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Catching Missional

Shaping a Participatory Environment in Missiological Education (A Case Study)

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An Adjunct Instructor in Christian Formation and Intercultural Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary, Karen Parchman teaches courses in missiology, missional leadership, and practical theology. Her dissertation focuses on the effects of missional change on communication in local churches. Karen is always looking for ways to engage students in the learning task, and is always looking to foster innovation through reflection in the classroom.

Abstract

A recent gathering at Fuller Theological Seminary framed its discussion with the following provocative title: “The End of Missiological Education (as we know it): The Path Thus Far” (April 10, 2012). The panel discussed the need for innovative, novel approaches to the learning task in order to renew missiological education. Traditional education frames the process of learning in a theory-praxis model, where student’s lived experiences are rarely considered or critiqued in light of missiological or theological reflection. Active learning, where students combine activities with reflection upon them, presents an innovative opportunity for missiological education. This case study explores the effects of an active learning environment for the course “Congregations in the World” at Fuller Theological Seminary’s Houston Campus in the Fall of 2012. In the paper, I outline the theoretical and practical frameworks of adult learning and practical theology and introduce the pedagogical goals for the learning environment. I then provide three learning tasks that the participants engaged in, and how they led to opportunities for deeper learning. Finally, some broad and general questions for consideration are made regarding an active learning environment for future missiological education.

“We all live within the stories we tell, for these tales fashion a coherent direction and identity out of the discontinuities of our past, present, and future” -Caroline Fehrl

Introduction

It was 9:30 on a Friday night, when this weekend class was supposed to end for the evening. Earlier, a learning activity meant to engage people in one-to-one conversation on their cultural heritage had broken open to reveal significant stories of pain, longing, hope, and adaptation. The subsequent spirited conversation engaged everyone in a journey of theological and cultural reflection. Though they would be back in this classroom in 11 short hours, the students assembled had no interest in leaving; one remarked, “but what’s the answer?! How can we leave without knowing how to fix this in our churches?”

Looking back on the notes from this evening and subsequent learning exercises meant to challenge their habits and practices of ‘missional’, there was a moment at which it became clear that the learning activities significantly challenged the expectations and norms of the classroom culture. And while the mediated interaction held a firm resolution at bay, the encounter compelled everyone in the room to be fully present and engaged.

Communication and social interaction are important for corporate sensemaking, particularly in situations when there are gaps in knowledge or distinctions between normative perspectives. The potential for deep learning happens in the space between persons as they interact. Any time there is naturally occurring interaction in the classroom, there is the possibility for both deep learning and deep anxiety. Educators have the responsibility during times of active reflection to dislodge assumptions and raise questions about what people know and how they come to know. Discourse scholars Ann Cunliffe and John Shotter address the challenges of the lecture hall, suggesting that educators “have completely ignored the kind of knowledge or knowing-within-the-moment” (2004:226) that derives from novel perspectives and information, informed by the multiples and varied experiences of family and culture, and from failures and successes.

This case study will introduce the outcome of several learning tasks in the course, “Congregations in the World” (See Appendix A for syllabus, created by Mark Lau Branson) at Fuller Seminary’s Houston Campus. The intention is to explain and explore the deep learning and possible transformative moments that emerged in a participatory learning environment focused on leading and creating mission-

shaped congregations. The course objectives were largely influenced by the task of developing proficiency with the praxis-theory-praxis of Practical Theology through action and reflection. Principles of Adult and Active Learning were engaged, which acknowledge that students are active subjects in the learning task. There was also recognition that students bring specific lived experiences into the learning environment that shape mental models, actions, and relationships in and about the world. Finally, it was assumed that knowledge creation takes place through a discovery of lived experiences in communication with cultural, contextual, theological, and biblical narratives.

As Christian educators, we are interested in the task of understanding truth, garnering knowledge, and developing wisdom. Through our processes of instruction, we might see our subject expertise informing how and what we wish to pass on to the next generation of leaders. Some curricular designs anticipate that the information transfer will lead students to incorporate the new ideas into daily practices. Current critiques of higher education, however, would argue that these ‘technical-functional’ (Neville 2008:32) approaches to learning do not help students to actively critique or engage the postmodern culture.

