

INTERCULTURAL/TRANSNATIONAL PEDAGOGIES

- Topic: The Differences that Difference Makes: Resourcing Intercultural and Transnational Pedagogies
- Convener: Jean-Pierre Ruiz, St. John's University, New York
- Moderator: Carmen Nanko-Fernández, Catholic Theological Union
- Presenters: Jonathan Tan, Australian Catholic University
C. Vanessa White, Catholic Theological Union
Jean-Pierre Ruiz, St. John's University, Queens, New York

During this second session of the Intercultural / Transnational Pedagogies Interest Group, which was organized under the aegis of the CTSA Committee on Underrepresented Ethnic and Racial Groups [CUERG] on the basis of feedback from participants at the CUERG working luncheons during the 2009 and 2010 CTSA conventions, the presenters shared key resources, strategies and best practices for intercultural, intercontextual and transnational pedagogies.

Jonathan Tan began his presentation, which was entitled "Teaching Religion and Theology: Intercultural and Transnational Resources," by discussing the significance of an increasingly global, intercultural, and transnational world. He explored the impact and implications of migration, globalization, and transnationalism on the transformation of religion and theology, which necessitates a rethinking of religious and theological education. He then presented the various intercultural and transnational resources that are available online for both classroom use and scholarly research. His compilation of web resources is available online at: <http://allthingsreligion.blogspot.com/p/religion-theology-web-resources.html>.

Speaking from the context of her research and teaching in spirituality, and drawing on the insights of African and African American traditions for pedagogy, C. Vanessa White invited participants to focus their attention on the Sankofa bird sculpture that she had placed on the podium. She explained, "Sankofa is an adinkra symbol from Ghana. . . which denotes that we must fetch back to move forward. We must retrieve our stories to be able to move forward authentically as theologians. This retrieval has taken the form of story." She went on to explain the ways in which her insights into the vital importance of experience and of narrative—including her students' own stories—challenged her to "change the way I teach so that this story becomes central and a gateway for the students further understanding and transformation in the classroom?" White demonstrated the ways in which even the physical configuration of classroom space can facilitate the productive exchange of personal narratives. Her insights into the power of narrative translate into a concrete pedagogical strategy in which "fetching back to move forward" through the sharing of stories—biblical as well as personal—furnishes rich resources for intercultural theological education.

In his presentation, "Behind Diversity: Institutional and Curricular Considerations," Jean-Pierre Ruiz invited participants to consider what we mean by "diversity." If and when we use the word in the classroom, are our students

on the same page? Does our understanding of diversity coincide with theirs? If and when we use the word at a faculty meeting, are our colleagues all on the same page? What do our presidents and provosts and deans mean by 'diversity'?" Conversation about diversity, he suggested, should be conditioned by the salutary caveat offered by Carmen Nanko-Fernández, who suggests that too often "people use diversity to describe 'those who are not me.' In other words, whoever is different or in the minority is labeled as the diversity, but the rest of 'us' are not." ("Creation in Divine Diversity: Imaging Community, Respecting Difference," *New Theology Review* 24:2 [May 2011]: 31). Underscoring the relationship between individual classrooms and courses on the one hand, and overall curriculum and institutional visions and strategies on the other, Ruiz sketched two approaches often deployed in the service of diversity: expanding the canon and reconfiguring the classroom. In many respects, expanding the canon is the easier move, inclusion by accretion, the simple adding of new—and more "diverse"—entries into the list of required reading. While this represents a well-intentioned expansion of the body of material that merits attention, it is not necessarily accompanied by a genuinely intercultural and transnational hermeneutic, so that what lies behind diversity discourse might just be business as usual. Expanding the canon is necessary, but not sufficient. As for reconfiguring the classroom, Ruiz suggested that the tired rhetoric of the paradigm shift where the teacher is less "sage on the stage" than "guide on the side" actually does very little to help us address the real challenges of diversity. If all we do is rearrange the furniture, the same old hierarchies (disciplinary and pedagogical) still hold sway.

JEAN-PIERRE RUIZ
St. John's University
Queens, New York