminary in New York in 1969. He was the Bill & Judith Moyers Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology before his death. As a passionate teacher, Dr. Cone had a transformative impact on generations of students at Union and beyond. Many international and domestic students have come to Union to study with him.

His courses in theology broadened students' horizons by introducing them to theologies from Africa, Asia, and Latin American, in addition to theologies from diverse racial and ethnic communities in the U.S. He encouraged students to ask critical questions and develop their own theological voice. He was supportive of international students, queer students, and students on the margins. As a role model for his students, Dr. Cone was a prophetic theologian, an award-winning author, a provocative public intellectual, and an inspiring teacher.

Although Dr. Cone was a famous theologian, he spent time building relationship with his students and mentored them. Those who were privileged to study with him saw a human side of Cone that was deeply touching and memorable. In the semester following his death in Spring 2018, six of his current and recent doctoral students gathered to share brief reflections on their experience of Cone as an inspirational teacher. This Forum, organized by Dr. Andrea White at Union, collects their edited presentations in six short essays.

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THE WABASH CENTER
JOURNAL ON TEACHING

FORUM

Remembering Dr. James H. Cone

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ABSTRACT

In this essay, I reflect on Dr. James H. Cone's legacy as a teacher and mentor who generously invested in multiple generations of students – including white students like me. This is one of several short essays presented by recent students at a public forum at Union Theological Seminary after his death in 2018.

KEYWORDS

James Cone, teaching, mentoring, white students, black theology

When I moved to New York City from Atlanta in the fall of 2014, other than my advisor, I knew precisely no one at Union. I was one of only two incoming PhD students that year, and the only other student in my cohort had already completed a degree at Union, which meant that he skipped all of the orientation activities, and that I regularly had to introduce myself as the new PhD student. All of which is to say that, for a while there, I was kind of on my own. But then, before the semester started, I got an email from the first person at Union to personally reach out in order to welcome and get to know me. That person was Dr. James H. Cone.

At first, I thought I was in trouble—honest to God. I could not think of anything that James Cone would want to talk to me about, and imagined that maybe, I don't know, he was going to be the one to deliver the unfortunate news that my admission to the program was a mistake. Much to my relief and surprise, he did no such thing. During that first meeting in his office, Dr. Cone instead told me that he had heard about me, that he was glad I was at Union, that he wanted to know more about my work, and that he would make space in an already full class he was teaching that semester if I wanted to take it. I did, obviously.

The course, "God and Human Suffering," was incredible. All of his courses were. James Cone's lectures were the stuff of legends after all. At least a portion of each and every session in each and every course would be devoted to a sweeping tour of all of the relevant material, always delivered with an existential passion and intensity that instantly communicated one of the abiding truths of his entire life's work: for Dr. Cone, theology was never an abstract game meant for disengaged intellectuals.

Teaching theology wasn't either. In that first course and in every other course that I subsequently took with him, he constantly reminded us that disciple-making should never be the primary purpose of theological education—though his job would have been much easier if it was because many of us would have followed him to the ends of the earth. Dr. Cone's goal as a theology professor was much loftier and far more labor intensive. I know because he told us what it was almost as often as he showed us what it required. His near-weekly refrain, "I want you to find your theological voice," was consistently supported by an ongoing commitment to doing whatever it might take to help his students get there. His particular example was all the more important for those of us aspiring to one day teach theology or religion at the post-secondary level. He certainly helped multiple generations of students find their theological voices, but he also helped some of us learn how to pass that gift on.

A few semesters and several courses together later, for instance, Dr. Cone sent me another email asking if I could come meet with him again. Though I was sure that, this time, I really was in trouble, he surprised me once more. In what was easily the most humbling experience of my academic career thus far, Dr. Cone asked if I would be willing to serve as one of the teaching fellows for his "Introduction to Systematic Theology" class. I enthusiastically accepted, obviously. During the last semester that he would ever teach that particular course, Dr. Cone gave me the incredible opportunity to practice what he had taught me: that fall, he helped me begin helping his (and my) students find their theological voices.

One of the last times I ever spoke with him came during the spring of 2017 when I was working on my comprehensive exams. By that point, whenever I received emails from Dr. Cone—or from his longtime assistant and invaluable right hand, Vicky Furio—I had finally begun accepting that maybe I wasn't in trouble and that maybe he just needed to check in about something. So, of course, out of all of the times that he called me to his office, this time was the only time that I actually *was* in trouble. This time, Dr. Cone dutifully informed me that my plan for my comps was simply not going to work and that I absolutely must devote one of my four exams to a study of black evangelicalism. A bit of context here: at Union, doctoral students propose their own agenda for comprehensive exams, and though I had intended to cover the history of black evangelicals in my dissertation on twentieth century U.S. American evangelicalism, that was not enough for Dr. Cone's exacting standards. In retrospect, I'm glad he intervened. That exam became my strongest and most fruitful of all. Not only did I get a dissertation chapter and at least a couple of conference papers out of it, I may have even gotten a book out of it. I certainly wound up with enough material for one.

So, then, what's the point of this reflection? That's a fair question. Because the editors could have invited contributions from a hundred other people with similar stories about Dr. Cone—stories about what it was like to hear him lecture, what it felt like to be invited to meet with him, how it came as a surprise when he was adamant about the need for you to change your plans, and so on. And if there was ever anything that Dr. Cone would not abide, it was the kind of pointless rambling and obfuscation for which he had an unceremonious and technical term that I'll omit to save the editors from needing to redact it. In his honor, though, I will cut to the chase.

The point that I want to make in relaying these stories is this: Dr. James H. Cone, one of the twentieth century's most important Christian theologians, had precisely zero responsibility for investing so heavily in me, a white doctoral student in social ethics, but he did it anyway. I am quite aware that he had better things to do, but he went out of his way to get to know me before anyone else did, to challenge and push me, and to help me learn how to teach. To this day, I remain dumbfounded by the grace of that. Various tributes have rightly emphasized that James H. Cone was the most significant Christian theologian of his generation, which he most certainly was. But if there is anything that I would want readers to know about Dr. Cone, it would be that he was also a teacher who was never too important to keep tabs on and check in with successive generations of masters and doctoral students, many of whom weren't even his own.

I have often heard that, over the years, there have been folks who have gotten the impression that James Cone's classroom was sometimes a tough place for white students—that may indeed have been the case. Honestly, I hope it was the case and often. Because, for those who look like me, it might have been the first time that they were ever challenged in that particular way in a classroom setting. But if there is any truth to that perception, I would argue that the reason for it has more to do with the fact that his classrooms were always so thoroughly suffused with his work—and he made no bones about the fact that he did not write primarily for white Christians—than it did with his personal interactions with white students.

Yes, James Cone's work made it absolutely clear that the price of admission for white Christians wanting to come alongside the black theological struggle for liberation was high. On his terms, it required what I would suggest was a conversion experience involving repentance and a turning away from a Christian faith distorted by the accretions of white-ness. But for those who were wiling to accept those terms, he was more than happy to welcome them into the struggle. Is it his fault that there have been so few?

When it came specifically to his students, however, I would argue that Dr. Cone had far more grace than most people would probably imagine. My story may be just one example, but it also is not. For more than fifty years, he willingly and voluntarily invested in his students—including countless white students—often personally and directly, but never showily or for the sake of praise. If I'm any indication, that investment wasn't reserved for the deserving. If only half of all professors had just a fraction of that level of care for the kinds of students who, on paper, it doesn't make sense for them to do so, academia would be a very different place.

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ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FORUM ON DR. JAMES CONE

Editor. 2020. "Introduction to the Forum on Dr. James H. Cone as Teacher and Mentor." *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* 1(2): 79–80. https://doi.org/10.31046/wabashcenter.v1i2.1501.

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THE WABASH CENTER
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FORUM

Cone's Consistency: Reflections from a Teaching Assistant

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ABSTRACT

Beyond his academic contribution of Black Liberation Theology to the church and academy at large, James Cone should be remembered on a personal level as one who prioritized the task of teaching his students, placed the student perspective and the development of independent student voices at the center of his pedagogy, pushed his students to take classroom learning out into the world, maintained exemplary standards of consistency in his theological work and moral character, and contributed to the legacy of his home institution Union Theological Seminary in immeasurable ways. This is one of several short essays presented by recent students at a public forum at Union Theological Seminary after his death in 2018.

KEYWORDS

James Cone, Union Theological Seminary, Occupy Wall Street, systematic theology, liberation, pedagogy

The last time I spoke to Dr. James Cone in person, we were meeting in his apartment on the third floor of McGiffert Hall at Union Theological Seminary. I had met him at this location numerous times before over the course of the past five years, usually to discuss my responsibilities as his teaching assistant for his most popular course at Union, "Systematic Theology 103." On this particular occasion, I was there to request a teaching evaluation from him for future job applications. Though I noticed that Dr. Cone was completely bald for the first time since I had known him, I didn't think much of it at the time. I figured that it was quite simply a stylistic choice on his part. He looked good, and he showed no signs of ailing health. To the contrary, the vitality and sharp energy that I had come to expect from him at all times was still there in spades. I had no idea he was in the midst of his last six months on earth. As I look back on those final moments that I shared with him, it doesn't surprise me at all that he showed no sign whatsoever of a reduction in the sheer force of his charismatic personality, which from my perspective, never waivered or faltered in any of my interactions with him.

I will always look back on my experience working with Dr. Cone as his teaching assistant for four years as one of the great privileges of my life. When I reflect on the lessons I learned and the general takeaways that I received from being around him, many things come to the forefront of my mind. First and foremost, I think about the indelible impression he made upon me during my first year at Union, which was a dramatic one for the school and for New York City. Occupy Wall Street had exploded in the early months of the fall semester, and the sense of moral purpose and social activism at Union was as high as I have ever seen. Union's spirit of public engagement was fully activated and there was a level of camaraderie amongst the entire student body that I have only witnessed, to this degree, twice at Union—on this occasion and then again during the fall of 2014 in the aftermath of the Michael Brown shooting and the ensuing protests that quickly spread from Ferguson, Missouri to the

rest of the nation. On both of these occasions, Dr. Cone was clearly visible at the forefront of the fight, and was even willing to cancel exams at one point to make space for students to pour their energies outward. His cancellation of exams turned out to be a particular effective pedagogic strategy in that it drove students to discuss the implications and outworkings of the assigned readings with more fevered attention than I had witnessed in previous semesters.

During that first year of the Occupy movement, I remember feeling that Dr. Cone was like the center of a vortex around which students' passion for racial justice and economic equality swirled. "Systematic Theology 103," which was typically at capacity with sixty to seventy incoming Union students each fall, seemed to me a strategic headquarters for allied forces heading down to Zuccotti Park as much as it was an academic class.

Interestingly, by the following spring semester, Occupy Wall Street had begun to wane, but student energy had not. It merely redirected itself away from Zuccotti Park and toward an internal controversy at Union that students had organized around. The camaraderie of the fall semester gave way to a more divisive atmosphere on campus, putting students at odds with the administration, with each other, and with some of their own professors, as lines were drawn around the issue. One person who made no bones about indicating where he stood and which side he supported was Dr. Cone. I remember watching him stand up at a crowded student lunch meeting, which packed the social hall to its gills, making it clear that he stood firmly on the side of the students and their right to make their voices heard. He was greeted with thunderous applause and a standing ovation, and I witnessed for the first time the true power of his influence upon student life and the level of sincere affection he generated in students' hearts. And from then on, no matter what the controversy or what the cause, on campus or off campus, it was abundantly clear to me that Dr. Cone would always distinguish himself as an uncompromising advocate *for* students. On any and every occasion, when students were lit up and fighting for change, Dr. Cone was always the loudest voice in the room and the most demonstrative when it came to his unwavering support for the student perspective and for student efforts to hold power accountable.

Indeed, his mantra, for "ST 103" and for every other class that I either took from him or participated in, was that students should focus first and foremost on finding their own, unique theological voice. I have been teaching undergraduate courses in theology, religious studies, and ethics for a few years now, and I can honestly say that I have yet to teach a class where I have not repeated this phrase: "Find your own voice!" And I always press my students to worry less about rote summary of reading material and to pour their energy more into discovering their critical stance toward that material.

