

Reflective Cultivation
Barbara (Bobbi) Patterson
An Evolving Model for Engaged Scholarship:
Teaching, Research and Service

Introduction

Brief Overview

A small circle of high school boys leaned forward in their grey folding chairs explaining how fist-fights settled race relations at “Southy”. Four of us, M.Div. students also in the circle, listened intently trying to link their vision for conflict resolution with the school’s administrators’. Brought by them to develop a conflict resolution workshop and class, our minds now scrambled and chests tightened. The gap between theoretical ideas and the complex lives of Southy’s young people seemed unbridgeable. What teaching approaches could begin to reach across? How could relevant skills for new kinds of relationships and actions be effectively taught? Why would these young people listen not only with their heads but also with their hearts? How might intersubjective experiences in and beyond the classroom open opportunities for transforming learning, ethical decision-making and actions?

Such questions born of experiences like these drew me to a life-long course of inquiry through teaching, learning, and service engaged for individual, communal, and civic thriving and transformation.ⁱ Weaving Hannah Arendt’s call, “All I ask is that we think what we are doing, (*The Human Condition*) with bell hook’s for resistance to traditional structures of academic power, I strive to cultivate holistic skills that bridge these gaps and chart new paths. Learning from scholars like Dewey, Vigotsky, Shulman, Freire, and Zajonc, my work emphasizes theoretical accountability to historical politics, cultural discourses, and practical responsibility through learned and lived choices for positive social change.ⁱⁱ I teach aware of the diversities of social location, lifestyles, and forms of intelligence and learning styles found among, students, community members and teachers.ⁱⁱⁱ The pedagogical models that ground my scholarship defy disciplinary niches and reach from foundational skills to synthesized innovations for application.

Engaged Teaching/Learning/Service: Community-Partnered Change

In 1995, I invited community partners and students to join me in a year long process to develop an internship course focused on engaged pedagogies. Working interdependently, we read relevant texts about justice, urban life, ethics, and religion while working together in community-based sites. Listening, experiencing thinking and negotiating, we developed learning objectives and goals initially expressed through a **Learning Agreement**, which outlined expectations and a **Learning Contract**, which established specific objectives, goals, and structured assessments. We created an on-site and in class **Mid-Point Evaluation** process that helped participants renegotiate aspects of their work and relationships. Twelve years later, I am developing a second internship course whose supervisors work in Atlanta’s sustainability organizations, community gardens, watershed alliances, lobbying organizations, etc.

In both classes, we use a **Learning Portfolio** format to track the trajectory of students' learning in these settings. Organized into five formats, descriptive, analytic, reflective, integrative, and synthetic/creative, portfolios examine "aha" moments of insight, conflict, confusion, and confirmation. These structured gateways, due every two weeks, serve students' evaluative work for next steps. Through regular feedback and rewriting, ethnographic reporting, and actions,^{iv} students rework and re-assess their learning in light of experiences, ethical dynamics, and class content. I use the participant observation formats to teach ethnographic skills in the Interpreting Religion or methods class required of all majors. In other upper-level seminars, such as Religion and Ecology (Rel/Envs329), students track how contemplative practices of walking and close observation during our campouts and hikes interface with class readings to clarify and hone their commitments to act on campus and beyond to live sustainably.

This early stages of this work encouraged me to create the **Theory Practice Learning Initiative** of Emory College of Arts and Sciences, (www.emory.edu/TPL) initially under the Provosts Office, then housed within the College's Center for Teaching and Curriculum, and now a part of the Office of University Community Partnerships (<http://oucp.emory.edu/>) As scholarly service, I have led many workshops and several faculty study groups on various service learning, civic liberal education, and experiential learning pedagogies. The work then drew me into national conversations, presentations, research, and writing in these areas through invited participation in seminars with the Carnegie Foundation, the National Society for Experiential Education, and the Education Group of the International Society of Religion, Nature, and Culture. I organized and received a grant for a half-day Service Learning workshop for the American Academy of Religion while serving on the AAR's Teaching Committee and continued benefitting from these pedagogical conversations as Co-Chair of the Teaching Religion Section of the AAR.

