

AAR

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The AAR Committee on Teaching and Learning (Tina Pippin, Chair) sponsors *Spotlight on Teaching*. It appears twice each year in *Religious Studies News* and focuses on teaching and learning around a particular theme, concern, or setting.

Interim Editor

Tina Pippin

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The Tenth Anniversary of the AAR Excellence in Teaching Award

INTERIM EDITOR:


TINA PIPPIN, AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE, AND CHAIR,
AAR TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE

From the Editor's Desk

AT THE ANNUAL Meeting in Montréal, the AAR will celebrate the tenth anniversary of its teaching award. The idea for the award began in the late 1990s under the leadership of then-AAR executive director Barbara DeConcini, and the Teaching and Learning Committee (Chair Thomas Peterson, Michel Desjardin, Richard Freund, Fred Glennon, Yudit Greenberg, Barbara Patterson, and Kathleen Talvacchia). These leaders wanted to start a larger conversation about teaching by giving national recognition to a teacher in the field of religion or theology. The committee generated the criteria for excellence in teaching in order to shape an award of note. They asked nominees in different fields in religion and theology to articulate their pedagogical concerns, methods, theories, and practices. Nominees make a case for what they consider good teaching; they demonstrate what college, university, and theology school professors do to disseminate knowledge, engage in critical thinking, and formulate questions from the disciplines.

There is no detailed archival history of the beginnings of this award, but the basic idea was to raise up and honor the thing most of us in academic jobs do most of the time: teach.

The winners of the award are Tina Pippin (2000), Eugene Gallagher (2001), William Placher (2002), Janet Walton (2003), Timothy Renick (2004), Zayn Kassam (2005), Patricia O'Connell Killen (2006), Stacey Floyd-Thomas (2007), Fred Glennon (2008), and Kwok Pui Lan (2009). A representative group wrote articles for this *Spotlight on Teaching* issue, updating their teaching statements and sharing their influences and continued passion for teaching religion. The authors show that scholarship is not limited solely to the disciplines and that there are important intersections with what happens in the classroom. The conversations here are interdisciplinary — from different fields in religion and theology and across disciplines of education, community engagement, and others.

The Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion is cosponsoring a workshop session with eight of the award recipients on Saturday morning at the Annual Meeting. Registration information is in the *Program Book*. Join the continued conversation about teaching and the tenth year celebration! 

AAR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AWARD WINNERS

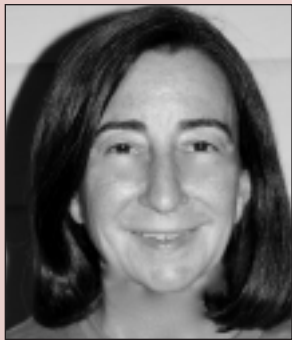
- 2000 — Tina Pippin
- 2001 — Eugene Gallagher
- 2002 — William Placher
- 2003 — Janet Walton
- 2004 — Timothy Renick
- 2005 — Zayn Kassam
- 2006 — Patricia O'Connell Killen
- 2007 — Stacey Floyd-Thomas
- 2008 — Fred Glennon
- 2009 — Kwok Pui Lan

In the Next Issue of
Spotlight on Teaching:

Undergraduate Research
in Religious Studies: Pedagogical
Challenges and Strategies

A Pedagogy of Incompleteness

Tina Pippin, Agnes Scott College



Tina Pippin is professor and chair of the department of religious studies at Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Georgia. She teaches courses in bible and culture, ethics, women's studies, human rights, and most recently, *English as a Second Language*. She was part of the *Bible and Culture Collective's* *The Postmodern Bible* (1995), and is the author of *Apocalyptic Bodies: The Biblical End of the World in Text and Image* (1999) and the forthcoming *Mother Goose, Mother Jones, Mommy Dearest: Mother/Daughter, Mother/Son Relationships in the Bible* (coedited with Cheryl Kirk-Duggan). Pippin is the current chair of the AAR Teaching and Learning Committee.

IF MILES HORTON is correct that “we make the road by walking,” where have I been traveling since 2000? How many new paths have I decided to walk; how many of the old paths have I retread? Who have been my travel companions? And where has that journey, and those conversations along the way, taken me? Who have been my teachers, who and what have informed my teaching, and what have I learned, relearned, failed to learn, lost in the deepest recesses of my pedagogical memory? Some things stick over the years — bits of theory and practice — while other pieces get lost on shelves or in files. Every week a new idea comes floating my way from some overheard conversation, or a bibliographical reference, or an intentional search. I want to revisit what really mattered to me ten years ago and my evolution and struggle to evolve as a teacher. I want to reflect at midcareer about risk taking, about venturing into the unknown pedagogical terrains, and about reimagining the classroom and the “department.” Paulo Freire observes: “If you don’t command your fear, you no longer risk. And if you don’t risk, you don’t create anything. Without risking, for me, there is no possibility to exist” (Shor and Freire, 61). I am always in a political moment in my classroom, in those really risky places where it is difficult to retain an honorable classroom space (Kwok Pui Lan’s term). I seem to be on the verge of either really messing up (by shutting down conversation) or creating spaces for new meaning-making (individual and communal). The journey of teaching takes me back around to these risky and politically charged moments and to my own need to continue to learn about teaching.

When anyone asks me what I teach, I usually reply, “religion and culture, women’s studies, and human rights.” These three areas or disciplines are interrelated for me and concretely emerged in the form of a new major in our

religious studies department, “Religion and Social Justice,” in 2000. Through engagement with local community partners, my students and I are able to experience the theories we study in the classroom. There is a human rights framework to our social justice major, and an abundance of human rights issues in our nation, state, city, and campus. Ira Shor and Paulo Freire say that “the context for transformation is not only the classroom but extends outside of it” (33). I teach in multiple contexts and the best moments for me are when the theories and practices of the classroom invade the outside community and vice versa. Maxine Greene believes “that teaching involves a creation of situations — learning situations — in which people are moved to release and ask their own questions, then move beyond and think in terms of the unexplored, of what is possible and not just what’s predictable” (Hatton, 61). I am finding out that the spaces and places of learning provide essential opportunities for liberatory education. The most transformative moments for me are in the intersections, when the conversations of community partners and their justice issues connect with the lived experiences of my students and me. These crossroads can be unpredictable, chaotic, disturbing, enlightening, humbling. As an educator, these are the spaces in which I best continue my education — as I listen to the insights and differing opinions and struggle to determine what “justice” means for both the outside instigators and my students.

What informs my teaching? I am including a “short list” of books and resources I most draw upon in the bibliography at the end of this article. I am an activist educator. What this means is that I strive for justice both in and outside the classroom. I am committed to working toward a liberatory, democratic classroom, one in which we respect each other and are all engaged in taking risks in the learning process. This liberatory process requires of my students and me open minds and hearts, a responsibility to question and reflect. We are both teachers and students in this learning process, even though we have different roles. I believe the questions are most often more important than the answers. As a postmodernist I do not believe in capital “T” Truth, but rather in truths, plural, and that we each hold important truths. So I see no single right way to read a biblical text or determine a theological or ethical issue. I resist the “banking method” of education in which the expert professor holds all the Truth and dispenses it at will to passive students, opening their heads and pouring it in so it can then be returned, with interest, on tests.