To be clear, Dr. Cone was one of the most rigorous and demanding professors at Union by far. I took several seminars from him, and his reading requirements were always sizeable and the writing requirements were always challenging. Of all my readers for my comprehensive examinations, he was the one to most consistently accuse me of not having done enough primary research or reading. In a public lecture I gave on Martin Luther King, Jr., he called me out in front of the whole audience for citing too many secondary sources and not demonstrating that I had actually read King's own works (he was right and I knew it). Dr. Cone also had exacting standards for student participation, and he even called me up to his apartment one time to rebuke me for not speaking up enough in class. Whereas some of my classes felt lighter than I expected for PhD coursework, I could always count on Dr. Cone to expect the most out of me and then some. He made a point to encourage me and inspire me to become a better student, a more effective teacher, and a more productive writer. I admired this a great deal. But beyond his high expectations for academic rigor, it was also clear to me that Dr. Cone cared far more about students taking risks and finding their own theological voice than he did about them accurately summarizing the reading or giving the most exhaustive technical answers on a midterm or final. He made his theological career and reputation by taking risks, and saying things about black experience from a theological perspective that nobody else had yet dared to say. It was this kind of risk taking that he demanded without equivocation from his students, and fought like hell to compel from them. Every time I met with him to discuss my own work, he (without fail) chastised me for disguising my theological voice while also provoking me to work harder to find it. I can now sincerely say that every time I sit down to write my dissertation, I hear him sitting on my shoulder, shouting into my ear, with that infamous high-pitched tone, "Find your theological voice!"

Finally, I want to make a general remark about Dr. Cone's consistency as a teacher and as a human being. I find that many theologians I have read are often hard to pinpoint, because they have an early period, a middle period, a late period, et cetera. Though he made some adjustments throughout his career, such as using more gender inclusive language, widening his scope beyond the topic of race to a critique of economic structures, and adopting a more conciliatory tone toward race relations, Dr. Cone only ever had one theological period. His message was always the same—that the systematic oppression of black lives was anti-Christian, that the liberation and self-determination of black lives should be normative for Christian theology, and that the only way to side with God is to side with the oppressed. Dr. Cone delivered this message, book after book, lecture after

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lecture, class after class, with unfaltering conviction. He was as much a preacher for a cause as he was a teacher of a subject matter. Having studied with Dr. Cone, I now find it impossible to separate my need to adhere to high standards of academic rigor and my obligation to speak with personal theological conviction.

Dr. Cone is perhaps the only theologian I have ever known who blended his theological writings and teachings with his personal character and lifestyle to such a seamless degree that one could detect not a single discrepancy between the two. When I think of Dr. Cone, it is his conveyance of absolute conviction and moral consistency that I desire most to emulate. His legacy is his unshakeable, immoveable demeanor and fortitude, which was ever present and undiminishing. It was my honor to know him, to work for him, and to learn from him. The institution of Union Theological Seminary will certainly never be the same now that he is gone.

ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FORUM ON DR. JAMES CONE

Editor. 2020. "Introduction to the Forum on Dr. James H. Cone as Teacher and Mentor." *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* 1(2): 79–80. https://doi.org/10.31046/wabashcenter.v1i2.1501.

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THE WABASH CENTER
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FORUM

James Cone: Notes on a Critical Theologian

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ABSTRACT

This short essay reflects on James Cone's transformational impact as a teacher inside the classroom and through his voluminous writings. This is one of several short essays presented by recent students at a public forum at Union Theological Seminary after his death in 2018.

KEYWORDS

James Cone, black theology, theology, pedagogy, interpreter

It's rare to be asked to speak about Cone as a teacher rather than as a theologian or radical intellectual. To think of Cone as a classroom teacher exclusively seems far too limiting. Cone was one of those rare figures who pioneered an academic discourse, initiating new ways of thinking and seeing Christian faith. His teaching transformed and transcended the classroom, impacting the church, society, and world.

There are many things about Cone that made him a great teacher, but if I had to isolate one, it was his profound capacity for truth-telling—uncomfortable truth-telling. So much of graduate education is obsessed with cognitive truths, "feel good" declarations are espoused by the American church, but Cone struck a dissonant truth that was visceral. The truths he spoke were not soothing or designed to calm and reassure; they were unsettling and challenging truths, ones that disrupted and overturned racial hierarchies and social conventions. Like Malcolm X, Cone was known to "make it plain" and "tell it like it is." Cornel West identifies this as "black prophetic fire"—a spirit within the black radical tradition carved by figures who exposed lies, celebrated the good, and bore witness. James Cone was the incarnation of this spirit.

Listening to Cone narrate the story of black suffering and joy was liberating. For those of us who had the great fortune of studying with Cone, there was an additional benefit; not only was he a brilliant articulator of subjugated truths but he also showed us how to leverage black anger and rage as resources for truth-telling. In a bourgeois society that routinely penalizes open expressions of anger from black bodies, witnessing Cone name "whiteness" and "white religion" as enemies of Christian faith and human community was empowering. It gave us new language for coming to grips with absurdity of black suffering and opened new horizons of possibility for thinking faith in novel ways. *How* Cone spoke about race theologically was almost as important as *what* he said. When Cone spoke about race, he didn't whisper or worry if whites would be offended, he spoke with a piercing sense of theological determination, straight from his gut. Cone wasn't just heard, he was felt. Cone's capacity to access his gut as a resource for truth gave students the courage to access theirs.

Cone conceived of theology as an ongoing conversation. To be a student of the tradition, one must learn its interlocuters, its sources and norms as well as its exclusions, silences, and limitations. The problem, he explained, was that whites didn't regard blacks and other marginalized people as serious conversation partners. They were the excluded Others, fit to be

recipients of the tradition but not agents in its construction. Europe, he warned, had no monopoly on the meaning of the faith. As a corrective, Cone centered black people in theological discourse as producers of knowledge. His deep dive into the history and culture of black people to elevate them as equal to Europeans revolutionized the category of "human experience" within theology. Blackness became the new creative standpoint for engaging and reimagining Christian faith.

As fierce a critic as Cone was, what thrilled Cone more than critique was creativity and innovation. No matter how sharp your critique of classical theological perspectives, Cone would push you to include your constructive contribution to the dialogue. From someone who forged black theology into an academic discipline, this makes sense. It's difficult for most students to appreciate how unlikely the institutionalization of black theology at predominately white seminaries and universities was. Black power advocates were considered anti-white, anti-American, and anti-Christian, their rhetoric was considered hate speech (remember the reaction to Obama's former pastor, Jeremiah Wright). American Christianity emphasized themes of love, reconciliation, and forgiveness when it comes to race relations. To not only mix a militant Black Power movement with a love-inspired Christianity but to claim, as Cone did, that the message of black power was identical to Christ liberating activity in North America did not seem like a defensible theological position at elite institutions. Yet Cone, with intellectual sophistication, was not only able to prosecute academic theologians ignoring race, he also initiated a new discourse in Christian faith that identified black history as a primary realm of meaning and purpose, a site of divine activity. God, for Cone, is active, in a liberating and goal-orientated way in black history in culture. Within black theological discourse, black history and culture are sacred texts and can be regarded as sources for knowing God in the same way white Christians regard the Bible. Along with radical clergy in the National Conference of Black Christians, Cone started to evolve black theology with early publications and debates with Charles Long, Carleton Lee, Gayraud Wilmore, Major Jones, J. Deotis Roberts, and his brother Cecil Cone. As Cone embraced and learned from his critics, he emerged as the Father of Black Theology, providing the majority of its early literature and dominant methods of inquiry, revalorizing its sources and reframing traditional confessional categories. The inclusion of blackness into the realm of theology was not just an "add on" to assimilate into a received theological tradition but radical call for the re-making of the discipline itself. Shortly after the institutionalization of black theology, the study of black history and culture, black religion and theology became a significant part of many mainstream seminaries and departments of religion around the country.

As radical a thinker as Cone was, he was a fairly traditional pedagogue. His introductory classes were lecture style, in which he was a commanding and charismatic presence; his upper-level courses were seminar style with student presentations. Much of what made him effective in both arenas was unique to his persona. What I learned from him most was how he approached the intellectual formation of students and the discipline of theology.

Finding Your Own Theological Voice

For Cone, finding one's theological voice is "the pearl of great price." When I arrived at Union, I assumed Cone would be interested in manufacturing "black theologians," similar to the way Henry Ford manufactured Model T cars. To my surprise, he scoffed at the idea, "What I think about theology is very well known. . . be yourself!" he insisted (1998). The pathway to discovering one's voice was in conversation with others.

Cone wrote extensively about his own struggles in coming to voice. In 1967, teaching at Adrian College, a rebellion broke out in nearby Detroit. As a recent doctoral graduate, he was well acquainted with the theologies of Barth, Tillich, and other European theologians yet he was woefully ill-equipped to say anything meaningful about the black struggle for justice. What the hell does systematic theology have to say about the pain and sufferings of my people, he wondered? The few blacks who had formal degrees in theology mimicked white theologians so Cone had no professional role models. It wasn't until he encountered the teachings of Malcolm X that his consciousness became revolutionized. "Malcolm taught me how to make theology black and to never again despise my African origins. . . . I was transformed from a Negro theologian to a Black theologian" Cone recalled (1999b, xxi). "The revolution that Malcolm X created in my theological consciousness meant that I could no longer make peace with the intellectual mediocrity in which I had been trained. The more I trusted my experience, the more new thoughts about God and theology whirled around in my head—so fast I could hardly contain my excitement" (1999a, 251). "Blackness opened my eyes to see African American history and culture as one of the most insightful sources for knowing about God since the Bible was declared a canon" (1999a, 251). "My newfound blackness impelled me to write, to let the world know that a new voice had arrived on the theological scene" (2018, 8).

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As a classroom teacher, Cone was interested in forming creative interpreters, not robots or clones. Each student, he believed, has a unique path of discernment. For Cone, it was through the Civil Rights and Black Power movement, for others in Union's ecosystem, it was Marxist and socialist movements, womanist/feminist movements, LGBTQ movements, and/or eco-justice movements. During the process of discernment, Cone encouraged students to affirm the truths of their experience and critique the limitations of established theological perspectives, even his own.

Critical Interpreters of Faith

The second strategy I've learned from Cone is to cultivate students to be critical interpreters of the faith. For many newcomers, the questions within theological discourse seem settled and fixed. Cone was clear that theological questions and constructs don't drop from the sky, they emerged from a complex matrix of ideas and conditions of interpreters from times past. Cone was fond of saying, "The Bible tells us to love God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind." Theology is loving God with your whole mind. He often added, "The black church does a good job with the first two, but not as good a job with the last one" (1998).

Loving God with your whole mind is to engage the task of interpretation. Instead of naively accepting the received tradition and prioritizing its ecclesial agenda (baptism, communion, spiritual gifts, end-time prophesies, miracles, and so forth) Cone claimed that the best way to determine whether an issue is theologically significant is to see if it makes us re-examine the relationship between God and humanity. White supremacy, for example, is theologically significant because it results in the inability to see the *imago dei* in the Other. This reframing of the theological task opens new horizons of possibility for identifying and discussing faith issues in classroom contexts.

In addition to being critical interpreters of the faith, Cone pushed us to *interpret the interpreters*. That is to say, to place ourselves inside the socio-political milieu of a theologian and try to understand why a specific question or controversy was so important to them. Also, we should try to determine why a specific response to a theologian seemed to settle an issue for that age even though it may not settle it for our age. In examining new theological perspectives, Cone prodded us to ask, "What are the dominant assumptions of this age? What are its tests of religious authority? What questions are we choosing not to ask?" He challenged students to be attentive to how questions change from age to age. It is this form of creative inquiry and robust exchange that helped form students as critical interpreters.