In contrast, the participative learning environment is meant to engage the lived stories of students in association with the cultural, contextual, theological and scriptural narratives that are reflexively influencing what they notice about the world. Students are dancing between action and reflection, or “doing things and thinking about what they are doing” (Bonwell and Eison 1991:2). In this course, the classroom was not isolated from the scripts and stories of daily life; rather those stories were integral to the educational experience itself. As the instructor, my goal was to foster habits of faithful presence to what God is doing in the world through solid content and inductive experiences.

The content of this paper is practical rather than theoretical, though these two principles of educational design function in concert. Section One explores the theoretical frameworks that are assumed as part of the course: Adult Learning, Practical Theology as a core requirement of the Ministry Division at Fuller Theological Seminary, and practical considerations regarding Just In Time learning. Section Two will highlight three specific learning tasks during which just-in-time teaching and interactive reflection occurred. Finally, Section

Three will draw conclusions about the efficacy of interactive learning environments for missiological education, and raise questions for future conversation.

Section 1: Theoretical and Practical Frameworks

Theological education as it relates to the *missio Dei* has been informed by Christendom models of the Western culture(s). Leaders in congregations, the academy, and on the mission field critique seminary education, stating that our systems do not train and educate leaders for the people of God who live in a changed and adaptive context.¹ The task of theological education, they suggest, has a deeply important task in preparing people for serving as witnesses to the missionary God we serve, and contribute to developing habits of faithfulness fundamental to missional living.²

Critical Pedagogy and Adult Learning

We are living in a changing world that is becoming more complex, requiring skillful critical thinking to solve difficult problems. The concern with higher education has moved from a single focus on what people learn, to how and to what end they learn. In studying higher education Richard Paul acknowledged this concern, and suggested that developing habits of the mind would require different type of learning frameworks, specifically targeting reasoning, reflection, and personal responsibility in the learning task (Fink 2001:13). Instruction-based pedagogy, with the emphasis on transferring information from teacher to student, supposes the student to be a passive and ready container to be filled by the information supplied in the classroom through lecture and assigned tasks. Paul's study indicated that, while most professors in higher education affirm their intent to create learning experiences to engage critical thinking, they are often unable to describe what critical thinking is, and how to introduce students to it. As a result the learning task is equated with teacher-based curriculum design.

Adult learning principles recognize that knowledge creation occurs in the space where people make sense of their actions together. Paolo Friere notes that adults have stories they bring to the learning environment that must be acknowledged and used in order to create new habits and actions. As it relates to learning, people are more likely

to default to hold habits, not adapt to new learning. Freire explains that no “reality transforms itself” (1970:53); instead, people are more likely to exhibit deep commitment to equilibrium. All social systems are autopoietic in that they are preconditioned reproduce themselves nearly exactly (Luhman 2005), and the actions they engage in support reproduction, not adaptation. In order to incorporate new knowledge or understanding, Freire notes that action and reflection are intimately intertwined and necessary for change (Freire 1970:53). Dialogue is not information exchange, it is corporate reflection that assumes the right and responsibility of the learner to participate in making sense of the activities and practices in the task of learning. In her work with adults throughout the world, Jane Vella has explored the dimensions of adults as learners. As active subjects of their own learning she has discovered that “[p]eople are naturally excited to learn anything that helps them understand their own...lives” (Vella 2002:6).

In participatory learning, the educational experience is different in another respect: it mines the experiences of daily life as data to guide future action. Every day, the students that attend our classes are bombarded with messages from a diverse set of public and private narratives: from the movies they choose to watch to the news they ingest, to the type of civic and social activities they engage in *and also resist*. For missiological education, the complexity engaging the task of knowing how (Cunliffe and Shotter 2006:231) must incorporate lived experience with the learning endeavor.