I believe in the unity of mind/body and that we don’t learn from the “neck up.” I believe in embodied learning, and this sometimes requires that we get out of our seats and move in the classroom. I draw from the mundane, the mainstream, the radical educational theories and practices. My commitment is to popular education models of teaching and to the theater of the oppressed in problem-solving and delving deeper into the issues.

I am happiest in my classes when I am able to focus on experiential learning, a way of learning based on experiencing different spaces, voices, and hands-on issues. For example, in my first-year seminar, “The Bible and Human Rights in Atlanta,” my students and

I are travelers in the land of Atlanta, encountering and engaging with the marginal and marginalized issues that face our city and culture. From this lens we look at our state, the nation, and the world. And we engage texts and traditions that speak in a variety of ways to these issues. The teen moms in our co-womentoring group, STRONG Sistas (now in its thirteenth year), make the connections between the segregated school system and their own future possibilities in an exercise about personal introspection and empowerment (see Pollack). And the English as Second Language classes we began offering to staff two years ago discover ways to converse with an immigration lawyer in a communally written play for a Forum Theater exercise (see Boal). These are boundary-crossing moments for me that shake the core of my everyday classroom teaching and remind me that teaching is about building relationships — and, from there, a more just society.

My teachers have been my students and colleagues, especially the Wabash Center, but also the folk school movements, labor movements, and any movement for positive social transformation in society. The starting point for these movements is the knowledge and situation of the people who are oppressed, victimized, underrepresented, or marginalized. These community-based models of education make their main focus problem-solving and social change. They are all about creating a more just society. These movements struggle(d) with racism, classism, sexism, gender oppression, and all the rest. They show us how the work is done over what Miles Horton has termed “the long haul”; that is, they start with the “is” and move toward the “ought to be” (Jacobs, 144). Popular education models for teaching for change are the biggest influence on my teaching. Freire is cited as the founder of the theory and practice of popular education, which can be defined simply as follows: “popular education is political education for everyday people. Simply put, popular education is people coming together to discuss problems of injustice and inequality, and learning how to confront these problems collectively” (*Project South*, Vol. I, 3; see Burke, et al., 8). Popular education is embodied, challenging, and most of all relational. Whether I am teaching a course in human rights or biblical studies or ethics or feminisms, I have found that pop ed theory and models help create a framework of mutual accountability and transparency by engaging all in the room in the learning process. I glean from community groups such as Project South, United for a Fair Economy, INCITE: Women of Color Against Violence, the Highlander Center, and many others, and also K–12 educational materials, especially *Rethinking Schools* and *Teaching for Change*. I continue to engage this work not only in the classroom but in our department work with our student leadership group (Safe Agnes Scott Sisters, or SASS). SASS is helping us imagine what a liberatory department structure would look like and over the past six or more years has been integral to our departmental community (see Pippin, et al.).

Where are my growing edges? What are my fears? Wherein lies the crankiness of my hard-edged opinions and boxed-up insights? How do I continue to own and push the boundaries of my own limitations as a teacher?

Again, Greene offers insights: “Old as I am, I still feel unfinished. . . . You are in a world of incompleteness, and you are always reaching beyond where you are — the way you are helping young people reach beyond where they are. And that’s the greatest gift you can get, it seems to me” (Hatton, 64). I am slowly learning to celebrate this incompleteness, that I never have a course completely “down” and that there are always cracks and crevices for the new to emerge, even in the harder, humbling times.

This incompleteness is greatest when I have spent years thinking I know something and then find out that I really didn’t know much at all. My most recent education occurred right after graduation this year, when I organized an alternative “community day” to work on campus with a friend of mine, Della Spurley, who has worked as a custodian at the college for almost forty-four years. I was able to get another friend of ours who chairs the English Department to join us in a morning of pulling trash and recycling from the dorm that Della works in. Della was one of the founders of the union for facilities staff on campus, and has been the historian, wise woman, and persistent, creative force for our campus living wage campaign. I have known Della for twenty years. I have also heard for years that the Monday after graduation in May was the hardest workday of the year. I thought I knew all this until I started pulling trash bags. All the teaching and reading I’d done in economic justice, all the times I’ve heard Della speak in my classes and at our living wage meetings and rallies, and all the popular education workshops I’d attended, even my own background of working in tobacco fields when I was younger — all this added up to incomplete knowledge. My faculty colleague and I were stunned by the experience; just a morning of pulling trash turned out to be one of my most important educational experiences. I learned the human cost of our campus “recyclemania” and of the enormity and impossibility of the job when staff is cut and furloughs are mandated. And I learned that I didn’t have such good humor and easy spirit as Della did about leaky bags and clueless students. I deepened my knowledge about economic (in)justice and about the effects of poverty wages and the undervaluing of (women’s) work (at a Christian-founded women’s college). How will this experience affect my teaching next semester? How can I better provide the spaces and experiences for this kind of knowledge and conversations about these issues to be a possibility? And in what ways can this knowing lead to transformative action and move from the individual to the systemic? Perhaps this is the top agenda item for the next half of my teaching life.

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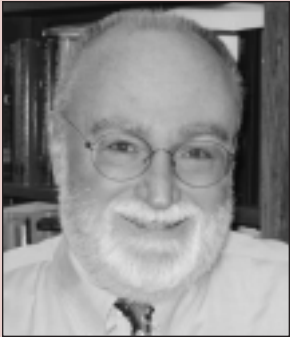
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Literacy and Resistance: On Introducing Religion

Eugene V. Gallagher, Connecticut College



Eugene V. Gallagher is the Rosemary Park Professor of Religious Studies and Gibney Faculty Fellow in the Center for Teaching and Learning at Connecticut College. He teaches courses on Western scriptural traditions, theories of religion, and new religious movements in the United States. He is a former chair of the AAR Teaching and Learning Committee and the 2003 CASE/Carnegie Professor of the Year for Connecticut College. Most recently, Gallagher is the author of *The New Religious Movements Experience in America* (Greenwood, 2004) and the coeditor of the five-volume *Introduction to New and Alternative Religions in America* (Greenwood, 2006).

MY ORIGINAL statement centered on the promotion of “religious literacy,” particularly among those students — by far the majority of those I teach — who are taking a single course in the study of religion to satisfy general education requirements. Stephen Prothero has now made a similar case much more fully and urgently in *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know — and Doesn't*. In my reading, Prothero's book should begin a conversation rather than end it. He offers a lot of detail about what beginning college students do not know and sketches out a historical account of how that has come to be. But, aside from very broad suggestions that both high school students and college students need to take at least one course about religion, he does not venture very far into just what such courses should look like. So the question becomes how to design that one course that would give most college students their only opportunity to develop some minimal religious literacy. (On course design in general, the comprehensive treatment I find most helpful is by L. Dee Fink). At several points, Prothero suggests that basic factual knowledge about the Bible and the history of Christianity, particularly in the United States, should definitely be part of such a course. It is not immediately clear, however, precisely how the transmission of such factual knowledge can become the animating principle of a college-level introductory course (see Fink; Gallagher 2009, 208–221).

Questions can be posed about the centrality of factual knowledge from various angles. Jonathan Z. Smith, for example, has argued strongly against the very notion of “coverage,” and suggested that introductory courses should focus on arguments about the interpretations of specific issues or problems. Such a focus, he adds, will also help students develop their capacities for

thinking, writing, and speaking. On that score, at least, Smith has lots of company. Barbara Walvoord's recent survey of the teaching of introductory courses in religion and theology (2008) highlights how frequently faculty members mention the development of their students' critical thinking skills as their primary goal in teaching. Walvoord also reports, however, that students more frequently mention other goals as primary for them, especially the development of their own religious or “spiritual” sensibilities.