Epistemic Humility

In teaching theology, it's important to remind students that theology is human language about God, not God-language about humans. Cone was allergic to absolutism. All human understanding is historically and linguistically conditioned. Therefore Christian God-language is always an approximation, not a complete grasping of God in and of Godself. The irony of the theological task is that we are applying human language and constructs to a God who constantly exceeds our grasp. The proper response to this process is deep humility.

In the context of a classroom, it's important to remind students that God-talk is an imaginative act, more art than science. Greek categories are not timeless truths and western metaphysics have a hard time capturing the transformative activity of a God in solidarity with the poor. Identifying our human constructs too closely with God is idolatry. So we shouldn't be overly confident about our language. Religious language is always metaphorical so there's no one way to talk about God. "God is Black, God is Red, God is Rice. . . are all anthropomorphic ways of speaking about God" Cone stated (1993, 392). In this way, "God chooses what is foolish to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong" (1 Corinthians 1:27). The vocation of theology is unlike other disciplines in a liberal arts curriculum; we should not just blindly promote university mission with their rhetorical claims of promoting good citizenship or teaching students to be good members of communities we know to be unjust. The vocation of a theologian it is to be a thorn in the flesh of all that oppresses and causes misery. In this way, theologians are in the academy but not of the academy.

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You Have to Find Your Voice: James H. Cone's Commitment to Theological Education

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ABSTRACT

This reflection is on the teaching philosophy of James H. Cone (1938-2018). It connects Cone's personal journey towards self-realization as a black theologian to his deeply held commitment to helping his students find and cultivate their own theological voice. The essay shares best practices from Cone's methods within the classroom. It also describes his passion for teaching and love of his students. This is one of several short essays presented by recent students at a public forum at Union Theological Seminary after his death in 2018.

KEYWORDS

James Cone, theological voice, black theology, pedagogy, theological education

James H. Cone's impact on theological scholarship cannot be overstated.[1] He is considered by many to be the most important theologian of the past fifty years. A foundational figure within liberation theology, Cone is respectfully regarded as the "Father of Black Theology." He argued that at the heart of the Christian faith is a message of liberation for black people and all of the world's oppressed. Over the course of his lifetime he published numerous books along with countless articles. Through his works he achieved international renown. Yet Cone was as equally committed to pedagogy as he was to producing texts. As Kelly Brown Douglas explains: "Cone's legacy goes beyond his writings, it extends to the opportunities it provided for others to find their own theological voice. He didn't want disciples. He wanted those who would bring new perspectives to understanding and doing God's work of justice in the world" (Union Theological Seminary 2019).

For six years, I had the privilege of working closely under Cone as his research and course assistant. I observed Cone's deep commitment to theological education firsthand. What follows are my reflections on what made him such an effective teacher and worthy of emulation.

At the heart of Cone's teaching was a desire to empower students to speak out of their own particular experience and to find what he called "their theological voice." This philosophy reflects Cone's personal journey towards self-discovery and vocational formation. It is therefore important to first consider his background and the social context that shaped him.

Cone was born in 1938 and grew up in Bearden, Arkansas. This was the segregated south of the 1940s and early 1950s. Black people were forced to attend segregated schools and churches. They had to watch movies from the theater balcony and enter

1 This essay is dedicated to Victoria Furio, Dr. Cone's administrative assistant of eighteen years.

the homes of white people through the back door. Blacks could only drink from "colored" water fountains.[2] These Jim Crow laws were enforced by lynching. Between 1877-1950, in Arkansas alone, 503 blacks were lynched (Equal Justice Initiative 2015). The 1955 murder of Emmett Till in particular had a profound impact on Cone. Yet despite the horrors of white supremacy, Cone was undergirded by the love of his parents, Charlie and Lucy, the support of his local black community, and the faith he found at Macedonia A.M.E. Church. These were the sources of love that gave him the strength to press on with dignity and courageously face the injustices of the world.

Cone was also greatly influenced by the political currents of the 1960s. Both the Civil Rights and Black Power movements pushed him to find the nexus between his Christian faith and the black freedom struggle. He pondered how to use his seminary training and subsequent position as a professor to teach and write in a manner relevant to the lives of those suffering in the world and in need of a message of hope. He drew inspiration from those he would later affectionately refer to as his "Intellectual Trinity"—Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and James Baldwin.

In King, Cone found a model of Christian identity which reflected his own religious disposition. This expression of Christian faith was committed to justice and political transformation. From Malcolm X, Cone received his love of blackness. Cone described Malcolm X as culturally transformative in that he nurtured in black people a revitalizing sense of self-esteem and pride. As Cone explains: "Malcolm taught me how to make theology black and never again despise my African origin. Martin showed me how to make and keep theology Christian and never allow it to be used to support injustice. I was transformed from a *Negro* theologian to a black theologian" (1999, xxi). Baldwin wrote that "one writes out of one thing only—one's own experience" (1998, 8). His works inspired Cone to not only become a great writer but one who wrote from a particular social location.

It was through the context of Cone's own experience that he was able to acquire his theological voice and articulate a black theology of liberation. In turn, helping his students find their voice became the bedrock of his teaching philosophy. In practice, this was achieved through a variety of means. Cone valued the diversity of his students and intentionally created space for the multitude of their perspectives to enter into the classroom. Through written assignments and classroom discussion he encouraged his pupils to connect the topics of the class to their own experiences and social location, to make meaning for themselves and their communities of accountability. A constant refrain from students throughout the years was an appreciation for the emotionally cathartic and "safe space" Cone's classes afforded them. For instance, his seminar on James Baldwin was especially popular and meaningful for students of color as well as those in the LGBTQ community.

But diversity is not a given. At times, it must be fought for. When Cone first arrived to teach at Union Theological Seminary, NY in 1969, the institution up to that point had never admitted a single black PhD student. Cone became instrumental in increasing black student matriculation into the school and its doctoral program. He also worked to recruit black faculty. Cone recognized the importance of representation long before it became a buzzword. And he toiled to help make it a reality.

Another way in which Cone elevated the voices of his students was through the structure of the class itself. For instance each of his seminar sessions would typically be divided into halves. Class would start with student presentations and then discussion. The second half began with Cone's lecture for that day followed by further conversation. In a very real sense, this order helped democratize classroom dialogue. While Cone always facilitated the discussion, the topic of each lesson was initially framed and significantly shaped by the students' own perspectives and wrestling with the assigned material. The result was increased student participation, buy-in, and personal stakes.

A key component of Cone's teaching was providing the proper historical context in which to understand the subject matter, be it the chronological development of a discipline or the time period out of which a specific thinker wrote. To this end, in addition to Cone's lectures, he would frequently use part of each class to play archival video and audio recordings. He would also invite special guest speakers to class. For example, a recurring presenter for his seminar on Reinhold Niebuhr was Niebuhr's last teaching assistant and Niebuhrian scholar, Ronald H. Stone. In Cone's course on James Baldwin, David Leeming, Baldwin's former assistant and biographer would make frequent appearances. Cone was always thinking of dynamic ways in which to enrich classroom discussion and student learning.

Cone possessed an intense passion for teaching. I have never seen a professor as devoted to the craft. During the semester it was his number one priority. In the classroom he displayed an uncanny sense of enthusiasm and vitality which never waned, even while undergoing chemotherapy during what would become his final semester of teaching. This energy within

2 Cone describes these experiences in his book *Risks of Faith* (1999, ix-xi).

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the classroom was matched by his preparation outside of it. Cone was constantly revising and updating his lectures and tome-like syllabi—each a vast wealth of knowledge and accumulated wisdom. He never rested on his laurels but worked tirelessly to improve as an instructor.

This enthusiasm was rooted in a love of his students. Cone writes: "My teaching is defined by my love of all students. . . . Teaching is profoundly connected with love. Without love for one's students, it is impossible to teach effectively" (2018, 110, 112). This is not to say that Cone was a pushover. On the contrary, he was a stern taskmaster. He worked hard and thus demanded a lot from his pupils. But this stemmed from the seriousness with which he took theological education. He believed in its value for society. His zeal also reflected the hope that he placed in his students to find their voice and become agents of positive social change in the world.

Cone was an effective teacher and worthy of emulation because he believed in the virtue of the discipline and of its transformative power. He inspires other educators through his example of hard work, commitment, and excellence. Teaching was his joy. His legacy will carry on in the countless students he loved and whose voices he helped set free.

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THE WABASH CENTER
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James Cone’s Liberative Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

James Cone is known primarily as the founder of Black liberation theology. Yet for those who were his students, his teaching was equally as powerful. Cone managed to mentor people, create dialogue, and foster collaboration, all around the common collective task of seeking justice and liberation through theological study and construction. These things made Cone such an effective teacher. His work existed on a continuum, in which the liberation of Black people, of all the oppressed, was a non-negotiable baseline. While he used “traditional” methods, primarily lecture and seminar formats, the purpose behind his teaching wasn’t traditional at all. And as a result, he has put in place a network of clergy, academics, and of many other vocations, who in one way or another are promulgating that commitment to liberation and justice quite literally throughout the world. This is one of several short essays presented by recent students at a public forum at Union Theological Seminary after his death in 2018.

KEYWORDS

James Cone, liberation theology, black liberation theology, pedagogy, mentorship

At the time of writing this, it has been nearly ten years since I took “Systematic Theology 103” (ST 103) with Dr. James Cone, and yet in so many ways it still remains the center of gravity of both my teaching and research. I later had the privilege of serving as a Teaching Fellow for that class, and that experience has remained definitive for my own teaching and my views concerning what can be accomplished in a classroom and what should be striven for. On the occasion of first offering some of these reflections on Cone, his work, and in particular his teaching, I was back in the room where I took that class for the first time in quite a long while. To be there without the possibility that Cone might walk in was strange. I took other introductory classes in Room 207, Union’s biggest lecture hall. But that room nonetheless felt like the ST 103 classroom. Cone’s presence, his shouting, open-palmed hand slapping on the podium, sudden dramatic pauses, cadence that meandered between lecture and sermon, still reverberates in that technologically and acoustically strange room. I think anyone who took the class can still feel liberation resonating in the walls.

As anyone who took ST 103 with Cone will attest, the syllabus itself as an object is a course in theology and a resource to be saved, with its layers of required reading, suggested reading, and an extensive bibliography, covering twentieth and early twenty-first century theologies. Various recent pedagogical resources have made the case that syllabuses themselves can and should be teaching tools. Ahead of the game, Cone had already made his syllabus into a learning tool before the concept gained wider acceptance: a narrative was proposed, the various levels to which a person could dig in an exploration of any given topic, and true to his constant admonition to “Find your own theological voice,” it offered the bibliographic foundation for any student of his to continue referring back to his syllabus, to the class, in order to find conversation partners, people with whom to disagree, and people to critique. It

was a class and a syllabus with a past, present, and potently open future. It helps students learn how to speak theologically, and to find what they have to say.

I didn't fully understand the depth of the narrative constructed in ST 103 with Cone until I taught under Cone as a Teaching Fellow in the PhD program. It starts with a self-reflective liberalism, building tension through what is often known as neo-orthodoxy with Karl Barth and Paul Tillich, which reaches a boiling point with the "Death of God" theologies of Thomas J.J. Altizer and William Hamilton. But that's when the turn happens, and the pressure is relieved, not by any reconciliation with the challenges that led to theological liberalism, but by the culmination and embrace of the death of the white, sexist, heteronormative, colonialist God. The sense of relief paired with energization that came with turning from fretting over the non-believer to advocating on behalf of the non-person, as Gustavo Gutierrez so elegantly put it and as Cone embraced, was palpable. Students began to see themselves in theologies, or to be convicted in their privilege by those theologies, to see the expansive possibilities of placing oneself passionately into the struggle for liberation and justice, as presided over by God. The result was always both seamless and explosive. Whether students registered the narrative or not, the effects were felt. From Cone I learned the importance of incorporating an overarching narrative arc to the argument one makes through a class in the course of a semester, and to making plain how students themselves are participants implicated in that narrative. Cone's narrative, however, didn't offer any simple conclusions, especially not in moments of injustice and potent discord, as was the case with Occupy Wall Street and the emergence of #BlackLivesMatter while I was a Teaching Fellow in ST 103. The next step in the narrative was always the students themselves, and the contributions to theologies that were needed from their own contexts and experiences.