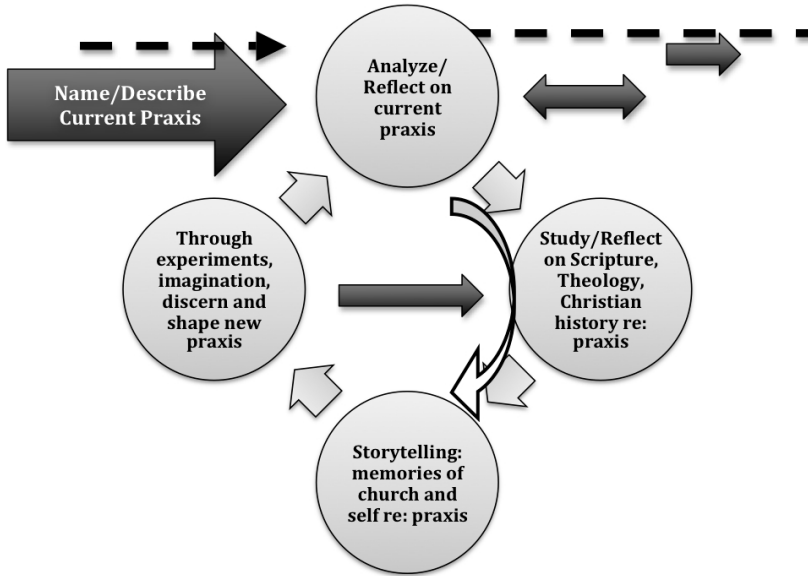
Practical Theology and the Goals of the Fuller Theological Seminary Ministry Division

The core requirements of the Master of Divinity include 8 different arenas for learning. For each division, there are expected learning outcomes related to the core requirements. This course is housed in the Ministry Division (MIN1), and as such must “specify the course as one that teaches a practical theology method” (Branson 2010:2) of praxis-theory-praxis.

Practical Theology presumes that learners arrive at the task of learning with built-in assumptions, and have been influenced by informal and formal relationships in the wider cultures where people gain identity. In his volume on Practical Theology, Thomas Groome

suggests that the task of theological education must move beyond its concern for knowledge acquisition to a “person’s whole way of being” (1991:7). Fundamentally he argues, that a knowing faith must encompass not only what people know, but how they come to know it. Whereas much of our theological education is concerned with the cognitive and rational aspects of theological truths in doctrine, practical theology’s contribution brings the truth of experience into the theological task (Anderson 2001:23).

To introduce practical theology to the class, students reflected on their experiences as Christians in the world: their interaction with neighbors and co-workers, how they received instruction for the task of ‘witness’ in the world, and their own interaction with congregational mission and ministry. In the first week of class, the students were involved in the process of learning Practical Theology’s interactive steps through practice, interaction, and reflection.

Figure 1: Practical Theology Cycle (Branson 2011:45)³

As each of the learning activities was reflected upon, the students were consistently drawn toward the praxis-theory-praxis dimension of the course to analyze, reflect, and learn.

Just-In-Time Learning

I discovered just-in-time learning through the work of Ronald Heifetz, whose leadership classes at Harvard are often oversubscribed. Also known as ‘case in point learning, Heifetz explains that he sees the classroom as a case itself, “a social system inevitably made up of a number of different factions and acted upon by multiple forces” (Parks 2005:7). The educator task not only includes disseminating the information from the course documents, but focusing on what is happening in the classroom at that moment to illustrate the content.

From the perspective of the educator, just-in-time is a work of interpretation. It requires educators to listen and be fully present to the activities of the classroom. Heifetz uses the metaphor of a ballroom to get this point across (1994). He suggests of the important qualities of educators is to get off the field of play, where the action is going on, and try to see the larger patterns of activity and interaction from

the metaphoric balcony. Parks addresses this less metaphorically and more succinctly, asking the educator to reflect on how “I can use what is happening right here and now to illustrate the content I want the class to learn” (Parks 2005:7).

Section 2: Foundations of the Course

The discipline of Practical Theology is an integral part of missiological education, for it seeks to interpret human activity, tradition, and culture through the praxis of the missional God of Scripture. From an ecclesiological perspective, the mission of the church must be grounded in and responsive to God’s ultimate care for all of creation. The church’s purpose is found in this bedrock theological and mission-focused direction as the foundation and the future horizon of its ministry.

Learning Task 1: Cultural Autobiography Small Group Session

One of the first learning tasks of the course incorporated a small group event. Identity is assumed to be a combination of nature, context, nurture, and culture, and students enter the learning experience with attitudes that have been shaped by a variety of life experiences. From this perspective, theological education honors the “wholeness” of people’s experience, rather than casting experience aside during the learning task. The following represents the small group experience.

1. Students were invited to find two others in the class with whom to share their backgrounds. They were then given 30 minutes to share their “Cultural Autobiography” through a series of questions provided.⁴ The racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity in the classroom was felt in these triads, where native African, Indian, and Egyptian students were learning together with African-American, Latino(a), and Caucasian Americans.