Thus, there are multiple factors that complicate the translation of Prothero's general imperative that college students need to develop some sort of religious literacy into the actual design of courses that are likely to accomplish this general goal. Among them, for example, are broad situational factors, such as institutional missions (not only at religiously affiliated colleges), that impose heavy burdens on introductory courses that fulfill general education requirements. Also, faculty members articulate a wide array of goals for introductory courses, ranging from the delivery of specific information to the cultivation of specific skills. In addition, it is not at all clear that students come to introductory courses on the study of religion substantially interested in improving their own religious literacy. Thus, while I still think that encouraging religious literacy is a good way of capturing my general purposes as a teacher, the recent work of Prothero and Walvoord, among others, has deepened my appreciation for just how difficult that process is when specific syllabi have to be crafted to meet such general goals. The wide variety of ways in which teachers actually design introductory courses, made particularly evident in the syllabi assembled by the AAR's Syllabus Project (see www.aarweb.org/Programs/Syllabus_Project) and in the series of workshops sponsored by the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion to follow up the Walvoord study, only underlines that difficulty. I would hope, then, that the AAR capitalizes on the momentum of various recent conversations about how to introduce the study of religion and what it should accomplish by making a space for sustained consideration of such issues in its regular programming. For many of us, the introductory course is a central teaching responsibility; Walvoord and Prothero show that it can be a central object of reflection and even research.

Some of the classroom phenomena that I've become more perplexed about can be gathered under the general heading of student resistance. That resistance can take a variety of forms: reluctance to subject one's own convictions or tradition to academic scrutiny, unwillingness to conceive that certain types of actions might even be considered religious, or an inclination to treat certain religious traditions as objects of humor or derision, for example. A relatively recent essay about student motives for participating in or withdrawing from class discussion casts the first form of resistance in an interesting light. Those results would seem to stand in some tension with the findings of both Walvoord and a recent UCLA Higher Education Research Study, which tend to

cast students as relatively open-minded seekers (see Astin, et al.'s HERI report). At the very least, Carol Trosset's findings indicate that some students may not be so much seeking to develop their own religious sensibilities as they are seeking simply to express and confirm them, and, if possible, to reinforce them by converting others to their point of view. She reports that in her study “the main reason students gave for wanting to discuss a particular topic was that they held strong views on the subject and wished to convince others” (Trosset, 46). Compounding that perspective was students' tendency to see personal experience as the (only) source of legitimate knowledge and to perceive challenges to their views as personal affronts. If those attitudes are as widely held as Trosset suspects, it certainly complicates any efforts to get students to take seriously religious commitments other than their own, let alone to discuss them in class with the goal of constructing knowledge and arguments about them.

A second type of resistance involves the refusal to see as religious certain practices that admittedly depart from the mainstream, no matter what their proponents aver. In my experience, this crops up most frequently in discussions about sex and violence. My students, for example, find both the celibacy of the Shakers and the plural marriages of the early Mormons and contemporary Fundamentalist Latter Day Saints difficult to comprehend. Even more so, they struggle to see the actions of figures like Paul Hill, the radical Christian anti-abortion activist who was executed in 2003 for the 1994 murders of a physician and his escort at an abortion clinic, and the September 11, 2001, hijackers as in any way religious. At least a couple of reasons underlie this sort of resistance. First, students appear to hold an unarticulated, pretheoretical understanding of religion that associates it with the promotion of “good” behavior as they implicitly understand it; hence “bad” behavior cannot be associated with religion; it must be something else. Frequently related to that position is the assertion that actors like Hill and the author of the “Spiritual Manual” of the September 11 hijackers, when they claim to be motivated by foundational, authoritative scriptural texts, have somehow “manipulated,” or “taken out of context” the texts on which they rely (see Kippenberg and Seidenstickler). Underlying such assertions, again, is the pretheoretical notion that “such stuff just can't be religious.” Such expressions of opinion are difficult to cope with in the classroom precisely because they do not rise to the level of arguments. That is, their fundamental assumptions and premises remain unarticulated; their persuasiveness depends solely on assertion rather than the assembly, analysis, and interpretation of evidence, and their conclusions are presented as self-evident. Dale Martin has critiqued the implicit understandings of texts that animate such views. Countering the metaphors that portray texts as boxes that contain meaning that the skillful exegete can unpack or agents that somehow “speak” to their attentive readers, he offers instead the bracing slogan that “texts don't mean; people mean

with texts” (Martin, 31). Taken seriously, Martin's slogan opens up the possibility that people can “mean with texts” in a variety of ways, some of which others may find challenging, difficult, or just plain wrong. But the burden of classroom discussion is always to have students articulate why any reading of any evidence is preferable to another; that is, to engage in argument. Martin's argument about the reading of texts can also lead to a revised understanding of “religion” itself. Precisely because the range of readings of texts is limited only by human ingenuity, it follows, in Bruce Lincoln's formulation, that “religious discourse can recode virtually any content as sacred, ranging from the high-minded and progressive to the murderous, oppressive, and banal” (Lincoln, 6). So, a form of resistance that refuses to acknowledge certain practices of beliefs to be religious, even when their proponents assert that they are, is “good to think with” in the classroom precisely because it raises fundamental issues about how texts acquire meaning and what the nature of religion might be.

A third form of resistance occurs when students reflexively reproduce negative judgments of religious traditions that lie outside their personal experience of the mainstream. Among the perceptions given voice in this category are the frequently encountered assertion that Roman Catholics are distinct from “Christians,” the notion that rituals in traditions other than the students' own involve the worship of “idols,” and the verdict that members of small, minority, or alternative religions, known popularly as “cults,” are either nuts, scary, or both. More than representing a failure of imagination, I'd say, such judgments reproduce, largely unwittingly, powerful social efforts at boundary maintenance. By speaking on behalf of an implicit status quo, students end up reinforcing a variety of strategies that separate an “us” to which they implicitly belong from a “them” to which they emphatically do not. Such a rush to judgment, however, frustrates one of the fundamental purposes of education in the liberal arts: to situate students' experience in the “here and now” in terms of multiple instances of “there” (other cultures) and “then” (other times). Attempts at comparison that simply assert unbridgeable difference, e.g., “they're nuts” and, implicitly, “I'm not,” leave little room for discussion, argument, and learning. So, the challenge in responding to various forms of resistance is how to create opportunities for students to undertake complex and nuanced comparisons that both recognize complex patterns of similarities and differences and attempt to account for them. Such comparisons are the gateways through which learning in the liberal arts takes place.

In my thinking about how to respond to student resistance I've found some suggestions from Peter Elbow particularly helpful. Elbow taught both English and writing at a number of institutions and has been an important voice in discussions of teaching and learning. He has argued that although the pervasive academic employment of a

See GALLAGHER, page viii

The Pedagogical Value of Our Existential “Why?”

Timothy Renick, Georgia State University



Timothy Renick is associate provost at Georgia State University in Atlanta, where he founded and served as chair of the department of religious studies. He recently led the AAR study, “The Religion Major and Liberal Education” (funded by the Teagle Foundation) and currently chairs the AAR’s Job Placement Task Force. He is a regular contributor to *The Christian Century*.