Cultivating Attention, Analysis, and Action: Teaching and Research

My current research into my teaching involves an IRB protocol with Dr. Ashli Owen-Smith, a professor in Public Health. We are studying "The Impact of Mindfulness-Based Experiential Pedagogies on Student Psychological Well-being". Using a 6-page survey drawn from a range of tested protocols as well as focus groups, we are attempting to assess various components of psychological wellbeing including self-concept, self-liking and self-compassion in relation to academic achievement and thriving. This research will contribute to my chapter in a forthcoming volume on contemplative pedagogies in Religious Studies.^v It resonates with aspects of my book, *Giving Back and Not Burning Out: Spiritual Practices for Ecosystems of Service*, under discussion with an editor from Shambala Press.

Recently integrating more structured contemplative pedagogies^{vi} into my scholarship, I have expanded on my academic training in early Christian contemplative practices and writings. I attended workshops and presentations by Parker Palmer, Robert Kegan, Mary Rose O'Reilley, and Arthur Zajonc. Continuing to train in this form of holistic education born of two epistemologies, logical reasoning and perceptive judgment, (Zajonc: 2003:pp. 50-58), I am using this non-judgmental approach to analysis to expands insight via cognitive, kinesthetic, and affective learning and teaching. I am delivering more papers and workshops on this approach.

It also enriches my current research collaborations with the Medical and Nursing Schools on contemplative practices as healing protocols.

Cultivation for the Future: Graduate Education, Technology, and Sequencing

As a member of the Graduate Division of Religion and chair of the American Religious Cultures track, I have co-developed and co-teach with Dr. Liz Bounds the required pedagogy-training course for our PhD. students. Currently, Liz and I are integrating a half-day workshop on teaching and technology for our Religion graduate students. During my Winship Fellowship and through a later grant, I studied new media/technology-based pedagogies through Emory's Center for Interactive Teaching. Learning more about teaching with simulation-videos (of mentally building a mandala for example), **blogs, I-Movies, U-Tube, and I-Tunes U**,^{vii} I have served as a pedagogical consultant to a semester-long course for graduate students. One of my graduate students will use ethnographic film as a chapter of her dissertation and an undergraduate researcher is developing **pod-casts** on the histories of Emory's roles during the Civil Rights Movement days of Atlanta. Strengthening my traction with everyday aspects of our students' media-engaged lives, I look forward to exploring additional opportunities and limits in these technology-related pedagogies.^{viii}

Having organized and learned from a workshop led by Patricia Killen, I became convinced of the fundamental power within **sequenced learning strategies**.^{ix} Preparing students to do the work I ask them to do has been central to my teaching in Introduction to Religion classes. Recently co-teaching with Dr. Dianne Diakite, I have designed an **Integrative Paper** assignment due during the last month of class following a series of content-driven tests. Students choose a topic of interest, define it, and examine how it reveals a limitation or gap in their pre-existing knowledge. Unpacking the effects of their underlying assumptions in dialogue with class-taught academic perspectives, students realize that learning involves rational, experiential, locative, emotional, and ethical factors. They gain insight about the powerful effects of their perspectives, and how knowledge becomes valued/values. They develop empathy for what had gone previously unrecognized and un-thought, a crucial aspect of liberal learning.