2. During the corporate reflection period, multiple experiences were noted and then discussed as a group. It allowed for the educator to begin to develop the practical theology cycle of current praxis (life experiences), the way culture influenced those experiences, how Scripture informed individual and corporate praxis.

The sociological exploration that occurs during a narrative reflection requires the educator to remain fully present to what is being said, and the “song beneath the words” (Parks 2005:99). If we pay attention, our students are peppering us with data about what and how they see the world. As interpreters of the classroom, educators must be attentive to the unfolding awareness taking place individually and corporately as students begin to explore the boundaries and horizons of their experience. These boundaries represent “fault lines” where fixed meaning structures break down, providing opportunity for new practice and new relationships.⁵ During this assignment, students were introduced to each other’s lifeworlds and experiences, often disrupting their understanding of the culture and context in which they live.⁶ Opportunities exist for transformation in this space, because every participant experiences vulnerability and dislocation. As an educator, holding this space is important, for it is in vulnerability and dialogic consciousness of one another that new avenues of understanding can be reached.

In the exercise above, students were engaging in deep conversation about race, congregational stereotypes, and the cultural dissimilarities of their life experiences. When the class returned from their triads, a spirited conversation about color, race and relationships turned on the interaction between a white student and a black student. The two were eager to display their connectedness. Rather than moving off of this assignment and on to the ‘real work’ of the class, this experience brought forward the opportunity to discuss reconciliation as a fundamental intention of God’s restoration project through the ministry of Jesus. Students shared episodes of congregational health, dysfunction, and their own stories in them. Because the content focused on introducing the Practical Theology cycle, the students were directed once again to the cycle of action and reflection, bringing together the praxis they identified and reflecting on scripture and theology relating to God’s reconciling work in the world and through the people of God.

Learning Task 2a: The Exploration of Missional: Making the Familiar Strange⁷

The term ‘missional’ has become a familiar language tool in our congregations, but in many cases it lacks a fundamental attitude connected to the *missio Dei*. Van Gelder and Zscheile note a tendency in many congregations to validate an “instrumental view of mission” that focuses on providing religious goods and services through the church in order to bring more people into its community (2011:113). The repeated use of the language of missional, with little analysis or reflection, has subtly been drained of its ability to transform congregations.⁸ The language of missional must be disturbed in order to allow for novel meanings to be introduced. That is the basis for “making the familiar strange.” It is what Fink notes as one of the basic tenets of the educational process: to “get students to see that there are some unexpected phenomena” that might be contrary to their understanding (2005:72).

In order to create new habits and capacities relating to the concept of *missional*, the students were encouraged to engage in an experiment outside the classroom, and keep a journal of their experience and how it might influence their behaviors in the future. The assignment required students to actively look for where the Spirit of God might be at work as they went about their daily lives during one week. They were asked to be fully attentive in their going and note their responses in their journals. Prior to the day’s activities, students were tasked with reflecting on Luke 10:1-12,⁹ and journal what struck them from that passage. This was meant to develop a deeper awareness of how God might be active in their daily lives and in the world around them. Students were then asked to reflect on what they saw, what God made them attentive to, and then provide some insights on God’s larger activity in the world.

The experience of journaling is an individual one: it is personally reflective, and can be important for transformation. As an active learning strategy, journaling presents little risk for the educator. Class time is not used, and it is a relatively structured assignment with definite outcomes (Bonwell and Eison 1991). However, if the strategy is to be employed for more enduring learning, the journal exercise becomes a space for disturbing the taken-for-granted assumptions about the practice of missional living.

Several students willingly allowed their journal entries to be used for the classroom learning after the journal exercise was complete. For the purposes of this paper, I will highlight two and demonstrate how they were used in the classroom discussions that bracketed the lecture(s). The two students were both male. Their cultural and social experiences were different, as were their theological standpoints. They both were and are active leaders in their congregations. The first journal entry came from a student who was in his first quarter of seminary:

“As I began to walk through the mall simply enjoying being aware of God’s presence, there was a young teenage girl who happened to be on the phone in a near corner. She was crying and looked as if something terrible had just happened. I walked passed her twice and the Holy Spirit told me to go back.... I watched everyone as they walked passed her looking at her as they continued to shake their heads in disbelief.... The Lord reminded me of verse 9 of Luke 10. I immediately began to intercede on her behalf. As the spirit led me over to her, I asked her if she would allow me to pray with her. She welcomed me as I introduced myself and she began to tell me that her father had just been diagnosed with cancer. I began to pray for healing, for restoration, for peace, and for God’s Will to be done.... After the prayer, we just began to share our testimonies and life stories. She is a new believer and had just given her life to Christ a week ago, literally. She asked if I wanted anything from her job, which was in the food court. As I told her that I had already eaten, I immediately thought of verse 7 of Luke 10. This experienced really allow my heart to be tender and receptive to all that God was saying and doing. It was such a powerful day. I am so grateful for the privilege to be apart of God’s mission.” (Journal Response, Student K)

Bonwell and Eison (1991) note that active learning strategies place greater emphasis on developing skills and assessing attitudes and values; for this exercise it was necessary to go beyond the textual data a student wrote, and engage in social interaction around the exercise itself. In a classroom setting, educators often use provisional

objects, such as learning exercises, to demonstrate what they mean. Just in time learning dispels the myth that there are taken-for-granted standpoints, using the interactive space to reflect as the action is happening in the moment. By the time of this exercise, everyone in the classroom had been made aware of the tapestry of multiple social memories that affected learning and interaction. They had been exposed to just in time learning, and had begun to assess their interpretations of the stories they heard and acknowledge the cultural forces that made those interpretations 'true.' In this case, students began a discussion about the cultural understanding of personal space, drawing from their own experiences. Through a guided discussion on congregational space and interaction, they reflected on the theological and missiological significance of community, raising questions about the nature of the church as it relates to the fellowship within the Trinity. The notion of engagement gave rise to a conversation about 'sentness' and the example of this student's willingness to be present to another's suffering.

Learning Task 2b: The Exploration of Missional: Making the Invisible Visible

Any discussion about cultural awareness necessitates using language. For better or worse, language is embedded in the very culture being discussed, and therefore is limited. Ann Swidler (2001) remarks that the cultural and interactive repertoires that people use to describe their world constrain the type of action that is available, and reflexively organizes the language used to describe those actions. As a result, culture is largely invisible to us because what we know about our environment is simply "the way we do things around here." When something disturbs the pattern of assumptions in one's practice of daily life, it makes paradigms visible, but also creates uncertainty about what actions are appropriate. During uncertainty, when the patterns of behavior don't seem to make sense, interaction may need to be somewhat ambiguous. Eisenberg suggests that this "strategic ambiguity" (1984:230) is useful for examining assumptions, and shaping new praxis.

The journal exercise was meant to disturb students day-to-day practice and make culture visible. An African-american student who was nearing completion of his MDiv wrote the second journal entry that the class members reflected on. It reads in part:

“... I went back to the neighborhood where I was raised. The people that were much older than I are dead, but their abandoned homes and cars are still there. At the community grocery store the seniors are morbidly obese, limbs disfigured from a stroke or some form of paralysis. Those who were old enough to be a big brother or sister to me are doing the same thing they were doing when I was a teenager, sitting under a tree, smoking, drinking and complaining. Guys that I walked to school with in what used to be a neighborhood, but has now become a ghetto, are still walking but unemployed, addicted to drugs, living at home with their mother and their children. Their quality of life is at an all time low. The guys who went to prison are home but they are struggling entrepreneurs operating barbershops and car detail shops.... I am guilty of treating my neighbor’s pain and problems as a project or program one can throw money towards.... John Wesley said, “The world is my parish,” but if I begin to address some of their surface needs, am I equipped or called to provoke the transformation of the mind in this community?” (Journal Exercise, Student C)

When educators embark on reflective learning, or what the Jesuits call ‘contemplation in action,’ ambiguity and dis-ease may be important factors in the process. Van Looy et al. trace the way communication can support group dynamics when new ideas are activating a sense of ambiguity and disorientation. Ambiguity, they note, occurs when the learning task extends beyond typical forms of information exchange; “it relates directly to the creation of new knowledge” (2006:187). Educators must be aware of their own tension, and desire for equilibrium during ambiguity. Holding the dynamics of the classroom and the contents of the course in tension with each other requires an active awareness of one’s own retreat, or what Sewell calls an attempt to “homogeniz[e] difference and manag[e] divergence” (1999:56).