DURING MY INITIAL years in academia, I often felt alone in my struggles to establish a toe-hold for religious studies on my campus. I thought that I was toiling in isolation — engaging issues that were the product of a history unique to my institution. What subsequent years have revealed to me is that I was anything but alone within our discipline. In a very real sense, teaching religious studies entails, by its very nature, a difficult and challenging dimension not affiliated with the teaching of, for example, history, biology, or English. Of those fields, no one — faculty, student, or administrator — asks why the field exists. No one imagines a modern university without these endeavors. The discipline of religious studies has never been so blessed. The field faces — and in some senses is defined by — an existential challenge: *Why religious studies?*

Some of the challenges come from without. As clearly evidenced by a recent multiyear, Teagle Foundation-funded AAR study of the religious studies major that I led, many of us face pockets of faculty at our home institutions who, believing religion to be an antiquated holdover of premodern ways of thought, fiercely oppose devoting university resources to studying an allegedly dying and false phenomenon (see articles by the Teagle Working Group and the AAR). Others of us face colleagues who see the addition of religious studies courses as opening the door to proselytizing in the classroom. (The Texas state system is just now reintroducing religious studies programs following faculty backlash after decades of reliance on “Bible chairs” — clergypersons paid for by Christian denominations — who were, until the practice was declared unconstitutional in the 1980s, employed to teach courses on religion.) Still others see the discipline as a luxury. Amid the current economic crisis, a number of schools are looking to trim or to discontinue religious studies programs, with well-established departments at institutions such as the University of Florida and Arizona State University in peril. While the public rationales for these budgetary decisions are never as blunt as the attacks of some of our less tactful colleagues, a familiar question

nonetheless is implicit in each administrative proposal to trim a program: *Why religious studies?*

Other challenges come from within the discipline. D. G. Hart, a professor of church history, has argued that religious studies tries to portray itself as an academic field of critical inquiry but that its existence and methods are inextricably tied to the field’s origins in Protestant campus ministries during the first part of the twentieth century. “As much as religious studies strives to sever ties to communities of faith, it cannot do so without self-immolation,” he writes (Hart, 10). Duke’s Stanley Hauerwas argues that “the creation of religious studies departments can be understood as the ongoing development of universities to provide legitimating knowledge for state power” (63–64). For Hauerwas, the discipline falsely attempts to unite inherently unrelated phenomena under the artificial construct of “religion” and, in the name of maintaining neutrality, abdicates responsibility for teaching students what is genuinely true about God’s ways.

While in what follows I will not explicitly attempt to refute the criticisms of either secular critics of religious studies or of scholars of religion such as Hart and Hauerwas, I would like to suggest some alternate answers to the question of *Why religious studies?* Moreover I will argue that, rather than feel embarrassed or disoriented by the field’s inability to conclusively answer the central question of its existence, those of us who teach in religious studies might better embrace the existential question as an integral aspect of our classroom pedagogy.

Students care about the study of religion.

One of several interesting findings in Barbara Walvoord’s 2008 study of undergraduates in introductory religion courses was that college students genuinely care about spiritual issues and want to pursue matters of personal religious development. A 2005 study of 112,000 students by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA came to a similar conclusion: “Today’s college students have very high levels of spiritual interest and involvement, many are actively engaged in a spiritual quest and in exploring meaning and purpose in life. They are also very engaged and involved in religion, reporting considerable commitment to their religious beliefs and practices” (www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/spirituality.html; see also Walvoord, 11).

While both Walvoord and the HERI study found that college-age students are often frustrated by a lack of opportunities to explore spiritual matters in college classrooms (56 percent of students said that their professors had never presented the opportunity to discuss the meaning of life, according to HERI), the very deficiency can be seen as a pedagogical opportunity for those of us who teach in the field of religious studies (see Astin, et al.).

In light of such findings and faced with the challenge of creating an introductory world religions course for the core curriculum at Georgia State University, my department elected to structure the course around a set of fundamental questions asked by most college-age students: Where do we come from? Why do we live and die? Why is there suffering? Is

violence justifiable? For each question, we selected primary sources from various world religions that offer provocative insights representative of the traditions in question. The goal was not to script the students’ answers to these basic questions of meaning (although we were certainly cognizant of the ways that the material chosen inherently shapes the discussion), but rather to provide a structured setting — assisted not only by an instructor, but by readings, writing assignments, and classmates — in which students might pursue their own thinking on the issues. The resulting course most assuredly does not address Hauerwas’s concerns about our discipline, but it does engage genuinely important issues not explored by any other offerings in the general curriculum. Indeed, efforts to fit explicit explorations of diverse religious perspectives on life’s central questions into other core courses in the college curriculum — history, sociology, even the increasingly secular field of philosophy — can seem strained and ad hoc. In religious studies, it comes naturally.

By the way, the course we added already is among the most highly demanded offerings in the university’s core curriculum, which leads me to a second point....

Students who care about what they study tend to be better learners.

A study recently released by the National Board of Economic Research looks at the choices undergraduates make in selecting their courses and majors, and at the impacts that these choices have on their later professional lives (DeGiorgi, et al.). What the researchers found will not surprise any of us who work with students on a day-to-day basis: students often make poor choices. The study focused on two major influences on students’ selection of classes and majors. One was the influence of peers — students who take an elective, for instance, primarily because their friends are taking the class or because a parent tells them to do so. The second was ability — students who take a class because they have an interest in and aptitude for the subject matter.

Not surprisingly, the researchers found that students very often take classes because of the influence of others. We’ve all dealt with the pre-med student who is convinced he’s going to be a doctor like his dad even though he has never gotten higher than a “C-” in any science class, or the student who insists on following her friends into business classes but — small problem — she hates business. Such choices are clearly not a recipe for student success, and the researchers found “clear evidence that peer-driven students perform worse than the ability-driven students in terms both of average and final grades” (DeGiorgi, et al.).

The researchers then followed the graduates into the work force for several years, finding that the students who selected jobs based on peer pressure earned 13 percent less than those who let interest and ability drive their career decisions. More importantly, the first group was also much more likely to feel mismatched and unhappy in its positions and to encounter difficulties in the workplace (e.g., poor job performance, layoffs).

Combine Walvoord’s and HERI’s insights with these findings and one arrives at another

important, if often underappreciated, rationale for the presence of religious studies on college campuses: religious studies contributes to the happiness and success of students. Students excel when they care about a subject, and many students care deeply about issues central to the field of religious studies.

Academic disciplines should constantly question the reason for their existence.

In the early stages of the Teagle project to study the religious studies major, I participated in an interesting exercise at a meeting of Teagle grant recipients from seven other disciplines. The Teagle Foundation Director, Robert Connor, asked each of us to prepare a report on the history of the efforts of a discipline other than our own to develop and to implement curricular innovation, common learning outcomes, assessment tools, and so forth. We surveyed not only the professional organizations’ websites but also conference proceedings, journal articles, and pedagogical resources.

Those around the table that day arrived at largely the same conclusion: most disciplines do not have a rich history of critical thought about these matters. Even disciplines guided by formal accrediting processes and boards often have little to say about the larger issues of what the field is trying to impart to students and what students should learn — beyond certain bodies of specific information — by pursuing the major. We may not often hear the question posed on college campuses, *Why chemistry?*, but this is not necessarily due to the fact that chemists have a unified, well-developed, and coherent answer to the question of their existence. Indeed, the most common complaint voiced by those who pursue issues of pedagogy within these other, established disciplines was that so many of their colleagues cared and thought so little about the topic.

