

INTERCULTURAL/TRANSNATIONAL PEDAGOGIES

- Convener: Jean-Pierre Ruiz, St. John's University, New York
 Moderator: La Reine-Marie Mosely, Loyola University, Chicago
 Panelists: Amir Hussain, Loyola Marymount University
 Gary Riebe-Estrella, Catholic Theological Union
 Jean-Pierre Ruiz, St. John's University, New York

This interest group is an initiative of the Committee on Underrepresented Ethnic and Racial Groups (CUERG), which shaped its agenda on the basis of discussions at the working luncheon during the 2009 CTSA Convention in Halifax. This year, under the heading of "The Differences that Difference Makes: Mapping Intercultural and Transnational Pedagogies," the panelists focused attention on the implications for theological education of the shifting demographics in our classrooms, of the globalization of theological discourse, and of the growing body of scholarship from constituencies previously underrepresented in theological study in the United States.

Amir Hussain used the following quote from Edward Said to consider issues of identity: "Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that—to borrow a phrase from music—is contrapuntal" (*Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002] 186). He then discussed several best practices: (1) asking students to share the poetry of their lives, and the music, film and literature that are important to them; (2) starting with the local contexts in our classes; (3) personal connections with the authors of course textbooks; (4) considering the work of Maria Rosa Menocal on the *convivencia* of Jews, Muslims, and Christians in medieval Iberia (*The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* [New York: Little Brown, 2002]). Hussain concluded with a quote from Brian Cantwell Smith about his father Wilfred: "his example—what he lived, taught, recommended, and inspired—was to stay firmly grounded in one's own tradition (not dogmatically, but honestly, openly), and, from there, to reach across to those in other traditions—to speak to them, to love them, to celebrate life's personal plurality. To be bettered, not lessened, by differences."

Gary Riebe-Estrella mapped four stages in the movement toward intercultural and transnational pedagogies. The starting point of most Western faculty members and theological institutions is the presentation of theology whose original context is not named and which pretends toward universalism. The first stage of the movement from this "non-contextualized" theology toward an intercultural approach might be entitled "recognizing the presence of the other." This usually involves including some other voices in the sources used in a given course. However, their presence is really a commentary on the theological theme which is principally carried by the sources from the dominant culture. These latter determine the theological question and how it is posed.

In the second stage, “getting to know the other,” the presence of many theological voices is used to demonstrate the contextual nature of all theology. The attempt is to help students move from theological conclusions to theological method so that they are engaging in “how to do theology. The third stage, “identifying the socio-cultural origins of difference,” involves allowing the contextuality and assumptions to move beyond delineating method into raising the issue of why this particular theological agenda, that is, exploring what determines that God’s self-revelation should be investigated under these specific rubrics or emphases. The fourth stage might be named “acknowledging the place of power in the creation of difference.” Its objective is to decolonize the production of knowledge in the doing of theology. It asserts that the categories of non-dominant epistemological world(s) have the same legitimacy as those of the dominant culture.

Jean-Pierre Ruiz suggested that for Latin@ theological educators, the challenge is not merely a matter of teaching (*latinamente* or otherwise), undergraduate or graduate students who also happen to be Latin@s, but of facing and engaging classes that are multiply diverse, and not only with regard to ethnicity. What might be the payoffs of such intercontextual *convivencia* in the classroom as students from a variety of backgrounds intentionally come together—even if only for one course during one semester—as a learning community? Ruiz drew on his experience of designing and teaching an undergraduate course entitled “God and Religion in the City” at St. John’s University, which is situated in the most ethnically diverse county in the United States. To address such questions as “Why should I care about someone whose beliefs, values, and practices are different from my own, even if that someone happens to live next door, or even in the same residence hall suite?” Ruiz draws on Kwame Anthony Appiah’s *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006). The explicitly theological appeal that is interwoven with Appiah’s notion of cosmopolitanism as an antidote to individualistic relativism focuses on the conjoined principles of the dignity of the human person and the common good.

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