One of the most poignant moments in my classes with Cone, as a student, came in his course on Reinhold Niebuhr. Holding everyone back for nearly the entire semester, insisting that we all hear Niebuhr on his own terms, I'll never forget the moment Cone finally leveled his critique, declaring solemnly, "In the end, Reinhold Niebuhr was a racist." What stood out to me was the profound sadness that came through in his pronouncement. There was no joy or vindictiveness in his voice whatsoever. There had been a lot of anticipation of Cone's big take down of Niebuhr in the class. But ultimately his reticence about it was even more powerful. It has made me think of *A Black Theology of Liberation*, where he wrote, "In Black theology, blacks are encouraged to revolt against the structures of white social and political power by affirming blackness, but not because blacks have a chance of 'winning.' What could the concept of 'winning' possibly mean? Blacks do what they do because and only because they can do no other; and black theology says simply that such an action is in harmony with divine revelation" (2010, 18). Further on, he continues,

> The gospel offers no assurance of winning. Again, what could 'winning' possibly mean? If it means what white racists mean by it—enslavement of human beings on the alleged basis of white supremacy—then, 'God deliver us!' The idea of winning is a hang up of liberal whites who want to be white and Christian at the same time, but they fail to realize that this approach is a contradiction in terms—Christianity and whiteness are opposites. Therefore, when whites say, 'That approach will not win out,' our reply must be, 'What do you mean? Who's trying to win?' (2010, 43)

His critiques were devastating. But he always insisted on understanding each theologian on their own terms. At the very least, to find one's own contradiction. Further, he lived his own theology in his pedagogy. His classes could be contentious, dialogic, agonistic. And yet the idea of anyone winning was foreign to them. The point, in his teaching as his theology, was to achieve liberation, insights, revelations of God's liberative work in history, including in classroom settings. Growth, learning, contention, striving, wrestling (as he was especially fond of saying) were crucial to his classes. Yet it seemed he always held high standards that encouraged more than memorization and internalizing concepts. It meant searching for liberation in those concepts, in theology, and in one's own theological voice engaging with the contradictions they encounter.

As a white scholar and teacher, I try to hold myself accountable to the standard that if I couldn't say it out loud in a room with James Cone there, I shouldn't say it and I should rethink my own views on it. Obviously that applies especially to race. But it also counts for anything to which race critique and criticism of power applies, and both in a positive and a negative sense. In the negative, I think it means always trying to be alert to my own language, the power in the room, and trying to remain vigilant against the logic of whiteness in the power dynamics of higher education and the classroom. And in the positive sense, not to be afraid to use passionate, invested language that rises to the occasion when naming injustice for what it is in an academic setting.

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At Union Theological Seminary, where I did my PhD, one of the four comprehensive exams in theology must be done as a public lecture, to which anyone and everyone is invited. My lecture hinged on a fine grained analysis of the use of "love" by James Baldwin in *The Fire Next Time* (1963) in conversation with Reinhold Niebuhr's Christian realism and against the backdrop of contemporary police violence against people of color. Everyone from my advisor to Cone himself asked why on earth I had decided to do this particular exam as my public lecture. Cone had been teaching a fiery class on James Baldwin, who he characterized as one third of his intellectual trinity alongside Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. The immediate traumas to which #BlackLivesMatter responded were still recent and raw. The exam was an extended meditation on Baldwin's conception of "love" in light of racism in the United States.

After my exam prospectus went to the theology field for approval I got an urgent, sort of frantic email from Cone saying he needed to meet with me right away about the exam. I was able to assuage Cone's concerns (for the most part). What he wouldn't let me leave without acknowledging is the fact that I stood a risk of doing great harm. Intellectual work, research or teaching, isn't disinterested, disembodied, or neutral. The possibility of violent power, of whiteness, manifesting is always a present reality in academic work. The public aspect of the exam, that I would be addressing not only my readers, Cone and Cornel West, but also my students as a Teaching Fellow, my peers, and the wider community, made the potential even greater. And what he drove home was that whatever academic, intellectual point I intended to make, I'd better first be really, very, extra sure that the oppressed in the room knew whose side I was on. That applies in writing, in lectures, and, I think most crucially, in the classroom. And that has stuck with me, that teaching liberation has to be wrapped up with the work of liberation. Academic spaces aren't value neutral. Coming down firmly on the side of the oppressed without reservation is a key to liberative pedagogy, which is a reflection of both Cone's scholarship and teaching. I don't always live up to that ideal, but Cone was absolutely an embodiment of it.

Cone's teaching, like his writing, was thoroughly invested in the work for Black liberation. A good deal of technical theological language, in my internal monologue, reflexively sounds in Cone's voice (I think of the very word "theologian" itself, with Cone's distinctive drawn out second "o," somehow managing to emphasize both the "theo" and the "logos"). Studies and techniques in pedagogy may emphasize more creative, more collaborative tactics and activities than the classic lecture style Cone was known for. And yet his teaching nonetheless managed to mentor people, create dialogue, create collaboration, all around the common collective task of seeking justice and liberation through theological study and construction. That, for me, is what made Cone such an effective teacher. His work existed on a continuum, in which the liberation of Black people, of all the oppressed, was a non-negotiable baseline. While he used "traditional" methods, primarily lecture and seminar formats, the purpose behind his teaching wasn't traditional at all. And as a result, he has put in place a network of clergy, academics, and of many other vocations, who in one way or another are promulgating that commitment to liberation and justice quite literally throughout the world.

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Jason Wyman received his PhD from Union Theological Seminary. His first book, *Constructing Constructive Theology: An Introductory Sketch*, looks at the history and method of constructive theology as a coherent tradition. He has also published articles in *Black Theology: An International Journal and Theology Today.* Wyman teaches classes on theology, social ethics, and religion in New York.

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Learning Theology in the Struggle for Freedom

Colleen Wessel-McCoy
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ABSTRACT

In his work as a scholar and educator, James Cone developed leaders. He built a network of scholars, clergy, and activists committed to the power of God in history and to the role of the poor and dispossessed in realizing earthly freedom. Cone's courses began with the situatedness of the theologians being studied and always returned to the problems of the world that theologians sought to answer. He challenged his students to do the same, identifying and answering the crises of our communities, doing theology in the struggle for justice and liberation. This is one of several short essays presented by recent students at a public forum at Union Theological Seminary after his death in 2018.

KEYWORDS

James Cone, Martin Luther King Jr, Poor People's Campaign, poverty, leadership

In recent years I have been traveling around to teach about Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1968 Poor People's Campaign as part of today's Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival. My presentation includes a clip from a documentary where Prof. Cone is the featured scholar on King's last years. In the film you can hear him speak before you see his image and name, and there is always an audible stir of excitement as people recognize his voice. And then as his image comes onto the screen that stir breaks into a cheer. Prof. Cone's voice impacts you and taps into all you have learned from him. No matter where I was—north or south, east or west—people recognized his voice, and that's because Prof. Cone's teaching included his role as a public theologian. He was committed to black people, poor people, and oppressed people everywhere. He relentlessly called the world to do and be better, even when he knew it would fail again. But the commitment to transformation that sent him around the world always brought him back to the students of Union Theological Seminary. He believed in us. He believed in our capacity to join him in the prophetic role of the theologian. God grant us the strength to live up to his hopes for us.

The alumni of Union Theological Seminary are leaders in our communities and congregations because we have been shaped by his commitment to us as an educator. He called us to deeper scholarship, challenging the anti-intellectualism that creeps into organizing and activism, into our churches, and even into our classrooms. Because of him we read our Bible differently, we expect scholars and religious leaders to take sides with the oppressed, and we insist that the brokenness of the world cannot be understood apart from systemic racism. His teaching methods drew from this commitment to shaping religious leaders for the world.

As an educator Prof. Cone insisted that we not lift ideas out of the material reality from which they came. Course material and lectures began with the situatedness of the theologians we studied and always returned to the problems and questions the theologians sought to answer. His book and course, *Martin & Malcolm & America* was truly about all three (1991). He extended the session time to preface every class with documentaries that took us to the context of the 1950s and 60s. He

wanted us to understand that Malcolm and Martin were shaped by the urgent questions of their day. And he wanted us to understand that their contributions were strengthened by that relationship.

As my work moved deeper into the study of the Poor People's Campaign I moved to understand more deeply Prof. Cone's insistence that we underestimate Martin Luther King Jr.'s theological contribution when we fail to see (or refuse to see) that, "the struggle for freedom is the only appropriate context for doing theology" (1986, 21). And Prof. Cone challenged us to do the same, identifying and answering the crises of our communities and world.

It was while I served as a teaching fellow for his classes that I realized that to be criticized and challenged by Prof. Cone was a compliment. It meant that he took you seriously and knew that the world needed you to be best you could be. As I come into my own work as an educator I increasingly appreciate his capacity to be critical of students, to tell us when we were wrong or fell short. I watch my own students struggle to learn how to hear corrections and suggestions without being overwhelmed by it. I struggle to learn that myself. But it was always clear that challenges and corrections from Prof. Cone were in the service of making us better scholars, ministers, and justice seekers. Bishop William Barber II reminds the leaders of the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival, "Don't be loud and wrong." Prof. Cone similarly knew from his fight for Black Theology that the oppressed are doubly scrutinized for errors and weaknesses. We must know the dominant voices better than they know themselves and then know our own scholarship as well.

Prof. Cone insisted that we be changed by what we study, not confirmed by it. He taught this by modeling it. He was candid about the times in his life when he was challenged by his colleagues and students. He was always open to hearing new ideas from students—as long as you demonstrated a real understanding of the ideas to which you were responding. He had little patience for superficial challenges, and he had heard them all over the course of his years. As both a student and teaching fellow in Prof. Cone's "Introduction to Theology," I remember the appalling arrogance and racism of some students who shamelessly raised their hands to challenge liberation theologies in ways they would never do for dominant theologies. Prof. Cone responded directly and unapologetically yet somehow also pastorally.

I smile when I think of the stack of well-worn books that he brought to class. He would place them on the table, spine out, and go directly to specific passages as called for by the course of discussion. In some sessions that stack would grow quite tall. In his "Black Theology" course he drew from the theologians directly, even when we had been reading them from his compilation, pulling out the original text to cite. He once observed that I had made reference to material from an endnote encouraging close reading. Students whose questions and comments revealed that they had not fully read or wrestled with the assigned readings before coming to class were redirected to the text.

Part of the story of Prof. Cone's effectiveness as an educator and mentor is the skillful work of his administrative assistant Vicky Furio. She brought to her work a commitment to students, justice, and liberation. It showed in her no-nonsense handling of appointments, papers, and schedules. She made the attention that Prof. Cone gave to students and scholarship possible. I often find her in the acknowledgements section of my peers' dissertations and books and am reminded of my own gratitude.

Cone was a towering global figure and a prophet of freedom. His vocation as a writer and educator was truly a ministry. He took the time to develop new leaders, to build a network of scholars, clergy, and activists committed to liberation, to the power of God in history, and to the role of the poor and dispossessed in realizing earthly freedom. There are generations of us across the country and world. And because of his commitment to developing this broad network of leaders, the tradition continues to build and you are invited into it, even if you didn't take a class with him. Black Theology, rooted in the freedom strands of the black church tradition, asks each of us, "In what ways can we best explicate the meaning of God's liberating activity in the world so that the oppressed will be ready to risk all for earthly freedom?" (Cone 1993, 111).

I miss his wise advisement, his impassioned lectures in the classroom, and his warm kindness as we passed each other in the hallway. But his challenge to be faithful to the God of liberation and to God's people lives and grows. His challenge to faithfulness follows us—in the classroom, the congregation, the community center, the streets, the legislature, and the courts —in every sphere where the poor and dispossessed are breaking out and uniting, ready to risk all for earthly freedom and to claim the promises of the God who takes sides in history. This call remains forever clear, if you are willing to hear it.