In my experience, this has never been a problem for religious studies. Ours is a discipline that is constantly critical of what we do and why, and the result is that we tend to think a lot about pedagogy. In times of increased emphasis on assessment, this is a definite asset; as we all know, to assess how well you are accomplishing a goal, you must first think about what you are trying to attain. But it also is an important part of what we can model and impart to our students in the classroom. Most of our colleagues across the academy say that they want their students to learn to be self-critical, but many of them (and, admittedly, more than a few of us) proceed to spend the semester assuming the essential, even unquestioned, significance of their own enterprise. In few disciplines is self-criticism on display as publicly and as frequently as in religious studies, and perhaps we should start to acknowledge this as one of the significant strengths of our field.

My home department’s BA and MA degree programs became markedly stronger when we started to require that students take a seminar course exploring competing theoretical understandings of the field. The students may experience some disorientation in encountering

Reaffirming Teaching as an Act of Composition

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FOUR YEARS past writing my initial personal statement, I continue to think that teaching, at its core, is an act of composition. Not composition as ritual, but composition as ritual. Composition in an aesthetic sense — beauty intensified through arrangement, simplicity of line, even negative space.

Sometimes the classroom unfolds as planned. Sometimes attention to students, material, and classroom dynamics calls for improvisation. But always composition is at play. Teachers are with their students in the midst of the material. Pondering, puzzling and probing, clarifying, criticizing and elaborating, drawing out assumptions, relationships, implications — these moves and many more make up essential elements in the repertoire of composing a context for intellectual insight. But currently, as a result of continued reflection on my own teaching and informed by interactions with students, peers, my field, and the larger context within which the project of university education takes place, I find myself exploring different dimensions of the art of composition.

Were I to write my personal statement today, I would title it borrowing a phrase broadcast by loudspeakers in the London metro: “Mind the gap.” That reference to the space between the edge of the platform and the floor of the subway car, repeated for the purpose of safety, serves as an apt organizing metaphor for what I have been thinking about. I’ve become more interested in the measure, maintenance, and effective pedagogical use of gaps — from the known to the unknown, from the easy to the difficult, between the developmental and the disciplinary, pressing the present to promising the future.

In my initial statement on teaching as a compositional act, “Composing Context for Insight,” I emphasized constructing scaffolding through tasks and questions that support students to cross the gaps. My emphasis was on the pedagogical product resulting from designing intellectual experience. And while I am no

less committed to designing courses and particular classes in ways that provide that scaffolding, I am increasingly convinced that noticing, enduring the discomfort of, pondering, and respecting gaps is equally and urgently important for learning. Why? Because gaps are essential to understanding, to incisive questions, to insight and originality, to acknowledging genuine difference, and to the self-possession required for attending to any situation, text, data, or problem.

I am increasingly convinced that the capacity to recognize and revel in gaps in knowledge grounds the habit of shaping and posing fruitful questions that is integral to students learning well and continuing to learn after they leave the classroom. Stanford psychology professor Carol Dweck’s work comparing learning, in the face of adversity, of children who focus primarily on being smart and those more engaged with the problem or task than with self-image, gave me insight here. Her work helped me frame a growing challenge, dealing with students so paralyzed by fear of not meeting their own self-perception that they cannot tolerate any gaps in their knowledge or skill. Hence, they cannot think, they are incapable of posing even a low-level question (www.stanfordalumni.org/news/magazine/2007/11/manaprifeatures/dweck.html). Sharon Daloz Park’s book, *Leadership Can Be Taught: A Bold Approach for a Complex World*, showed me more about the relationship between attention to gaps, be they unknown, confusing or complex, and the capacity to shape questions and follow out a train of thought. Her subject matter, the teaching method of Ronald Heifetz, and even more the way Parks herself wrote about it, disclosed gaps as pedagogical well-springs.

Multiple conversations and interactions with other texts have also pushed me in attending to gaps. For one, I am alternately satisfied and frustrated with articles and books promoting active learning. Many are long on particular strategies and short on framing how and why a faculty member might choose to use those strategies. The nature of a discipline, particular material, and the purposes of the course are integral to such decisions. One example of a useful but incomplete text in the active learning vein is Angela Provitera McGlynn’s *Successful Beginnings for College Teaching: Engaging Your Students from the First Day*. It is clear on topics to cover in a syllabus and during the first class sessions. It provides a range of activities that help students to learn about each other, the instructor, and the course. It has multiple suggestions for promoting participation and so increasing motivation. Absent, however, are considerations to which a professor should attend in determining whether, why, and how to use the techniques, other than to get students engaged. Elizabeth F. Barkley, K. Patricia Cross, and Claire Howell Major in *Collaborative Learning Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty* outline precisely that in their first chapter, “The Case for Collaborative Learning.” Any faculty member considering incorporating more active learning techniques into pedagogy would benefit from reading that chapter.

I am increasingly uneasy with a tendency in the active learning literature to confuse activity with learning. Students know the difference. Activities that are not framed, that seemingly lack purpose, that are experienced as disconnected and that fill space but are not situated

within the flow of an entire course, quickly gain the appellation of “busy work.” Unframed, effective learning activities lose power.

Students also are uncomfortable sitting with questions not easily resolved and problems not easily solved. Thinking goes on in gaps and the more difficult it is for my students to rest comfortably in gaps, the more difficult it is for them to think. While mulling over this issue I have been reading in the area of contemplative pedagogy, a field garnering growing attention and recently the focus of a three-year project by the AAR Committee on Teaching and Learning. John P. Miller’s *Educating for Wisdom and Compassion: Creating Conditions for Timeless Learning* provides one example and Sid Brown’s *A Buddhist in the Classroom* another. In some ways they echo a strand in one of my favorite writers on teaching, the late Donald L. Finkel, whose *Teaching with Your Mouth Shut* remains an artful presentation of how one creates constructive gaps for students to cross. While my thinking on the contemplative pedagogy movement is not fully formed and I am concerned about some ethical dimensions of it with regard to use and misuse of power in the classroom, I find helpful how it draws attention to the act of paying attention — to learning how to look, notice, and attend without grasping or pummeling into submission whatever the object of attention might be. The contemplative pedagogy literature is a conversation partner with whom and over against whom to further develop my own ways of inviting students to pause and ponder, to be still with whatever they are reading, exploring, and considering.


Two other texts are informing my own thinking about the pedagogical use of gaps by pushing me to be sharper in my own practice of design. One is L. Dee Fink’s *Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses*. The comprehensiveness of Fink’s presentation of the elements of course design provides a horizon against which I am considering how to gauge and maintain appropriate gaps between what my students know how to do and what I want them to be able to do. The volume captures material Fink uses in his workshops and is a useful reference volume. The other is Dannelle D. Stevens and Antonia Levi’s *Introduction to Rubrics: An Assessment Tool to Save Grading Time, Convey Effective Feedback, and Promote Student Learning*. This is the most accessible introduction to the creation of rubrics that I have found. What I have not resolved for myself to any satisfaction is where the discrimination rests between the use of rubrics as an aid to artful composition of learning environments — including the maintenance of necessary gaps — and the use of rubrics as crutches that do away with the necessity of noticing, pausing, pondering, and attending to whatever it is students are asked to encounter in a class.

