Teaching Peace Studies: An Introduction

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In the Spring of 2010, *The Conrad Grebel Review* published a special issue on "Teaching the Bible" containing a number of academic essays and personal reflections on this theme by Anabaptist or Mennonite educators. A follow-up issue, on "Teaching History" (Fall 2012), provided another opportunity to explore the distinctly Anabaptist/Mennonite intellectual and personal engagement with the academic pedagogical vocation. As guest editors of this issue of *CGR*, we are pleased to continue this occasional series by turning our attention to the theme of teaching peace (and conflict resolution) studies, another topic central to Anabaptist identity and witness to the world.

Once again, contributors were invited to reflect on specific pedagogical challenges and opportunities, on pedagogical resources or tools helpful in the classroom and, most significantly, on the impact of Anabaptist/Mennonite identities and agendas on pedagogical content and style. The end result is an issue enriched by a variety of voices and perspectives on the deeply challenging yet very rewarding vocation of translating to our students, our constituencies, and the wider community something so central to our own faith and ethics.

Each of the articles in this collection represents a distinctive voice and location within the wider framework of Anabaptist/Mennonite or secular higher education. The authors are either Anabaptist/Mennonite themselves or they teach at an Anabaptist/Mennonite institution. Each article raises its own unique questions and perspectives, but the voices together suggest an underlying harmony as well—different perspectives on some common threads woven into their approaches to peace and conflict resolution pedagogy. There are also a few places where the authors seem to agree, although the language they use suggests subtle but important differences, particularly around issues of power. A few of the underlying threads are briefly pulled to the surface here.

Instructor Identities and Vulnerabilities

For each author, authentic and effective teaching begins with knowing and sharing oneself. Knowing oneself, however, is a process, and one

The Conrad Grebel Review 32, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 116-119.

that has unfolded over time for a number of contributors. Randy Janzen demonstrates this clearly in reflecting on his identities as a Mennonite, a Christian, and a settler, all of which shape his interaction with classes of students for whom some of these identities may seem very alien. Edmund Pries, another Mennonite teaching in a secular setting, articulates the matter of acknowledging instructor bias while attempting to teach with integrity in a diverse context. For Lowell Ewert, a background in law and human rights integrated with his Mennonite background molds the content and style of his teaching practice. Regina Shands Stoltzfus reflects on how her formation as a peace studies educator was grounded in Anabaptist theology in a black church context.

Teaching authentically from one's own position not only leads to the potential for accusations of bias, which Pries sets forth, it also leads to a deep level of vulnerability and risk-taking, as instructors must also acknowledge their positions within unequal social power relations. For Shands Stoltzfus, this is bound up in understanding what it means to be an African-American woman teaching a course on personal violence and healing to predominantly white Mennonite college students. Janzen recognizes that his Mennonite identity, with its self-perception of a history of relatively peaceful engagement with the wider Canadian society, is also inextricably bound up with a settler identity and the settler legacy of dispossession of indigenous lands and resources. Karen Ridd too recognizes the fear of vulnerability, and draws on Parker Palmer's work on confronting this fear.

Together, these authors put before us the challenge of authentically teaching peace and justice while at the same time recognizing one's own entanglements in the injustices of society, whether as victim or perpetrator, settler or colonized, possessed or dispossessed. For Ridd, the answer lies in accepting a call to love ourselves even as we love our discipline, and to love our students—something she describes as the hardest requirement of the teaching vocation.

Classroom as Location of Safety and Disruption

Pries refers to the classroom as both a holy sanctuary and a crucible—as a sacred space which provides a safe haven for students and is simultaneously a site for creating cognitive disequilibrium. Whether stated in terms of

facilitating radical self-care in the midst of studying violence (Shands Stoltzfus) or loving the students while attempting to understand a world that seems to be falling apart (Ridd), the authors reflect in various voices on this journey of creating both safety and disruption.

Each author shares significant examples of specific classroom exercises that can facilitate this journey. Ewert introduces the exercise of creating a pictorial map of the course as a whole as a way to enable students to visualize their journey together through it. Shands Stoltzfus describes several community-care and self-care exercises designed to help students work through the necessarily deeply stressful content of a specific course. Pries uses questions to probe dominant assumptions. The authors often draw out details of their pedagogical approaches in order to demonstrate what occurs in the classroom and how their pedagogy is manifest in their choices and exercises.

Pedagogical Vocation as Transformation and Radical Love

All the contributors demonstrate distinctive ways of articulating what they do and why they do it. Ewert provides several practical examples of presenting the broad architecture of peace to make it relevant and meaningful for students from a wide range of disciplines. For Pries, the primary goal of all teaching is student transformation, but he questions what this means in a peace studies context. Janzen begins with the sharing of identities and personal stories as the starting point of a de-colonized educational journey. For Shands Stoltzfus, the identities and stories brought into the classroom and processed together are necessary to create a new path, a new way of being in the world. Ridd summarizes the pedagogical vocation as an exercise of radical love—integrating love of student, love of material, and love of self.

Emergent Possibilities

A fourth thread, intriguing by its near absence, is the limited consideration of Anabaptist/Mennonite religious beliefs. The contents of faith are not explored explicitly in most of the contributions to this issue. This is the case even though at least two of the contributors have worked in ministerial positions. There are general comments that speak of one's faith in terms of personal background or of a history of a people suffering for faith, but there

are no scriptural references here. We can speculate on why this is. It may be related to dominant ideas of what writing on peace studies means formally for an academic journal; it may relate to where these peace pedagogues are located and the specific content of their courses (Ewert's analysis suggests this might be the case); or, it might suggest a relatively unquestioned alignment of the values in the field of peace studies with Anabaptist/Mennonite values. Fruitful questions we might pursue to further understand this dynamic include these: Tto what degree do Anabaptist/Mennonites who teach peace studies think the values of justice and peace explored in course texts reflect or match theological content? What are the points of friction for Anabaptist/Mennonites in the discipline of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution?

Our contributors speak of many roles: mentor, guide, facilitator, destabilizer, challenger, parental-type advisor, unconditional supporter, and evaluator. Acting as an evaluator is in some tension with other roles, as Ewert and Shands Stoltzfus recognize, and this suggests a topic that could be meaningfully explored in further depth.

Through these articles we see that teaching peace studies, whether one is working in an Anabaptist/Mennonite or secular context, involves authenticity and vulnerability, support as well as disequilibrium, and a willingness to be transformed along the way. We invite you to explore the contributors' voices, engage with them, and be challenged by them; and perhaps to discover a few more underlying threads.

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