A '**Key Term**' assignment in the Methods similarly sequences students learning by training them to identify the key terms by which an author builds and leverages his/her argument. In the Gender and Religion class, the **Analysis, Practice, Reflection** exercise trains a sequence for critical thinking. Three students form a team with the first analyzing the text for the basic argument, the second describing where she/he has seen the thesis in contemporary practice/life, and the third providing a critical and ethical reflection about content or perspectives the author does not address. Students report that this assignment teaches them to move from content to comparison to analysis while shaping their own ideas as young scholars.^x

Cultivating Liberal Learning

I hope my classes cultivate spaces of discovery. Beginning with discussion about class expectations and ground rules,^{xi} writing exercises,^{xii} and in specific classes, mindfulness practices designed to develop focused attention.^{xiii} Students engage content, themselves, what

they had noticed but often never named, and critical, creative thinking^{xiv} learning, research, and service with increased insight, flexibility, and ethical preparation for contributing to the common good.

ⁱ Benson, Lee, Ira Harkavey, and John Puckett. *Dewey's Dream*.

ⁱⁱ Eylar and Giles, Where is the Learning in Service-Learning. Other sources include Jossey-Bass Higher Education Book Series, National Society for Experiential Education, Best Practices (www.NSEE.org), and Campus Compact (www.compact.org), among other resources.

ⁱⁱⁱ David Kolb. 1984. *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall; Gardner, Howard. 1999. *Multiple Intelligences for the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Basic Books.

^{iv} See "Ethnography as Pedagogy: Learning and Teaching in a Religion Department Internship Class in "Teaching Theology & Religion", Vol. 6, Number 1, Feb. 03, 2002, pp.24-34 and "En/countering the Other" in Religion and Service Learning," Richard Devine, Joseph Favazza and F. Michael McLain, Volume Eds. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Higher Education, pp.55-68.

^v Patterson, ""Sustaining Life: Contemplative Pedagogies in a Religion and Ecology Course" in *Teaching from Within*, Fran Grace & Judith Simmer-Brown (Eds), forthcoming 2010, New York: SUNY Press.

^{vi} Zajonc, Arthur. "Spirituality in Higher Education" in "Liberal Education". Winter 2003. pp. 50-58.)

^{vii} Currently, I am on Emory's I-Tunes U as part of a Life of the Mind Conversation between Dr. Larry Young a neuroscientist and me on the topic of affection and compassion from our disciplines.

^{viii} Windham, Carrie. 2005. "The Student's Perspective" in *Educating the Net Generation*. Oblinger, Diana and James.(Eds.). Also Hartman, J, P Mozkal, C Dziuban, "Preparing the Academy of Today for the Learner of Tomorrow. Both: Educause; on-line: www.educause.edu/educatingthetgen.

^{ix} Elements central to my work reflect Shulman's Table of learning, expanding on Bloom's classic taxonomy. Shulman's Table of Learning uses the following sequence, though he emphasizes the spiraling and non-linear unfolding of these elements in action : Engagement and Motivation, Knowledge and Understanding, Performance and Action, Reflection and Critique, Judgment and Design, Commitment and Identity. Benjamin Bloom's Cognitive Taxonomy has the following sequence: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, Evaluation. Found in Shulman, Lee. S. "Making Differences: A Table of Learning" in *Change*. November/December. 2002. Volume 34, Number 6. pgs. 36-44. Also formative for my work in sequencing: Patricia Killen's articles, "Gracious Play: Discipline, Insight, and the Common Ground" in *Teaching Theology and Religion*. Volume 4 Issue 1, Dec.2002. pgs.2-8.

^x Readings on these taxonomies and approaches to liberal learning are assigned and discussed: Shulman, Zajonc, Kolb, Gardner.

^{xi} This approach reflects workshop materials developed by Dwight Giles for establishing and assessing experientially engaged classes presented at AAR Pre-Conference Workshop that I organized and received a grant for in 2002.

^{xii} Based on a workshop with Peter Elbow and other sources.

^{xiii} Resonant with the national contemplative pedagogies movement, my classes begin with a spectrum of basic mindfulness practices from quiet listening to music, to viewing a series of images in nature-related classes, to basic breath-based practices. Such structured exercises are designed to sharpen students' capacities to establish and maintain focus, preparing them for cognitive work.

^{xiv} Snyder, Gary in *A Place in Space*, pp. 183-191.