Just in time teaching requires deep listening and engagement: becoming aware of what is happening internally is just as informative as paying attention to what is happening among the students. In this case, a deep longing to ‘make everything okay’ and dispel the tension was itself data upon which to reflect. When educators experience

tension within – what Heifetz calls “catching the edge of [one’s] personality” (Parks 2005:153) – he suggests using it as a learning tool. In participatory environments, learning is an expectation and an outcome for both students and educators.

In any culture there exists the dominant narratives and stories from the margins. Those who live within the dominant narratives often do not have the language or meaning structure to make sense out of the stories of marginalized social groups in the wider culture. The African American storyteller who can no longer make sense of his culture of origin is extremely pertinent because it calls into question the default settings of action and interaction that are normalized in our congregations and contexts: to what degree are we hospitable to the stories of powerlessness?

Interaction creates new knowledge and novel ideas because of the diversity of life experience, assumptions, and perspectives. The language of missional became more exploratory as participants begin to press into existing meaning, and question their frameworks. The tools of the class, which were highly experiential, were geared to cultivate instincts of awareness to the activity of the Spirit of God in the creation. The journaling exercise gave rise to deep tensions of why and how the church is engaged in the communities in which God has placed it. The discussion allowed for vulnerability between diverse groups. It challenged our ability to analyze and develop new narratives and stories.

Identity is shaped and reshaped through stories people tell, share in, hide, and ultimately live within. The task of the educator is to guide the conversation so that diversity is honored within the framework of the course content, paying attention to when the pain is too great, the pain is wasted, or it generates just enough heat to mobilize the students to learn from the presenting situation. Assisting in the transformational process of learning, the educator must allow for the ongoing and novel way people apply what they know to their actions.

Learning Task 3: The Practice of Presence

Though all of the learning tasks were geared toward becoming ‘present’ to what God is doing, the final learning task in this case study explored the dynamics of active engagement in the classroom. Every student was required to lead a group discussion on one of the required readings from the class. Students were to develop a study guide and keep the conversation moving on the topic. Prior to introducing the book and prior to students gathering in their small groups, they would do an exercise in ‘becoming present.’ Being fully present to what is happening in the immediate moment is a learned instinct of becoming aware of the patterns of verbal and non-verbal cues that reveal whether the group is ready to do the work (Parks 2005:100).

The students were asked to pay attention to their own cues; whether they were relaxed, nervous, bored, or otherwise occupied by events outside of the classroom. During a period of silence they would be invited to become more present: be attentive to who is in the classroom, what they are doing, and what their body language is telling the rest of the room.. After participating in the exercise of leaving and becoming present several times, students became more aware of when they were truly engaged and when their minds were engaged elsewhere.

The participants in the groups were challenged to be active listeners, responsible for their own learning when their colleague led the exercise. After the book discussion, the class shared their experiences, and explored the connection between being present in the conversation and the interaction over the readings. As the educator, I modeled certain behaviors for the students in the reporting out phase: using silence as a tool, reflect back what was heard and share an insight from the course content, and ask for alternate interpretations and perceptions. The exercise brought a deep learning, not only of the information contained in the reading, but students also reflected on the experience of engagement as a spiritual practice.

There are more stories of engagement and presence and missional purpose that occurred during the quarter. The three exercises explored here were a snippet of the collective learning within the contours of action and reflection. The most profound “ah-ha” moments occurred through these assignments and reflection upon them.

Section 3: Concluding Thoughts for Future Discussion

The Master of Divinity core curriculum at Fuller Seminary requires that students take one missions class, which in my limited experience is frequently addressed in the final year at seminary. Such was also the case when I spoke at the one missions class required at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary 10 years ago. Though the contextual and cultural realities are shifting in the academy, the question remains how to use the one opportunity we may have to form Christian leaders who care for the world that God loves, and cultivate new instincts for understanding and recognizing God's missional intent. The following reflections on the practice of participatory environments are limited in scope, but attempt to address some possible challenges to creating this type of experience.

1. *Learning to lead a participatory environment may alter the style and purpose of educational practice.* Each of us may point to a time when learning was transformational. It may have come in a classroom, but it likely wasn't through a Multiple Choice exam. Students retain information, change attitudes, or are motivated to learn more when they have been actively engaged in the learning process. Bonwell and Eisen (1991) note that while it reduces the amount of available lecture time, the participative atmosphere creates new avenues for creative learning to occur. Manage expectations of the students in the classroom by announcing the different type of learning they will engage in. Large class sizes should not prevent educators from integrating the social and communicative strategies of active learning; the framework expects small group work and shifts the burden of learning from the individual to the system.