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ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FORUM ON DR. JAMES CONE

Editor. 2020. "Introduction to the Forum on Dr. James H. Cone as Teacher and Mentor." *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* 1(2): 79–80. https://doi.org/10.31046/wabashcenter.v1i2.1501.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Colleen Wessel-McCoy is a lecturer at Union Theological Seminary and Co-coordinator of Poverty Scholarship and Leadership Development at the Kairos Center for Religions, Rights, and Social Justice. A former teaching fellow for Professor James Cone, her scholarship focuses on Martin Luther King Jr.'s political strategy and theological vision of a Poor People's Campaign in 1968 and the work of the organized poor in a revolution of values today.

THE WABASH CENTER
JOURNAL ON TEACHING

TEACHING TACTIC

A Self-Care Journal for the Religious Studies Classroom

Anthony Keddie
University of British Columbia

The context

This strategy was developed at a large public research university for students in lower-level introductory courses like "Introduction to Western Religions" and "Scriptures of the Near East." It has also been used effectively in upper-level New Testament courses.

The pedagogical purpose

For many students, especially those from conservative religious backgrounds, the academic study of religion can be alienating, confusing, and depressing. In a religion course in a public university setting, students can often feel that their own religious convictions are stifled and disregarded. This tactic resists the alienating tendency of religious studies courses by recognizing students' emotional struggles as valid and providing a nonjudgmental mechanism for supporting students as they work through the ways that a course challenges their religious or non-religious convictions.

Description of the strategy

At the beginning of the semester, I ask students to initiate a Self-Care Journal. At least once every two weeks, I reserve five to ten minutes of class time for them to write in this private journal, which is not read or graded. It can be either hand-written or digital, but all entries should be recorded in the same place. I underscore that this exercise in self-care allows a safe space for students to explore how learning critical approaches to religion makes them feel about their own religious identity (and its intersections with race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc.).

I use prompts like the following, which can be adjusted to align with course content and methods:

- How does your understanding of religion affect your life?
- What challenges does your religious or non-religious worldview present for your learning in a course like this?
- What self-care strategies can you employ when you encounter material that makes you angry, uncomfortable, or sad?

After writing certain entries, I invite students to share with small groups or the full class so that they can see how their peers are grappling with some of the same issues. This activity can also be prefaced by a few minutes of silent breathing exercises to help students focus their thoughts.

Why it is effective

Scholarship on learning[1] shows that college-aged students' intellectual development is interdependent on their emotional and social development. By encouraging students to reflect on how their learning about religion affects their general wellbeing, this exercise fosters students' awareness of their emotional and mental health and encourages them to incorporate strategies of self-care into their daily lives. Scholarship[2] also stresses that effective teaching builds on students' prior knowledge. This tactic enables students to activate their prior knowledge in concert with critical inquiry.

1 https://www.wiley.com/en-us/How+Learning+Works%3A+Seven+Research+Based+Principles+-for+Smart+Teaching-p-9780470484104

2 https://www.routledge.com/From-the-Laboratory-to-the-Classroom-Translating-Science-of-Learning-for/Horvath-Lodge-Hattie/p/book/9781138649644

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TEACHING TACTIC

What We Talk About When We Talk About “Religion”

Eric Thurman
The University of the South (Sewanee)

The context

I use this tactic during the first week of an introductory religious studies course, which typically has around twenty-five students, though it could be used in any course that deals with theories of religion.

The pedagogical purpose

Most courses in religious studies begin with the question of how to define “religion.” I developed this tactic to address the dissatisfaction my students have experienced with one familiar approach—parsing a pregiven list of popular or academic definitions of religion for their shortcomings. Most students want to dive into the particular beliefs and practices of different groups, but abstract theorizing at the beginning of the course squelches their enthusiasm. This tactic begins reflection on the limitations of religion as a category in a different way: it invites students to generate and critique their own definitions based on concrete examples they themselves choose.

Description of the strategy

Before class, students walk around town with this question in mind: “Where do you see signs of religion taking place in the spaces around you?” After their survey, students (1) make a list of their examples and (2) describe one in more detail by answering these questions: “What makes this an example of religion? How would you define religion in general if this were the only example we had?” Virtually every student will name familiar examples: the university chapel, the 60’ war memorial cross, the biblical text of the school motto, and so forth. Others, however, will include not-so-obvious possibilities: the American flag flying across the street from the chapel, or the famed football field.

In class, each student introduces their list in turn and explains how they would define religion in general using only one of their key examples. I put their definitions on the board in the form of “Religion is ________.” We then work through each definition to see which of the examples on the board, if any, fit.

We note how each definition excludes things other definitions include. We also compare the different student lists to see what, if anything, these particular examples have in common that would justify putting them all in the same category. We conclude by asking if we could ever define religion in a way that would cover all our examples and, if not, what that means for how we should talk about religion the rest of the semester.

Why it is effective

This exercise illustrates in a concrete way the difficulty of coming up with a single definition of religion. It provides a smooth introduction to the work of description and classification because it begins with examples and ideas students are already familiar with: their own. Many student-generated definitions also echo some scholarly definitions and this provides an opportunity to introduce unfamiliar scholars and their concepts. More generally, the exercise provides a touchstone that can be returned to throughout the rest of the course. Whenever students make broad generalizations about religion or assume religion is categorically separate from culture, politics, ethics, economics, etc., we can recall the limits of our first effort to talk about religion.

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TEACHING TACTIC

Teaching Virtue Theory Experientially

Kent Eilers
Huntington University

The context

I teach in a Christian liberal arts setting and use this strategy with upper-level nursing and premed students in a course titled "Theological Bioethics," which is essentially a medical ethics class from a Christian, theological perspective.

The pedagogical purpose

A learning outcome for this course involves moral reasoning from a range of different ethical systems. Students must demonstrate proficiency in approaching ethical challenges from the standpoints of various approaches to morality, such as deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue theory. Specifically regarding virtue theory, I have found (over ten years) that students consistently and profoundly struggle to reason from this approach. They have no language for speaking virtue theory; no coordination for its dance steps; no way to see ethical deliberation from its vantage point. Rather than address the learning challenge theoretically, this tactic addresses it experientially.

Description of the strategy

The strategy consists of fourteen activities that reveal settled habits and generate embodied familiarity with virtue theory's approach. Called Formation Experiments (FEs), each centers on one of the seven Capital Virtues (humility, generosity, temperance, etc.) or seven Vices (vainglory, envy, gluttony, etc.). For instance, the FE on vainglory requires students to avoid their reflection, and then reflect on their management of appearance (an idea borrowed from DeYoung's *Glittering Vices*[1] [2009]). The FE on humility requires students to ask questions in class or seek help from friends, and then reflect on their comfort with authenticity. An anger journal is required for the FE on wrath, in which students reflect on their anger's intensity and causes. And so on with the rest of the classic virtues and vices. One FE is assigned per week, lasts two days, and students may complete any ten. After completion of each FE, students reflect *specifically* on their experience through a one-page journal. Though I read each student's journal for specificity, I readily admit to them that I cannot verify their actual completion of the FE and point out the obvious fact: this is a character-oriented learning approach, and deception speaks volumes about theirs.

Why it is effective

To be clear, the tactic does not ask students to practice the vices (no!), nor do I suggest that two days of practicing virtue will form character. The wisdom of the ages, no less many in contemporary neuroscience and moral psychology, tell us the formation of character requires time and intention (Lewis [2012][2]; Reilly and Narvaez [2018][3]). Instead, FEs are diagnostic activities. They reveal one's settled habits, and—the learning payoff—they also generate experiential familiarity with virtue theory's approach. The strategy moves students past theoretical knowledge of virtue theory into realms of experiential understanding and transference. By practicing and then reflecting on activities that reveal character, students develop embodied familiarity with virtue theory's approach to moral reasoning— they gain some coordination with its dance steps, they learn to see from its vantage point. This experiential understanding enables them to apply virtue theory more fluently to the ethical scenarios we address in class discussions, written projects, and group work.

1 http://www.bakerpublishinggroup.com/books/glittering-vices/227920

2 https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2012.668005

3 https://doi.org/10.1628/ptsc-2018-0005

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BOOK REVIEW

Useful Assessment and Evaluation in Language Education

John McE. Davis, John M. Norris, Margaret E. Malone, Todd H. McKay, and Young-A Son

Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2018
(ix + 264 pages, ISBN 978-1-62616-540-3, $49.95)

Reviewed By

Shively T. J. Smith
Boston University School of Theology

This book is a collection of fourteen essays representing presentations made at the 2016 Georgetown University Round Table (GURT) conference, sponsored by the Georgetown University Department of Linguistics and the Assessment and Evaluation Language Resource Center (AELRC). These essays showcase a diverse set of approaches to treating assessment and evaluation as "tools of educational transformation" for foreign-language learning (vii). They focus on primary, secondary, and undergraduate-level foreign language instruction, with none concentrating specifically on graduate-level theological education or religious studies. Nonetheless, the volume offers some novel proposals for structuring language courses that may benefit biblical or modern language sequences offered in theological schools and religious studies programs. The book is organized into three sections, each representing emerging research and praxis on transformative foreign language assessment and evaluation for e-learning platforms, language course instruction, program development, and ESL student placement.

Part one—Connecting Assessment, Learners, and Learning—surveys theories and practical implementations of assessment and evaluation for enhancing language learning, particularly from the perspective of student and teacher self-assessment processes. In five essays, this section establishes self-assessment as a continual process and offers practical steps for integrating self-assessment in foreign language acquisition.

Part two—Innovating, Framing, and Exploring Assessment in Language Education—covers topics such as the formative use of task-based assessment "in primary schools, the implementation of technology-mediated speaking performance assessment, and validation of educational placement decisions for immigrant learners" (ix). Some of the proposals may provide seminaries and graduate-level liberal arts programs fresh avenues for (1) going about its sequence of biblical language instruction or (2) resourcing multilingual students navigating North American theological and religious education.

Part three—Validity Evaluation—includes five essays that address processes for assessment validation, such as corroborating the outcomes of university entrance exams or language placement exams with student achievement and retention. These essays provide suggestions for the evaluation of overall language programs implemented by institutions. As a whole, it may supply new considerations about evaluating outcomes of language instruction for theological ESL programs.

The perspectives offered in this volume present innovative research on foreign language learning from outside the academic contexts of theological education and religious studies. As a result, they reflect fresh theoretical and practical considerations that may not have, as of yet, permeated conventional resources and "common knowledge" about assessment and evaluation in theological education. While it may prove to be a beneficial read, those primarily located in theological education and religious studies who grapple with issues of language instruction—especially biblical language instruction or the implementation of theological ESL programs—may still find this a challenging read. While the scholarship is relevant at times, its application is left to the reader from theological education and religious studies to make. Despite this potential difficulty, the volume represents the kinds of knowledge and resources available to theological education and religious studies from other educational stages and learning environments that may be further along in considerations about institutional learning processes, e-learning pedagogy, foreign language classroom instruction, and support of multilingual, international students.

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BOOK REVIEW

SoTL in Action: Illuminating Critical Moments of Practice

Nancy L. Chick, *editor*

Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2018
(xii + 164 pages, ISBN 9781620366929, $29.42)

Reviewed By
Kwok Pui Lan
Emory University

Academics trained in different fields are sometimes at a loss of how to conduct research in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). Does SoTL have its particular methodologies different from those of other fields? Who are the audiences of SoTL and how can one join the conversation? Is there a quick guide, which introduces the diverse approaches with illustrations? Can we learn from the experts, who can provide advice and point out the pitfalls? This book is helpful for beginners to think more clearly of the scope and research in SoTL, and it also provides insights for seasoned scholars who want to learn from others in diverse disciplines.

The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 focuses on the foundations of SoTL, including discussion of the origins of SoTL projects, ways of identifying research issues, the relationship between educational research and SoTL, and the alignment of research methods with purpose. In Part 2 contributors offer examples of specific research methods with examples. These methods include questionnaires, classroom observation, conducting interviews, close reading of student artifacts, and the use of think-aloud protocols developed by cognitive psychologists. Part 3 focuses on making impact and touches on writing and reading SoTL and participating in SoTL conferences.