In the past four years, my goals for teaching have remained steady; namely, “to compose an environment in which students become able to read closely, think critically, and imagine the worlds of others accurately and with empathy” and for students to “learn to practice the procedures of reli-

gious studies/church history with disciplined subjectivity and make more adequate, nuanced meaning of course material and the world.” I continue to be energized by the challenge of aligning my students, the material, and myself in ways that contribute to learning. Teaching is to me, no less now than four years ago, an ascetical practice, one that includes, as I wrote then, “taking on the discipline of being the fitting companion for students on their intellectual journeys, not demanding that they be the companions I want on my intellectual journey” (an idea I first saw in Robert Kegan’s *In Over Our Heads*).

My current attention to gaps expands and complicates my thinking about the design of intellectual experience. It accents a different convergence of the three themes that anchor my teaching — artful composition; alignment of students, material, and professor; and an asceticism that respectfully considers the other. My hunch is that the exploration of gaps as artful pedagogical resources, pivotal spaces for generating understanding, insight, and originality, offers a way into better design of intellectual experience and so more skillful teaching.

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Cultivating a Pedagogy of Possibility: The Moral Wisdom and Ethical Practice of Teaching as a Vocation

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THE INSTITUTIONS where I have served as a member of the faculty have greatly influenced, shaped, and directed the development of my pedagogical trajectory. To me, the expressed mission — “putting knowledge to work,” “educating men and women of diverse backgrounds for ministry,” “educating individuals to think and act as ethical leaders and responsible citizens in the global community,” and “to encourage individuals in their spiritual and intellectual growth, to prepare leaders who will be agents of social justice, and to educate future scholars and teachers of religion” — were not mere taglines to handbooks, websites, or recruitment spiels given to prospective students during their visits to my office or classes. Rather, I employed, and continue to employ, these missions as teaching touchstones that articulate my understanding of the fundamental, vocational objectives of teaching religious studies and theological education.

However much my trajectory as a teacher has been influenced by the aforementioned missions, I would be remiss if I did not pay tribute to the fount and source of some of the most formative and significant influences on my worldview. I must acknowledge in clear and certain terms that my teaching philosophy has been inspired by the moral wisdom imparted to me through the familial lessons of my youth — through the wisdom my sharecropping grandparents and military parents deemed necessary for me both to survive and to thrive as an African-American girl growing up in Corpus Christi, Texas. In particular, I would highlight my mother’s and grandmother’s narratives, colorful and instructive doses of wisdom and struggle that for me were the quintessence of what it means to be critically

self-reflective: “Practice what you preach.” “Remember that it’s a long line that has no end.” “Learn how to hit a straight lick with a crooked stick.” My father’s words of wisdom were coupled with his military perspective (and insistence) that gave the imperative and urgency to his words that “the biggest room was the room for improvement.” These occasions of moral instruction were contexts that cultivated confidence to pose questions and openness to reason with them about opinions or concerns of mine that differed from their strict discipline. They used every occasion to lovingly nurture an abiding desire in me to be both vigilant in my quest of knowledge and intrigued (as opposed to intimidated) by the challenges it presented, even if those challenges were manifested in powers, principalities, or people. At a rudimentary level, these maxims have shaped my approach and philosophy to the teaching profession.

On the first day of all my classes, I introduce the study of ethics by stating: “Ethics begins where problems start. Our work together as ethical leaders will be to become the change we seek by naming, facing, and striving to resolve problems.” In this respect, my students learn at the outset that ethics is no mere intellectual exercise; it is a social imperative that impacts their lives and those of others. That is, ethics is measured by real, tangible outcomes. However, facilitating real outcomes in an era of increased multiculturalism and rapid global transformation is no easy task. This is most especially the case because race, gender, and money are frightening and distressing topics to most students. This, coupled with the fact that they have to confront my subject matter (which interrogates racism, sexism, classism, and xenophobia) under the tutelage of a Black female authority, an experience they have rarely, if ever encountered, is initially more than some of them can bear. As a result, many at first are stunted in their ability to do the rigorous and reflective work needed to engage the subject and, in turn, for the subject to change them. This is the glass or brick wall that most faculty of color (particularly women) find themselves crashing against when they enter a new teaching environment that has yet to live up to the promise of diversity.

Discovering the power and necessity of embodied pedagogy is the outcome of a teaching career in which I have continued to be challenged by ideas and practices that transform the teaching-learning process. In my own quest for knowledge and classroom competency, I have also learned that, as a relatively young Black woman, I must negotiate the contested space of the classroom because my very presence causes dissonance in what is considered a Eurocentric, middle-aged space. My ability to overcome the teaching challenges encountered in such a context has been aided by those who have designed, implemented, and experienced the power of transformative pedagogy in their own regard. Writings such as Paolo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, bell hooks’s *Teaching to Transgress*, Carter G. Woodson’s *Mis-Education of the Negro*, Katie Cannon’s *Teaching Preaching*, Charles Foster’s *Educating Clergy*, and the anthology *Being Black, Teaching Black* have become scripture in my sacred practice of teaching. In fact, their research and testimony have caused me to publish and share my own insights about teaching that transforms.¹

My pedagogy has always sought unapologetically to create conflict in the minds, lives, and souls of the students who enroll in my interdisciplinary courses in Ethics, Black Church Studies, and Feminist/Womanist Studies. These challenging and integrated scholarly approaches coupled with my very embodiment as a Black woman creates both cognitive dissonance and even cultural shock for most of my students. Instead of shying away from this reality, I use this conflict and dissonance in my teaching by chipping away at the external façade of many of my students’ identities as well as their expectations of the teaching-learning process. I have found the pedagogical creation of uneasiness and tension with the *status quo* to be a vital component for the resolution of ethical conflict, and, ultimately, the realization of social justice. That is, to create conflict is to invite and bring about change, and it is only through change that unjust conditions can be transformed to positive life options.

As an illustration: by using case studies “ripped from the headlines” in many of my ethics courses, I seek to situate my students in media res by immersing them in the heart of a given subject, rather than allowing them the safe distance usually afforded by supposed objectivity and abstraction. Such “objectivity” compels them to invest in the lowest forms of moral thinking, wherein descriptive ethics is used in an effort to construct a normative theory of human nature that, for instance, judges people based on the color of their skin rather than the content of their character. Instead, my disciplinary objective is to have them develop, exercise, and utilize the highest form of moral reasoning, wherein metaethics bears witness to answering questions with logic and epistemological insight so as to be less occupied with right and wrong and more preoccupied with the just and good for all.²

Living in an era of increased multiculturalism, economic anxiety, and religious pluralism, I believe that, as teachers, we who engage in the fight for social justice must ask ourselves a fundamental, existential ethical question: “How does my teaching realize social justice for those people who see justice as an impossible reality in their lives?” This social justice sensibility in my teaching-learning process involves inviting my students into a “living laboratory” classroom context wherein we collectively seek to transform the world in which we live by examining and understanding the ways people believe, feel, know, and understand the sacred in their lives. Thus, my pedagogical challenges and their measures of success have always involved identifying, procuring, and often creating from scratch the resources and tools (e.g., curricula, syllabi, models, technological support, training, funding, etc.) needed to transform my classroom into this living laboratory — that is, into a space in which students can gain experience confronting and resolving real world issues so as to prepare them to face similar challenges in the real world outside of the classroom with clarity of thought and confidence of character.