2. *How will participatory environments be affected by distributed learning and online courses?* Many internet course tools are geared toward adult education, and are concerned with creating online community (see Bartlett 2008) that can effectively engage in deep learning. However, questions remain regarding how educators create the online experience to capture events as they unfold and use reflection in action dynamics. Creating transformational moments that the community is witness to and participant in will be a point for discovery in online learning.

3. *What adheres? What transforms?* Every educator attempts to make the learning experience interesting enough that the students grasp the necessary information and hopefully will remember its concepts and some content. But one of the delights we have in the classroom is to witness the transformation of the mind in students as they awaken to new knowledge. Throughout the course last fall, the students entered the process of learning how to become more present to the work of the Spirit of God who is intentionally active in our world – both in the ‘secular’ creation and among the people of God. The final papers were meant to be an active, practical theology reflection developed over the course of the quarter and through some of the learning exercises. The practical aspect of the paper, where students are shaping their own learning environments, is another space for transforming practices. One student, shaping a ministry to African American men at the local barbershop, shared the following goal:

“...as people internalize this way of life, they begin to understand the frame work of transformation. The ordinary men and women of a local church now begin to actively innovate mission-shaped life across the church because they have listened to each other; they have been given the dignity of God’s people, and they have discovered that the Spirit of God really is present among them. It is at this point, in the midst of growing experiments, that people realize that they have discovered for themselves a way of being church that isn’t dependent on outside programs, gurus, or even ordained clergy. Tangible, measurable, and observable actions occur. This is the point at which a local church tips over to a place from which it can’t go back to the old ways of being passive recipients of religious goods and services. Something tells me that in the coming months and years I would do well to remind myself of how important it is to not lose sight of the goal of not turning back. I pray that our first experiment, The Barber Shop Ministry, is the seed that moves us closer to that goal.” (D., final paper)

Parker Palmer, writing about his philosophy of teaching, describes it this way: “I [have] learned that my gift as a teacher is the ability to dance with my students, to co-create with them a context in which all of us teach and learn” (1998:72). The steps of participatory environments may be foreign to some; the role of educator, the experience of the students, and the content are woven together as tools for the learning process. It captures the imagination of the student and educator alike, even in the most vulnerable space of

ambiguity and engagement. We recognize the future leaders we are equipping today are entering a challenging, adaptive and complex world. Providing them tools to assess honestly, innovate creatively, and engage thoughtfully will require patient leadership and willingness to co-create with our students in the task of learning.

Notes

- 1 This course primarily addresses the congregation or people of God in the contexts where God has placed them, not cross-cultural missions.
- 2 Such critiques have been coming from within the academy as well as from practitioners. See McLaren and Campolo (2003), Roxburgh (2006, 2010), Frost and Hirsch (2003) and Van Gelder (2009).
- 3 Students were introduced to several Practical Theology methods, and were advised to choose a method for their final paper. The cycle above was one of those methods introduced in the class. Branson's model is informed by Groome (1991), Roxburgh (2006), and Anderson (2001). The cycle is not linear; the arrows indicate that there will be movement back and forth as sense is made of action, and reflection may bring groups back to earlier stages of the cycle to study, analyze, and tell stories.
- 4 The questions were adapted from Branson and Martinez 2011:25.
- 5 Chris Blatern and Murray Anderson Wallace (2006) explore the boundaries of experience as they noted the conversational patterns during a conflict mediation consultation. They suggest that no learning will take place unless the language and its meaning are disturbed from accepted patterns of interaction.
- 6 As an example, one triad had a white North American male, a second-generation Latina, and an Egyptian immigrant. During the reflection period, the Egyptian male appeared disturbed. Being attentive to this, he was asked to share a little of his experience. He was astonished by the diverse stories of North America coming from these two people – he had always assumed that the United States was a monolithic culture.
- 7 The phrase was originally used by William J.J. Gordon to explore the concept of Synetics, but it has been broadly applied in a diverse number of settings. For this course, the real purpose was to encourage students to explore their thinking beyond the taken-for-granted assumptions, where the first thought is “there's nothing new here.”
- 8 Roxburgh and Boren, among others, have made this point as well (see “Introducing the Missional Church” 2009:31).