In putting the book together, editor Nancy L. Chick does not want to introduce SoTL in the abstract, but wishes to illumine critical moments in practice through vignettes and examples. Each chapter is like listening to a colleague reflecting on a particular issue in SoTL, drawing concrete examples from classroom practice and research. In the chapter on using questionnaires, for example, the author does not provide a step-by-step guide to creating a questionnaire. Rather, the author shows how he reflects on the big-picture conceptual issue questions related to SoTL when designing the questionnaire. Each chapter includes a helpful reference pointing to further readings.

The discussion throughout the book is engaging and shows the authors' commitment to teaching and to SoTL. It motivates us to become better teachers through engagement with the literature in SoTL. It is encouraging for those of us not trained in social-scientific methods to see that classroom observation and closing reading of student artifacts can also produce SoTL. The chapter on classroom observation explains the process of involving other colleagues to observe teaching in action. The chapter on close reading explains the difference between closing reading for SoTL and grading assignments.

While the examples given are helpful, the book would be more useful if it attended to the challenges of doing SoTL research in diverse classrooms, taking into consideration race, gender, sexuality, class, and culture. It would be more up-to-date if it included discussion in SoTL on teaching generation Z students and non-traditional students, and teaching online and hybrid courses, as they are becoming more common in higher education.

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THE WABASH CENTER JOURNAL ON TEACHING

BOOK REVIEW

Digital Technologies: Sustainable Innovations for Improving Teaching and Learning

Demetrois Sampson, Dirk Ifenthaler, J. Michael Spector, and Pedro Isaías

Cham, Switzerland: Springer International, 2018
(xviii + 310 pages, ISBN 978-3-319-73416-3, $149.99)

Reviewed By
Darwin K. Glassford
Kuyper College

Graduate theological education is experiencing a variety of upheavals, including learning how to navigate the digital technologies transforming the teaching-learning process. Navigating these changes necessitates that graduate theological schools and seminaries adopt the mindset of an educational technology company.

Editors Sampson, Ifenthaler, Spector, and Isaías have assembled a collection of international research articles in *Digital Technologies: Sustainable Innovations for Improving Teaching and Learning*. The articles are organized around four themes: "Transforming the Learning Environment," "Enriching Student Learning Experiences," "Measuring and Assessing Teaching and Learning with Educational Data Analysis," and "Cultivating Student Competencies or the Digital Smart Society." The rich data found in each of the articles will assist institutions in asking good questions as they seek to discern the instructional tools they will employ to enhance learning.

The essays address the use of digital technologies principally in either a K-12 environment or college-level STEM programs. Despite their focus on different educational contexts, the essays are helpful in explaining the role digital technologies are playing in the educational environment and challenging one to think imaginatively about the implications for graduate theological education.

Wrestling with the articles was enjoyable but imagining how they apply to theological education was enlightening and frustrating at the same time. The articles lack a shared definition of "learning," this combined with the ends/outcomes of education being implied made assessing the educational value for theological education difficult. In the end, imagining the implications of these articles for theological education was more like making conjectures or discussion starters rather than the bases for working hypotheses.

Digital Technologies will serve as a helpful resource when evaluating digital technologies for inclusion in an institution's educational strategy. The international character and depth of the articles help one ask good educational questions when evaluating digital learning tools. Asking good technological questions consistent with one's theological heritage is consistent with being an educational technology company, especially as theological institutions seek to be more nimble in identifying, assessing, evaluating, and implementing sustainable digital technology to enhance learning.

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BOOK REVIEW

Innovations in Open and Flexible Education

Kam Cheong Li, Kin Sun Yuen, and Billy Tak Ming Wong, *editors*

Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2018
(xxv + 267 pages, ISBN 978-981-10-7994-8, $63.23)

Reviewed By
Elizabeth Yomantas
Pepperdine University

Innovations in Open and Flexible Education is a timely collection of research which examines various aspects of open and flexible education in the global community's changing landscape of teaching and learning. The book is written for professors, academics, researchers, students, educational practitioners, and administrators to learn the latest empirical research in regard to open and flexible education. The book is organized thematically with a focus on four major themes: open/flexible curriculum and pedagogy, mobile and ubiquitous learning, digitized media and open educational resources, and tracking and analysis of student learning. The book includes qualitative and quantitative research studies, empirical and case studies, statistical analyses, descriptive surveys, and interviews.

Part I flows seamlessly as the contributing authors discuss historical perspectives, student perspectives, budget planning, needs assessment, models of the flipped classroom, cross-country analysis, and massive online open courses. Part II focuses on the use of mobile devices, specifically in vocational education and training, preferences and readiness for usage, the use and design of specific apps for learning, and learning management systems. Part III of the book examines digitalized media and open educational resources including game-based learning, flipped massive online open courses, open educational resources, videos in blended learning, and media literacy. The final section of the book, Part IV, analyzes student learning including the use of big data in teaching and learning, instant messaging, application programming interfaces to track learning, reinforcement learning, and the design of data-logging devices.

The findings of this book are exciting. According to Lee, the purpose of flexible learning is to "achieve equity, efficiency, and effectiveness" (31) in education. As the editors note in the introduction to the book, there is a global trend of knowledge becoming more publicly accessible and less reserved for the privileged. As education is becoming more open and consequently more flexible, education at large is more available to all people. This book highlights the latest research on this topic, which may lead to educational stakeholders creating more open and flexible landscapes in their educational communities. As Christian scholars, this must be one of our aims—to make education more inclusive and flexible to welcome and benefit all learners.

The organization and structure of the book is not only informative but is enjoyable to read. The editors selected topics that are connected but remain distinctly different, which creates an interesting and diverse reading experience. Furthermore, the content in this book leads to much introspection on the part of the reader; the reader is challenged to consider what open and flexible pedagogies they have adopted in order to benefit all students. The research provides a fertile ground for discussions of education theory, pedagogy, and praxis. The book is comprised of twenty-three chapters that are written with experiences and perspectives from Asian countries (including Australia) and is a part of a research book series titled Education Innovation. For further work on this topic, it would be valuable for the editors to develop a book series that focuses on research from different continents on open and flexible education. The contents of this book demonstrate the diversity and richness of this topic, so perhaps this text could be expanded into a series.

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BOOK REVIEW

Handbook of Research on Student-Centered Strategies in Online Adult Learning Environments

Carlton J. Fitzgerald, Simona Laurian-Fitzgerald, and Carmen Popa, *editors*

Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2018
(xxxii + 554 pages, ISBN 1522550852, $196.00)

Reviewed By

Khalaf Mohamed Abdellatif

Cairo University

Adult learners are different than younger learners. These groups do, however, share some interests and learning similarities; for instance, both are motivated to use technology in learning. Yet adult learners often have additional challenges using technology because of their late involvement with the digital world. Older adult learners' participation in online learning and continuing education pose institutional, situational, and dispositional challenges.

Online learning provides particular possibilities for adult learners, thereby allowing them to cope with specific adult learning demands. It helps adult students to maintain some sustainability while navigating new technological terrains. Adult learners may have particular learning issues and challenges arise from time to time.

The *Handbook of Research on Student-Centered Strategies in Online Adult Learning Environments* was developed for educators who work with adult learners in online programs. It is a book primarily focused on helping teachers by offering specific ideas for working with students in online environments and serving as a guide for structuring learning experiences for people at different stages of development.

The book comprises 22 chapters organized in four sections. Section 1, "Integrating Educational Practices into Online Learning," provides insights into how educators can link natural learning tendencies in teaching to students' learning. Furthermore, it highlights competency-based education and the position of student-centered online learning. Section 2, "Adult Learners and Learning," discusses andragogy in relation to the transitions in knowledge acquisition, focusing on concepts of digital natives and digital immigrants. Discourse on preparing the efficient teacher in the age of information and communication technology is foregrounded in Section 3, "Professional Learning." For instance, Chapter 14, "A Guide to Professional Learning for Secondary Mathematics Teachers," explores the impact of a professional learning program on mathematics teachers' self-efficacy. Section 4, "Student-Centeredness and Collaboration," provides an overview of collaborative learning as well as student-centered online learning.

This handbook also provides arguments on converting theoretical frameworks into practical work in an online classroom or any other digital context. The chapters are organized subsequently in a rational order, yet the reader can start with any chapter of potential interest. However, the discourse on neoliberalism, along with austerity, and their impact—on online education generally, and online adult education particularly—is absent. Furthermore, the counter-argument which debates that online learning should be accepted with much caution receives only 15 pages. Moreover, while Dan Patroc argues that insufficient non-verbal communication is a major drawback in online learning, non-verbal communication receives only one paragraph. Overall, the editors and authors provide a remarkable contribution to the literature on online adult education. *Handbook of Research on Student-Centered Strategies in Online Adult Learning Environments* is highly recommended for adult educators, online trainers, researchers, and policymakers.

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THE WABASH CENTER JOURNAL ON TEACHING

BOOK REVIEW

Threshold Concepts in Problem-based Learning

Maggi Savin-Baden and Gemma Tombs, *editors*

Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill/Sense, 2018
(vii + 176 pages, ISBN 978-9004375109, $72.00)

Reviewed By

Mary Ann Zimmer
Marywood University

The editors of this volume address a gap in scholarship by bringing Problem-based Learning (PBL) into fruitful dialogue with the separately developed Threshold Concepts Framework (TCF). The goal of the volume is to show how TCF enhances the understanding and practice of PBL. None of the authors addresses the teaching of theology or religion; nonetheless, each chapter offers some insight that could readily lend itself to a better understanding of the process of learning in the theology or religious studies classroom. The collection begins with four strong introductory chapters addressing the basics of these two pedagogical approaches and their relationship to each other. The next three chapters lay out how these theories can be found across such different disciplines as engineering education, chemical engineering design, and professional development for university teachers. The final three chapters report on research projects that point out new TCs in additional disciplines.

PBL is an educational practice that presents students with real world problems that are not neatly defined and do not have an obvious solution. Students work in groups to decide what further knowledge they need, how to obtain it, and how to represent it. The TCF works with the points at which students cross in a significant way from familiar ways of framing knowledge to a point of disorientation and then to incorporating new knowledge. Savin-Baden and Tombs describe TCs and PBL as independently developed pedagogies but natural partners nonetheless. This is true in two ways. PBL has long described itself as deliberately constructing a path for students toward and through “troublesome” knowledge. Suitable problems for PBL are those that lead students to a point of being stymied in their existing level of knowledge as they address wicked problems that are not easily classified and solved. Often the PBL method is itself troublesome to students as they wrestle with an educational process that shifts responsibility from teacher to student and from individual to group.

Operating separately, TCs identify and work with concepts either particular to a discipline or more generally, that require a student to leave the space of prior knowledge and self-understanding and enter into a liminal state in which prior knowledge is no longer viable but new concepts or self-understandings are not yet grasped or stabilized. TCs give attention to the type and amount of scaffolding that is necessary to prepare students and help to direct them through these impasses. Although the TCF was originally developed through consideration of threshold concepts in particular disciplines, the editors go beyond those boundaries to consider transdisciplinary concepts including critical thinking.

Even though the chapters devoted to particular disciplines are not all obviously applicable to teaching theology and religion, their authors succeed in making the target ideas more understandable. The chapter most valuable for teachers of theology and religion is the contribution of Jayne Lewis, “Empathy and Problem-based Learning.”

People unfamiliar with these two areas will find enough guidance to read the discussion fruitfully; that being said, this collection is not an entry-level introduction but an opportunity for deeper development for those already familiar with one or both of these approaches. There are more proofreading issues in this book than one would expect. Skipped words and puzzling phrases slow readers down while they grapple with making sense of the text.

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THE WABASH CENTER JOURNAL ON TEACHING

BOOK REVIEW

Identity and Internationalization in Catholic Universities: Exploring Institutional Pathways in Context (Global Perspectives on Higher Education)

Hans de Wit, Andrés Bernasconi, Visnja Car, Fiona Hunter, Michael James, and Daniela Véliz, *editors*

Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill Sense, 2018
(xxiv + 298 pages, ISBN 978-90-04-38207-7, $133.00)

Reviewed By
Maureen K. Day
Franciscan School of Theology

Based primarily on case studies, *Identity and Internationalization in Catholic Universities* brings readers a global perspective on the ways in which Catholic universities are grappling with questions of identity and internationalization. Although many books are limited to a single country or region, this edited collection includes contributions from Latin America, the United States, Asia-Pacific, and Europe. The result is an informed and global account of institutional and socio-political experiences that are shaping and being responded to by Catholic universities today.