My pedagogical philosophy stems from eight tenets: 1) The personal is, indeed, political; 2) Learning and teaching raise the most essential questions about human existence; 3) Teachers must generate strategies that demand both critical reflection and accountability — be it personal, social, or institutional; 4) The learning

process is one in which the theoretical lends itself to the practical; 5) The teaching moment must grapple with issues such as freedom of choice, conscious action, personal character, and considerations of moral responsibility; 6) The link between the theory and practice of human relationships becomes much more evident when the teaching moment strives to understand why people do what they do in order to figure out what ought to be done; 7) My beliefs about teaching stem from the core of what I do and who I am; and most importantly, 8) The teacher’s main goal should be to meet students where they are, in order to take them where they need to go.⁴

From the core of these eight tenets, I strive to create a teaching-learning context that is at once academically rigorous, socially relevant, and character-building. I approach the vocation of teaching with the goal of exposing students to worlds of ideas and beliefs, discursive realms they can enter freely and engage fearlessly, in order to cultivate sound character as well as to enlarge their capacity for critical thought, sound scholarship, ministerial leadership, and good citizenship. One of my primary goals is to elicit from students an active, intellectual investment in all aspects of the pedagogical process (e.g., assigned readings and evaluative exercises) throughout the term of each course. In so doing, I aim to introduce them to definitive inquiries, methods, and conceptual frameworks, thus equipping them not only with disciplinary information, but also with disciplinary competency. I encourage students to view the field of theological education in immediate relationship to religious studies, as well as in cognate relationship with other disciplines and fields in the humanities and social sciences. I cannot guarantee that they all will ascribe to this philosophy of liberal arts education. Nevertheless, I work hard to establish an environment where students develop the intellectual courage and imagination to identify places of coherence and cross-fertilization across their core curriculum.

At the time I won the teaching award, many of my students were second-career professionals whose employment experiences ranged from working in the widely ranging fields of banking, medicine, social work, education, child-care, government, and engineering. At the research-based university divinity school where I am now employed, I teach not only Master’s level students in theological studies but also graduate students in the department of religion. In this context, I find myself reaching and shaping a younger demographic of students who are more geared towards social justice — students who are generally theologically literate, but who often lack experiential understanding of the implications of their ministerial and social ambitions. In either context, however, my pedagogical imperatives are always designed to help students draw effectively from their individual expertise and experience. Experience has taught me how, in educational contexts where students often tend to feel anonymous and virtually discounted, emphasizing that each person in the classroom — teacher and student alike — can and will achieve their highest aspirations is the most prized aspect of the learning process to me. By utilizing the level of personal investment and the willingness to encounter the discomforting,

See FLOYD-THOMAS, page viii

Ignatius, Dewey, and Me: How Ignatian and Experiential Pedagogies Have Transformed My Teaching

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WHILE ONE may think that the teaching statement I provided as part of the dossier for the 2008 Excellence in Teaching Award less than two years ago might need little revision, the truth is that I have been engaged in a great deal of research and reflection since then for two papers I have written (Glennon 2008, 2009). The basic outlines of that statement and the values underlying it still ring true: education is as much about process as product, teachers and students are engaged in a communal enterprise in a search for truth, and I continue to structure that community through learning covenants that seek to promote freedom, responsibility, and mutuality. But further research and reflection into other pedagogical theories have pushed me to rethink certain elements. In particular, I have been exploring experiential learning theories and their relationship to the paradigm of Ignatian pedagogy, which makes sense given that I teach in a Jesuit school. Such exploration has deepened my approach and understanding of the teaching-learning community and my role in it.

Ignatian pedagogy grew out of the characteristics of Jesuit education that have been developed and refined for the past 450 years. The first component of that paradigm is context: “personal care and concern for the individual, which is a hallmark of Jesuit education, requires that the teacher become as conversant as possible with the life experience of the learner” (*Ignatian Pedagogy*, 12). The ways that I have attempted considering context in the past have been to stay abreast of research and literature on effective pedagogy and to gather information from students in class about their interests, learning experiences, and learning styles through brief written questionnaires and essays. While these have been beneficial, they have not always been enough to glean sufficient understanding of the cognitive development of students. This is important because through the learning covenants I am treating students as adults and asking them to move from an other-directed to a self-directed learning framework, which is essential for transformative learning (see

Freire 1970; Mezirow 2000). While that is an important goal, Robert Kegan, a cognitive-developmental theorist, reminds me that I am asking students to make a fundamental shift in the way they see themselves and their world. This can be and has been a painful process for some students in my classes. Kegan rightly suggests that “all of us, as adult educators, need help in discerning how rapidly or gradually this shift in authority should optimally take place for that student, which is a function of how far he or she is along this particular bridge” (Kegan 2000, 66). The Ignatian emphasis on context requires that I understand where my students are in their development and structure my classes in ways that allow them to develop the skills to make the transition as adult learners rather than throwing all of the responsibility on them. Thus I find myself reading more extensively the research on student development (cognitive, ethical, social, spiritual, etc.), conducting individual meetings with most if not all of my students (something I have the luxury of doing), and providing guides and exercises for students to allow them to make the cognitive and developmental shifts needed for success (see Nathan 2005; Walvoord 2008; Lindholm and Astin 2008).

“ . . . education is as much about process as product, teachers and students are engaged in a communal enterprise in a search for truth . . . ”

The second component in the Ignatian paradigm is experience, which refers to both the prior experiences in learning and life that students bring with them and to the direct and indirect experiences faculty create for them within and without the classroom (Korth, 282). The task of the educator is to find ways to bring these together so that the student can develop intellectually, affectively, ethically, and spiritually. This emphasis coincides well with my research and work on experiential learning since my days as a Carnegie Scholar. What I discovered with the help of my colleagues is that almost everything we do in the classroom provides some experience for our students, whether reading texts, writing papers, group discussions, field trips, service learning, or even lectures. But not all experience is of the same quality, which is a key focus of the Ignatian paradigm, and mirrors the concern of John Dewey, an early proponent of experiential education: “Hence the central problem of education based upon experience is to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences” (1997, 27–28). In my work in the classroom, developing such quality experiences has involved a great deal of experimentation with active learning strategies (cooperative learning, simulations, role plays, and the like), continuous assessment (both qualitative and quantitative), and honest reflection (on the part of students and me). There have been many failures and successes along the way, both of which have enabled me to develop as a teacher and to see significant growth and formation “of the whole person” among many of my students.

The third and fourth components of the Ignatian paradigm are reflection and action. The premise is that the quality experiences students have in the educational setting will foster deep reflection within the student on the meaning and value of what they are studying, its relationship to other dimensions of knowledge and the human search for truth, and generate internalized meanings and values that “impel the student to act, to do something consistent with this new conviction” (*Ignatian Pedagogy*, 19). At first look, this paradigm seemed to reverse my understanding of the praxis or action-reflection model common to the critical pedagogy of Freire and others, which has been foundational for my own efforts at educating about and involving students in the work of justice. According to Piaget, “Knowledge is derived from action. . . . To know an object is to act upon it and to transform it” (1979, 28–29). Similarly, Ira Shor contends, “Action is essential to gain knowledge and develop intelligence” (1992, 17). My initial development of a social justice action project in my senior seminar assumed that significant learning about justice is best achieved through concrete action, acting on one’s view of social justice, and reflection on that action, not through abstract reflection alone (Glennon, 2004). Upon further experimentation and reflection, however, I have realized that this is not fully the case. The social justice action project I required of students was an active learning experience upon which students would reflect in the hope that it would generate some internalized meanings and values about social justice that would embolden them to act justly beyond this particular activity should they encounter injustice in their lives. Moreover, while the goal of Jesuit education is to form “men and women for others” who have a commitment to social justice, especially for the poor, this paradigm is not about indoctrination. If these experiences, reflections, and actions lead students to reorient career paths or to engage in volunteer work in their communities, which has and does happen, then so much the better. However, Ignatian pedagogy stresses the freedom of the individual to generate her own sense of meaning and conviction and to discern his own path to action in the world. In a similar vein, I do not dictate what social justice issue students should engage or the actions they should take to address it. Rather, I allow them the freedom to determine which actions are appropriate on the basis of their own values and commitments.