- 9 This passage is used frequently in a variety of Missional circles, particularly in Patrick Keifert's Church Innovations Institute (www.churchinnovations.org), and with Alan Roxburgh's Missional Network (www.themissionalnetwork.com). Students had been exposed to "Dwelling in the Word" as part of the regular exercise of the course, which exposed them to dialogic and reflective listening to scripture.

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2012 *The End of Missiological Education (As We Know It): the path thus far*, at Fuller Theological Seminary.

Roxburgh, Alan, and M. Scott Boren

2009 *Introducing the Missional Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

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2006 *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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1999 *The Concept(s) of Culture*. In *Beyond the Cultural Turn*, edited by V. E. Bonnell and L. Hunt. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

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Appendix A: Syllabus

TM521: Congregations in the World: Neighborhood, Workplace, and Society Mark Lau Branson, Ed.D.

DESCRIPTION: This course focuses on the practices of the local church as it engages in the world as partners in God's mission of restoration to make all things new. Principles from scripture, theology, and social practice will be developed to illustrate the dynamic connections between congregation and context. Building from the praxis-theory-praxis framework of practical theology, students will engage such topics as neighbor hospitality, healthy partnerships, community development and social action, evangelism, and spiritual formation.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR LIFE AND MINISTRY: This course is designed to promote student's authentic, practical engagement with social environments and contexts from a practical theology framework in order to approach and interpret with others their understanding of the church, the culture, and the mission of God.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: Students completing this course will have: (1) developed a conceptual understanding of the missiological purpose and task of Christian ministry in the world through a praxis-theory-praxis perspective; (2) integrated a kingdom perspective into their spiritual and missiological interpretations of culture and congregation; (3) demonstrated the ability to engage a practical theology method for reflection on and evaluation of the congregation's connection to their context and cultures; (4) utilized the concepts, perspectives, experiences and skills from this course for their own spiritual formation and vocational direction; and (5) begun to grasp a vision for and commitment to forming congregations as an incarnational and interpretive presence in the community.

REQUIRED READING:

Arias, Mortimer

2001 *Announcing the Reign of God*. Lima, OH: Academic Renewal Press. 174 Pages. ISBN 978-1579105631. \$21.00

Branson, Mark Lau, and Juan F. Martínez

2011 *Churches, Cultures, and Leadership*. Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic. 275 pages. ISBN 978-0830839261. \$15.21**

Escobar, Samuel

2003 *The New Global Mission*. InterVarsity Press. 192 pages. ISBN 978-0830833016. \$10.90.

McKnight, Scot, Kevin Corcoran, Peter Rollins, and Jason Clark

2011 *Church in the Present Tense*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press. 156 pages. ISBN 978-1579105631. \$14.87.

Roxburgh, Alan and Scott Boren

2009 *Introducing the Missional Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books. 200 pages. ISBN 978-0801072123. \$15.54.

Wright, N.T.

2012 *After You Believe*. New York: HarperOne. 320 pages. ISBN 978-0061730542. \$10.87.

Additional articles and chapters in Moodle.

ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENT:

5% Students will upload Weekly Journal writings (2 per weekend) relating to the content of the lectures, readings, and class interactions, and their impact on student's understanding of vocational ministry and the church in society.

10% Class Discussion and Attendance. It is expected that students will read the required material according to the schedule and be prepared to interact in group discussions and any exercises related to the material. In lieu of attendance, students will turn in a brief summary of their experience of the course, lecture, and events in the classroom after each session.

15% Prepare and lead a small group discussion on one of the required books. Submit a 700-word analytical reading report and proposed interview guide plan (2 pages) for the small group discussion.

30% Create and present a planned missional encounter for a particular ministry area of the church. It may be a men's/women's ministry, youth, children, current missions practice, etc. Anticipate the role this encounter has on the spiritual or communal formation within the people of God, and explain how it can support your congregational activities in the world. (5 - 7pp)

40% Final Paper: utilizing a practical theology method, students will submit a 5,000 word final paper describing current praxis relating to a church's interaction with its context, and prescribing future missional engagement for the people of God. Include the biblical, theological, and socio-cultural reasons for change, expansion, or transformation of current praxis, and suggest possible processes for the church in change.

PREREQUISITES: None.

RELATIONSHIP TO CURRICULUM: Meets MDiv Core requirement in Practical Theology/Spiritual Formation (MIN1) and in Missiology (MIN8).

FINAL EXAMINATION: Final Term Paper.