This book would be helpful for several audiences. Most obviously, this book would benefit administrators in Catholic higher education who regularly face questions not only of identity and internationalization, but also questions of academic rigor, institutional relevance, and others that the various contributions explore in different ways; this book will put these administrators' institutional commitments into conversation with other similar institutions. Also, because identity and internationalization are not unique to Catholicism, many universities of secular or other religious heritage would find these contributions insightful for their own institutional contexts. Additionally, Catholic centers that seek to advance issues related to multiculturalism, globalization, international collaboration, issues of common concern (such as climate change or peace studies), or Catholic identity would likewise benefit from learning the ways that these are being discussed among other Catholic institutions in a variety of cultural contexts. Finally, this book would help instructors of practical theology or religion and society courses to have a more global perspective on the ways identity and internationalization affect Catholic organizations. Equipped with this book, faculty could better explain the ways a shifting Catholic identity and a changing society affect Catholic schools, hospitals, nonprofits, and others.

Perhaps a more universal and unique contribution of this book is the frame that the introductory chapter provides for the forthcoming chapters. In walking readers though the impact of identity and internationalization within Catholic universities and providing insights for crafting a strategic plan to more intentionally address these, all of the above audiences are provided with practical ways to navigate the challenges they are facing. Likewise, the chapters that follow each illuminate the ways mission and vision are enabled or constrained by identity, internationalization, and the strategic plan of the university.

The editors could have expanded the reach of their book by providing more theory and analysis, the dearth of which is demonstrated in the lack of scholarly resources in many of the chapters. A more extensive theoretical base would have embedded the valuable empirical findings in a stronger theoretical frame, making the insights more portable to readers.

Still, my desire for a stronger theoretical underpinning to this collection does not take away from the fact that this book makes a valuable contribution to the conversations surrounding identity and internationalization in higher education. *Identity and Internationalization in Catholic Universities* is indispensable not only for those in leadership in Catholic higher education, but also for those leading Catholic schools, hospitals, nonprofits, networks, Bishops conferences, and other organizations that seek to make a distinctly Catholic impact in an increasingly global and pluralist world.

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THE WABASH CENTER JOURNAL ON TEACHING

BOOK REVIEW

Disruption and Hope: Religious Traditions and the Future of Theological Education

Barbara G. Wheeler, *editor*

Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019
(170 pages, ISBN 978-1-4813-0815-1, $29.95)

Reviewed By

Ryan N. Roberts
Cornerstone University

Demographic and societal shifts in religion—to say nothing of higher education challenges—gnaw at North American theological education. The turbulence around the religious and educational environment is constant, and the essays in this volume acknowledge these challenges while exploring methods to move forward. The essays were written by seminary presidents and university leaders of various traditions to honor Daniel Aleshire, longtime executive director of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS). The first four essays address the challenges faced by theological schools while the final two essays examine the rise of non-Christian traditions in North America. Outside of the six essays, a helpful introduction provides coherence to the book, while the honoree of the volume supplies an afterword.

The first two essays by David Tiede and Martha Horne soberly name the disruptions around theological education. Tiede raises four pressing challenges and how Lutherans (ELCA) are addressing them: the digitization and marketing of everything; the cost/debt spiral; the need for leadership change; and the focus on educational results. Horne provides a call for change through the story of Desmond Tutu's awakening to how theology is shaped by different historical, sociological, and cultural contexts. This should drive an ability for Anglican comprehensiveness, anchored in communion, worship, and mission, that allows for theological inquiry and debate.

Donald Senior focuses on the type of Roman Catholic seminary candidate needed for the emerging needs of this world. Priestly formation from the work of Pope John Paul II roots this vision and is then joined with values from Pope Francis's vision of the joy of the gospel, care for creation, and mercy. While other essays focus on curriculum or mission, Senior calls for a counter-cultural vision for theological education embodied through its people.

Evangelical pragmatism and its aversion to seminary training is the focus of Richard Mouw's essay. Mouw encourages theological schools to listen to concerns and questions of those in ministry. Theological educators must make the case for theological education, but must do so with an empathetic spirit throughout the conversation.

The final two essays by Douglas McConnell and Judith Berling examine multifaith engagement and its implications for pedagogical concerns. McConnell grapples with how to engage a multifaith context from an evangelical framework. He calls for convicted civility rooted in hospitality and illustrates this through an institutional case study. Berling traces the history of multifaith theological education in mainline seminaries and explores ongoing opportunities and challenges. She raises the many ways that tradition can be both understood and shaped; this flexibility in tradition should aid in classroom pedagogy and interreligious learning.

The volume as a whole encourages faculty, administators, stakeholders, and institutions to discern their core identity and mission. This, in turn, should drive what doctrines/affirmations and practices of life are central to a school's tradition. While not prescriptive in methodology, the essays provide a quick read for busy stakeholders that can foster reflective dialogue on mission, tradition, and vision.

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BOOK REVIEW

Learning from Each Other: Refining the Practice of Teaching in Higher Education

Michele Lee Kozimor-King and Jeffrey Chin

Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018
(xii + 320 pages, ISBN 978-0-520-29658-9, $39.95)

Reviewed By

Bernadette McNary-Zak
Rhodes College

As faculty seek more effective learning and teaching practices, several disciplines have taken a "turn to reflective pedagogy" in recent years. *Learning from Each Other: Refining the Practice of Teaching in Higher Education* makes a substantive contribution to pedagogical practice in the discipline of sociology; this book is the result of workshops sponsored by the international honor society for the discipline. Contributors reflect a wide range of institutional types, teaching contexts, and research areas.

Following a brief introduction by the editors, the book is divided neatly into four parts: curricular innovations, classroom techniques, out-of-class situations, and assessment. Each chapter treats theory and strategy; this combination assures that topics are discussed with sufficient depth and adequate breadth of coverage across the discipline. References are included at the end of each chapter and the book closes with a useful index. Four of the twenty-one chapters in this book will be given attention here.

"Courting Controversy and Allowing for Awkward: Strategies for Teaching Difficult Topics," by Mari Plikuhn, offers sound guidance applicable to any number of classroom discussions and contexts. The chapter addresses controversial content as well as classroom space; it includes helpful strategies for class structure and management. In "Becoming a Culturally Inclusive Educator," Dena R. Samuels provides a guided sequence of practical steps for faculty engagement in this "transformative process" (203). The reader is encouraged to consider carefully the question of preparedness before working through the eight steps in this process. "The Value of Games and Simulations in the Social Sciences," by Amanda M. Rosen, assesses the use of this active-learning strategy in a clear way. Rosen weighs barriers and incentives before addressing best practices. Finally, "Putting the Student at the Center: Contemplative Practices as Classroom Pedagogy," by Tracey Wenger Sadd, supplies a succinct discussion of goals, outcomes, practices, and assessment of contemplative pedagogy. The chapter concludes with considerations and questions for determining the application of this pedagogy.

Instructors in Religious Studies and Theology are fortunate that these disciplines are strong in SOTL (scholarship of teaching and learning). These disciplines have a robust infrastructure for engaging in workshops, colloquies, and grant work to strengthen critical reflection on pedagogy. It is telling that instructors in these disciplines continue to produce and contribute highly impactful work on pedagogical research and practice that informs the national discourse. For this reason, there is much to be gained from this book. Discrete chapters may arouse interest in current trends, common questions, and shared efforts. Furthermore, attention to alternative perspectives on recurrent challenges and concerns distinct to a discipline can raise awareness. Finally, the recognition that higher education is growing ever more interdisciplinary makes this an opportune time to reflect on learning and teaching as a collaborative enterprise.

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BOOK REVIEW

Extending the Principles of Flipped Learning to Achieve Measurable Results: Emerging Research and Opportunities

William Swart

Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2017
(xx + 149 pages, ISBN 978-1522529842, $155.00)

Reviewed By

Matthew D. Campbell
University of North Alabama

As higher education continues to grapple with expanding online coursework in meaningful ways, faculty must confront a perennial question: how can online coursework mirror the rigor of in-person classes while preserving the flexibility that makes online learning attractive to students? In *Extending the Principles of Flipped Learning to Achieve Measurable Results: Emerging Research and Opportunities*, William Swart argues that flipped learning has the potential to balance these demands by winnowing the transactional distance, a barrier to student engagement, that is common in traditional coursework.

In traditional learning, a lecture typically occurs in class and homework extends beyond the classroom; conversely, flipped learning requires students to study course material at home, including recorded lectures, before engaging in collaborative, problem-solving activities in class. By flipping the traditional model of higher education, flipped learning allows students to invest more deeply in their coursework while simultaneously receiving feedback and peer support in class.

While flipped learning may be alluring, enacting such a dramatic reordering requires resources, knowledge, and tools that most faculty do not possess. Written in a straightforward, practical style, Swart's text provides a viable throughway for faculty members hoping to enact a flipped classroom.

Swart begins his exploration of the concept by reviewing the proliferation of online coursework and noting the near-universal agreement among university faculty regarding the disparity of quality in online learning versus face-to-face learning. As an antidote to this pattern, Swart touts the considerable benefits that flipped learning affords students, instructors, and college administrators. Following this introductory material, the text grounds the Plan-Do-Study-Act (P-D-S-A) cycle as the primary vehicle for introducing, executing, and maintaining a flipped classroom. This cycle, originating from business and management, ensures that meaningful learning occurs throughout a new intervention, rather than relying solely on outcome data to judge the effectiveness of an intervention.

The heart of the text unpacks each step of the PDSA cycle and its use in a flipped classroom, offering practical advice and data to support those wishing to use the flipped model. This occurs through direct discussion of the model and an embedded case study that illustrates core concepts. Before closing with an exploration of possible future research, Swart also includes candid discussion of the challenges—both anticipated and unanticipated—that flipped learning often produces. As Swart notes, while there is positive evidence regarding student preferences, achievement, and satisfaction concerning flipped learning, there is a paucity of research documenting its role in promoting other desirable values in students.

This text adds to a growing body of research explicating the promise of flipped learning within K-12 and higher education. Particularly for faculty members in theological education or religious studies in a liberal arts setting, this text provides short-term and lasting benefits. Swart's thorough unpacking of flipped learning delivers a robust catalog of research-based, practical advice for enacting this model. Perhaps most valuable for these faculty is the opportunity for students to engage with weighty ideas in a collaborative manner after having initial, independent preparation.

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BOOK REVIEW

Emerging Self-Directed Learning Strategies in the Digital Age

Frank G. Giuseffi, *editor*

Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2018
(xx + 257 pages, ISBN 1522534652, $106.00)

Reviewed By

Karla L. McGehee
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

Emerging Self-Directed Learning Strategies in the Digital Age (2018) edited by Frank Giuseffi is one of the volumes among the Advances in Educational Technologies and Instructional Design Book Series. In the preface, Giuseffi acknowledges that self-directed learning (SDL) is not a new concept. Yet, twenty-first century technology continues to transform the platforms of SDL. His desire is to highlight the importance of self-directed learning in today's teaching-learning environment. With each chapter written by a different scholar (or group of scholars), the reader is exposed to a number of strategies useful among multiple teaching-learning platforms to foster self-directed learning with the desired outcome of promoting student success and greater teacher–student engagement.

The text is organized into eight chapters, with each chapter addressing a specific SDL platform or process. Included among the topics: online learning, an android-based mobile application for students to monitor their performance via grade point average, Massive Open Online Courses and their applicability to technical and vocational education and training in developing countries, non-mandatory employee training, the necessity of self-motivation among doctoral students to complete their dissertation (built upon Malcolm Knowles's andragogical assumptions), cultural influences on self-directed language learning, the relationship between metacognition and knowledge transfer along with critical thinking and SDL, and teachers' use of digitally based SDL strategies to employ essential questions to nurture the students' critical thinking skills. While the editor's goal may have been to provide a wide range of scenarios for the engagement of self-directed learning, chapter 4, addressing employee training and the organization's responsibility for offering the training, seemed out of place. Job training is not germane to the discussion of SDL in the academic setting or specific teaching-learning platform or process.