The final component of the Ignatian pedagogy paradigm is evaluation. In the current climate of student learning assessment, evaluation seems to fit right in. A decade ago, I argued that formative assessment was a moral obligation, part of our covenant with students, parents, and the broader community to insure that the promises we make to educate our students to the best of our ability are fulfilled (Glennon, 1999). Ignatian concern for evaluation is about more than mastering the knowledge and skills that are the object of such assessment, however. Evaluation, like each component of Ignatian pedagogy, is about formation; it is “concerned about students’ well-rounded growth as persons for others” (Korth, 283). The purpose of the evaluation is to help students to develop the habits of reflection and discernment necessary to identify areas where they need continued development, which may lead them back to engage in additional experiences, to deepen and refine

their reflection, and to encourage further action. The key to such evaluation is the development of an environment of mutual respect and trust between the teacher and the student (and I would add among other students). This view fits well with my own understanding of the teaching-learning community as a covenant community, where freedom, responsibility, and mutuality are fundamental values. Over the past few years, I have increased my efforts to engage students in dialogue about their learning; pushing them to identify individual and course learning objectives and requiring them to write a short paper at the end of the semester that leads them to reflect on how they met those objectives and the conditions that helped and/or hindered their learning. Where I have not focused much energy is on getting students to make the broader connections between what they are learning in my class and its connection not only with concepts and ideas from other classes but, more importantly, with their formation as whole persons. While I do seek to point out blind spots in the ways that students currently think about significant issues and push them to broaden their perspectives, this paradigm pushes me to engage my students in deeper reflection that includes attitudes, priorities, and actions for others — to get them to think about the ways in which their learning not only benefits them or members of the class, but also the world around them.

In conclusion, my exploration of other pedagogical models, particularly the Ignatian paradigm, has helped me to realize anew that one cannot rest on one’s laurels when it comes to teaching. The context and experiences of students, professors, and institutions keep changing in our increasingly complex, global world. Such changes call us to stay critically reflective and to find ways to adapt our approaches and methods to this new reality. Yet the Ignatian paradigm also reminds me that, while the methods may change, the underlying values that ground not only what I do but who I am as a teacher have enduring value.

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RENICK, from page v

Robert Orsi and Stephen Prothero debate the role that the investigator's value judgments should play in what he or she studies, or in reading Diana Eck, Jonathan Z. Smith, and Mark Taylor in succession, but the discussions are inevitably lively and the disorientation is productive. Students begin to see how their own perspectives and choices — and those of their teachers — shape the nature of what they study and how they perceive it. And when one thinks about it, isn't this itself a rather potent response to the question *Why religious studies?*

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GALLAGHER, from page iii

hermeneutic of suspicion, or what he calls "methodological doubting," has frequently yielded real insight, for fuller understanding it needs to be balanced by an equally rigorous process of "methodological believing" (see Elbow 1986, 254–304, and 2000, 76–80). He proposes that "thinking is not trustworthy unless it also includes methodological belief: the equally systematic, disciplined, and conscious attempt to believe everything no matter how unlikely or repellent it might seem, to find virtues and strengths we might otherwise miss" (1986, 257). Elbow suggests that methodological belief can be employed "to find a valid sense in words . . . to transmit an experience, [to] enlarge a vision." He refers to both methodological doubt and methodological belief as constituting "games," emphasizing that both are provisional approaches that can be tried out on the material at hand or temporary stances that can be adopted to see what they might yield. In short, they can be played with. Both games invite their participants to entertain seriously, but for a limited time and without making a personal commitment, a range of possibilities for making meaning about a particular body of evidence (Elbow 1986, 278, 261; see my development of Elbow's ideas in relation to a course I teach on new religious movements in Gallagher, 2007). Elbow's seriously playful approach to making sense and meaning of any kind of evidence could be particularly productive in the religious studies classroom. Rather than directly challenging students either to state and justify their own convictions

and practices or to wrestle directly with the convictions of others that may initially challenge and affront, Elbow's approach, as I would appropriate it, entices students to entertain a variety of "what if" questions that can provide multiple points of entry into the religious worlds of others. That process of entertaining seriously how others make meaning of the world through their religious acts and convictions, much more than the factual knowledge it yields, is the beginning of religious literacy.

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FLOYD-THOMAS, from page vi

for myself and my students alike, I strive to foster a "pedagogy of possibility" that presents learning and teaching as synergistic enterprises that are neither isolated nor disposable, but rather, are all-encompassing elements of life that extend well beyond and long after our shared classroom experience. In so doing, my expressed hope is that I and my students invest in the rigorous work of learning and knowledge production so we all will leave our campuses and venture out into the "real world" as dynamic, thoughtful people ready, willing, and able to face the challenges of life with a sound and needed skill set that is matched by our passion for engagement beyond the glass walls, stained glass ceilings, and ivory towers of the academy. I do this semester in and semester out, not merely because it is the job that I have been employed to do but because, at my roots, I know and believe that inherent within each of us (professors and students) is not only the ability to practice what we preach but also that the very classrooms that we occupy may become the biggest room for such improvements.

Endnotes

¹ See Stacey Floyd-Thomas, Katherine Allen, and Laura Gillman, "Interdisciplinarity as Self and Subject: Metaphor and Transformation," in *Issues in Integrative Studies* 20 (2002): 1–26; Stacey Floyd-Thomas and Laura Gillman, "Subverting Forced Identities, Violent Acts and the Narrativity of Race: A Diasporic Analysis of Black Women's Radical Subjectivity in Three Novel Acts," in *Journal of Black Studies* 32.5 (2002): 528–56; Stacey Floyd-Thomas and Laura Gillman, "Facing the Medusa: Confronting the Ongoing Impossibility of Women's Studies," in *Journal of International Women's Studies* 2.2 (May 2001): 35–52; Katherine Allen, Stacey-Floyd-Thomas, and Laura Gillman, "Teaching to Transform: From Volatility to Solidarity in an Interdisciplinary Family Studies Classroom," in *Family Relations: Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies* 50.4 (2001): 317–25; "From Embodied Theodicy to Embodied Theos: Black Women's Body and Pedagogy," in *Being Black/Teaching Black*, ed. Nancy Lynne Westfield (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 125–136; and Juan Floyd-Thomas and Stacey-Floyd-Thomas, "Emancipatory Historiography as Pedagogical Praxis: The Blessing and the Curse of Theological Education for the Black Self and Subject," in *Being Black/Teaching Black*, ed. Nancy Lynne Westfield (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 95–106.

² The word "pedagogical" or later "pedagogy" is not used in this fashion to suggest that teaching revolves around "training or educating children." Rather, I employ the word in reference to my intellectual design and identity politics involved in the art and science of teaching. 