All eight chapters in the text are well researched, referencing pertinent studies and pedagogical principles. Two of the chapters share specific research conducted on the phenomenon addressed. Chapter 5 ("The Intersection of Andragogy and Dissertation Writing") outlines the mixed methods study conducted by a doctoral student exploring the dissertation completion process. Dissertation chairs and doctoral students in the dissertation-writing phase will find this chapter insightful. Chapter 8 ("Transformational Shifts of Pedagogy Through Professional Development, Essential Questions, and Self-Directed Learning") describes a year-long case study of professional development among teachers and their use of digital technology in designing essential questions targeting critical thinking among students. Though the emphasis of the research was on the subjects of math and reading, the reader will gain information on how to use questions to help develop critical thinking skills among students.

The layout of the book lends itself to use as a reference guide. Each chapter begins with an abstract succinctly stating the purpose of the chapter and relevance to SDL. The chapters end with a concluding paragraph reiterating the thesis and main tenets shared. Finally, you will find a list of pertinent references for further study. Our goal as educators is to help our students become self-directed learners. This text will broaden your understanding of how to use today's technology to help in this quest.

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THE WABASH CENTER JOURNAL ON TEACHING

BOOK REVIEW

High-Impact Practices in Online Education: Research and Best Practices

Kathryn E. Linder and Chrysanthemum Mattison Hayes, *editors*

Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2018
(x + 248 pages, ISBN 978-1-62036-847-3, $35.00)

Reviewed By
Gary S. Eller
Creighton University

What are the potential benefits of high-impact practices (HIPs) for online education? That is the key question addressed in this well-researched collection of essays. Whether the reader is new to innovative theory and techniques in online education or an experienced distance educator, they will find a valuable resource here. Each contributor provides a helpful short list of key takeaways and a solid bibliography at the end of their chapter. The introduction and conclusion by the editors, Linder and Hayes, set the framework for the discussion and aptly describe possible future directions for teaching online, blended, or face-to-face courses.

High-Impact Practices in Online Education reads like a dynamic conversation on research with practical recommendations for how to strengthen a variety of teaching contexts. Each topic selected for inclusion covers a specific high-impact educational practice. That list was largely identified in 2008 by George D. Kuh as ten critical components of undergraduate education. First-year seminars, learning communities (LCs), writing-intensive courses, and internships were among those featured components. These practices are still considered high-impact, but newer practices, such as ePortfolios, have been added in subsequent years. All have become part of developing educational strategies to impact student retention and graduation rates.

So, where will readers find what they most need in this collection? For some, a particular topic will draw their attention. My suggestion is to resist that impulse. Try, instead, reading the introduction and conclusion before sampling individual chapters. Understanding the context for the conversation about HIPs matters. The research and literature in this emerging field has been somewhat scattered, but a representative sample is nicely gathered and incorporated into this single volume.

There are no chapters specifically on theological education or religious studies. That said, there is much of worth to educators in those disciplines. For example, June Griffin's "Writing-Intensive Classes" or Pamela D. Pike's "Internships" speak directly to theological and religious educators. The same can be said about Stefanie Buck's "High Impact Practices and Library and Information Resources." No doubt other readers will discover other favorites as well. Remember that any one of these chapters could make a dramatic difference in most teaching and student learning.

Is there one overarching idea offered as a takeaway? Yes, and it is that best practice principles are, in the end, more important than modalities. That is a valuable point to have in mind as exciting new technologies continue to emerge.

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BOOK REVIEW

Building the Field of Higher Education Engagement: Foundational Ideas and Future Directions

Lorilee Sandmann and Diann O. Jones, *editors*
Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2019
(xxi + 288 pages, ISBN 978-1-62036-855-8, $37.50)

Reviewed By
Daniel Orlando Álvarez
Pentecostal Theological Seminary

Building the Field of Higher Education Engagement: Foundational Ideas and Future Directions presents twelve landmark articles from 1996-2012 that contributed significantly to the emergence of the field of engagement. Along with the articles, the book presents updated commentaries and responses by the original authors or noted scholars to the questions they proposed. The format of this publication is thoughtful as each chapter presents conversation-provoking questions about engagement across academic disciplines. In addition, Chapter 13 is a prospective look into the future. Nine authors provide their insights to what engagement may look like in the next two decades.

This book is valuable to those in the specific field of religious education as it strives to rethink the work of the academy. Lorilee Sandmann states that colleges and universities remain one of the greatest hopes for intellectual and civic progress because they search for answers in light of pressing problems (xiii). Furthermore, higher education in its highest ideals is committed to the scholarship of engagement. She defines engaged scholarship as a mutual relationship between academia and the community that leaves a positive legacy for all partners (xiv, 196). These concepts challenge established notions about higher education.

First, this book examines the most foundational values of education. Engagement should be built from these values and not the expectation to do research and achieve tenure. As a result this creates ripples in the culture and expectations of the academy so that a new or revised model for higher education may emerge.

Second, this book challenges the way educators see themselves and how they are to engage the community. The community has come to view them as ivory tower elites. Conversely, this volume challenges institutions and educators to participate in outreach to the community at large. The text provides several interdisciplinary examples of outreach. It is important because it generates conversations about the role of faculty and their role in outreach. This is a valuable contribution as the book also gives suggestions on how engagement and outreach can be measured so as to be included in the tenure process.

Another valuable idea is the notion that knowledge is now non-linear. It was expected that the academy would study, research, and provide solutions for the world. The consequence is that the academy does not answer the questions the community is asking. In a non-linear world, the community has knowledge. The academy must necessarily be more engaged in the world that surrounds it. Through interdisciplinary dialogue, the text provides valuable insight into these conversations.

For theological educators this is an important book because it provides language to understand the complex relationships between the community and the academy; as well as that between faculty and administration. It causes the reader to reimagine the requirements of tenure and the meaning of higher education in a fast-changing cultural milieu. This book conceptualizes the changes in the work of the academy so that one is better prepared to engage an institution's culture and values so that it may be more true to education's highest ideals and values.

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BOOK REVIEW

The Intersubjective Turn: Theoretical Approaches to Contemplative Learning and Inquiry Across Disciplines

Olen Gunnlaugson, Charles Scott, Heesoon Bai, and Edward W. Sarath
Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2017
(xviii + 282 pages, ISBN 978-1-438467665, $25.86)

Reviewed By
Beverley McGuire
University of North Carolina Wilmington

Contemplative pedagogy has become quite popular over the past decade (Jacoby, 2019). This book builds on previous contemplative pedagogical scholarship (Barbezat and Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education,* Jossey-Bass, 2014; Simmer-Brown & Grace, *Meditation and the Classroom,* SUNY Press, 2011), especially a prior volume by the same editors—*Contemplative Learning and Inquiry across Disciplines* (Gunnlaugson et al., 2014). This book focuses on second-person perspectives or intersubjectivity, which the editors note can be represented spatially as between people, rather than subjectively inside or objectively outside them. It seeks to redress the tendency in contemplative studies to focus on first-person, personal experiences or third-person, objective study and observation of individuals engaged in contemplation.

The Intersubjective Turn would interest contemplative studies scholars as well as instructors with a previous background in contemplative pedagogy. Those unfamiliar with contemplative approaches to higher education would benefit from first consulting the work of Barbezat and Bush (*Contemplative Practices in Higher Education*, Jossey-Bass, 2014) or the previous volume (Gunnlaugson et al., *Contemplative Learning and Inquiry across Disciplines*, 2014), especially Arthur Zajonc's overview of contemplative pedagogy in higher education and Harold Roth's proposed pedagogy for contemplative studies. Although instructors who teach in public universities and colleges may find it challenging to adapt some of the contemplative approaches to their institutional context, those at private institutions and seminaries may encounter less difficulty in applying the contemplative pedagogies discussed.

Each article emphasizes the value of incorporating intersubjectivity into one's contemplative pedagogy and focuses on particular classroom activities that promote such intersubjectivity. Mirabai Bush discusses her "Just Like Me" exercise developed for Google's Search Inside Yourself program, where participants first engage in self-compassion and then become aware of what they share with others, and her "Mindful Emailing" activity where participants write a response to an email, but before sending it, lean back, take three deep breaths, re-read their response and imagine how it might be received by the other person. David Lee Keiser describes a pedagogical practice that addresses students' discomfort at being stared at: a "stage exercise" where students mindfully walk to the front of the auditorium, pause and take a breath, make eye contact at least once with everyone in the room, then mindfully walk off stage, taking another breath and then returning to their seat.

Lyn Hartley advocates deep dialogue in which students explore uncertainties and questions that no one has answers to, which allows for transformative learning. Judith Simmer-Brown draws on Gregory Kramer's method of "insight dialogue" to have students sit in dyads, reflecting on challenging aspects of their spiritual or personal journeys as they speak for three minutes and then return to silence and deep listening.

David Forbes uses mindfulness as a way for students to reflect on unexamined assumptions and conditioned patterns of thought in order to move towards a postconventional, self-authorized consciousness that tolerates ambiguity and agile thinking. Joanne Gozawa emphasizes the value of students not only doing contemplative practices, but "not doing" them by listening to silence and embodying a posture of receptivity. Other chapters discuss theological and theoretical reasons for engaging in intersubjective contemplative practices, advocating contemplative inquiry as a means of promoting empathetic connection.

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BOOK REVIEW

Community-Based Language Learning: A Framework for Educators

Joan Clifford and Deborah S. Reisinger

Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019
(vii + 207 pages, ISBN 9781626166363, $32.46)

Reviewed By

Jonghyun Kim,
PhD candidate
Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary

Can we escape political injustice when we learn a language? Most people would say that language and justice issues are separate, but according to this book's authors, Joan Clifford and Deborah Reisinger, learning another language cannot be completed by simply gaining a linguistic skill in a classroom. They reason that language learners cannot overlook the diverse cultural and social factors of those who live in their own language community. Therefore, the book introduces the importance of local community-based learning for second-language learners (CBLL, as the authors abbreviate) to build a better educational framework.

Specifically, Clifford and Reisinger, US-based language professors, pay attention to the unique experiences of second-language student learners with relation to their local communities in America. As described in Chapter Four, speaking the dominant language in a society gives one access to the society's dominant culture. For example, in the United States, English holds such a power. The problem is that "not all ways of speaking English are created equal in certain social spaces" (101). On the surface, second-language English speakers seem unimpeded in their access to America's educational and health services, but actually their different accents and cultures are often undervalued "in the school system which prizes and reproduces dominant (white, English-speaking) culture" (101). That is, for second-language learners, where their living language communities are located, economically, socially, and politically, matters when they try to access America's dominant cultural group.

Although Clifford and Reisinger focus on the American learning situation and social injustice issues, their audience is not limited to American educators. Rather, by providing a better local community-based learning model, the authors hope that students will critically reflect and challenge problems which are imbued in their social structures. Regarding this, the book is not only useful for learning foreign language but also for other areas such as the missionary context where theological subjects are taught in English or in other languages.

Further, within this emphasis on local communities as a learning partner, for both students and teachers, learning another language allows students to encounter something more than language. That is, it can be a place for the students to experience a "dissonance" between their previous beliefs about their own community's problems, and those that appear through CBLL conversation. For the teachers as well, this conversation offers a chance to reconsider their cultural privilege and power, and how this might affect their students who come from diverse communities.

Finally, the book means to create "brave spaces" for "genuine dialogue" between learners, educators, and communities by coping with their conflicts or tensions to deeply understand and challenge social injustice issues (140). To do this, the book structures each chapter with reflections for instructors and activities for students to provide a practical framework of CBLL. This book would be valuable for both educators and their students who are considering their communities as important learning partners with relation to their own ecclesial, social, and cultural context.

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