

When Critical Pedagogy and Engaged Spirituality Meet: Generating and Sustaining Hope for Social Change

Abstract

Hope as hopping in expectation involves both external and internal actions of those who hope for a better world. Changing hopeless conditions can generate hope, but staying hopeful in hopeless situations requires more than external changes. It calls for a pedagogy that nurtures both spiritual strength and social change. This paper explores a pedagogy of hope by intersecting critical pedagogy, philosophy and praxis of education that seeks deployment of emancipatory knowledge, and engaged spirituality that nurtures people in their deepest sense to enable them to engage in social justice actions.

I. Introduction

How one can stay in anti-oppression work while one is being discriminated against due to one's race, religion, sex, economic status, gender identity, and other forms of oppression? How one can sustain hope for oneself and generate it for others at the same time? These are the questions that many of my students and I have wrestled together in my Spiritual Formation for Leadership class and the Changemaker Fellowship Program, a year-long tuition free program for social change agents that I direct at my own institution. Particularly the changemaker fellows, who come from various NGOs, healthcare services, legal communities, higher education, high-tech industries, and other social justice sectors and plan to go back to their work with hopefully deepened spiritual and theological foundations for their work, challenge traditional seminary students in the class how they as spiritual leaders will not only generate hope but also sustain hope in many hopeless situations. These questions and challenges from my fellows when juxtaposed with grim statistics that 35-40% of ministers leave the ministry within the first five years due to burn-out and the feeling of hopelessness (Helopoulos 2015, 201) command religious education scholars and practitioners to be more explicit and intentional about the formational and transformational dimension of our work and the discipline. Sustaining hope when life and the world seem hopeless requires spiritual depth and strength of those who engage in generating hope for others. In other words, a pedagogy that generates and sustains hope invites religious educators to think deeply about spiritual formation as a core nature of our discipline and practice.

This paper explores a pedagogy of hope that nurtures both spiritual strength and social change actions by intersecting critical pedagogy and engaged spirituality. Specifically, using my own teaching context/class as a case in which we try to foster spiritually rooted leadership for social change, I will present the contents and the format of the class based on engaged spirituality framed in critical pedagogy, and my learnings from teaching this class that may offer insights for other contexts.

II. Engaged Spirituality for Generating and Sustaining Hope

A Teaching Context for Engaged Spirituality

Every fall I teach a class called Spiritual Formation for Leadership, a required class for entering students in M.Div., CMF (Changemaker Fellowship), CSSC (Certificate in Spiritual and Social Change) and MAST (MA in Social Transformation) programs at Pacific School of

Religion in Berkeley, CA. I have about forty-five students in the class every year who come from over twenty different religious backgrounds including various Christian denominations, Judaism, Muslim, Buddhism, various New Thoughts, diverse Pagan traditions, Native/Indigenous spiritual traditions, as well as students without any religious affiliations. About sixty percent of the class identify themselves as members of LGBTQ communities, and racial/ethnic minority students make up about forty percent of the enrolled students. The ratio of M.Div. and other degree students (CSSC and MAST) are almost equal. About fifty percent of the enrolled students come from various NGOs, healthcare services, legal communities, higher education, high-tech industries, and others, and the majority of them plan to go back to the same work place with hopefully deepened theological and spiritual foundations. Despite their widely different religious and work backgrounds, all of these students express their deep commitments to social justice, and want to pursue it from spiritual/theological perspectives in their various contexts.

The purpose of the class is to help students to critically reflect on the meaning and nature of spiritually and theologically rooted social transformation and to develop their own leadership through rigorous academic studies and spiritual practices to sustain them as a person and a leader, i.e. a generator and sustainer of hope. However, the challenge is that as the student body represents such diverse backgrounds, their views of spirituality and social justice are as various as the students themselves. These diverse views make this class very exciting and generative as it opens new and constructive ways for each student to think about their spiritual leadership for social change. At the same time, I have learned that the diversity of the class sometimes causes tensions and conflicts that resemble many of their ministry and social justice work contexts. One of the tensions is their different understandings of spirituality. Some students, who come with psychological, physical and spiritual burn-outs from their social justice activism and ministries, expect to have silent meditation/retreat types of classes, and thus sometimes expressing their complaints about rigorous readings and lectures that lead to anti-oppression conversations and actions. They often say that they know how to do anti-oppression work, and thus they are at PSR for spiritual renewal through meditations and self-care. Other students, who associate spiritual practices with retreating from urgent justice work, resist to engage with certain practices that are not explicitly related to their view of anti-oppression work. These contradictory expectations and needs at times hinder them from engaging in courageous and authentic engagements with one another. To challenge and meet these different needs of my students at the same time, I frame the course according to two primary approaches: engaged spirituality and critical pedagogy.

Engaged Spirituality: A Root of Hope

Engaged Spirituality, a concept borrowed from Thich Nhat Hanh's Engaged Buddhism, is spirituality that nurtures people in their deepest sense and enables them to engage in social justice activities to move the world toward peace, justice, compassion and wholeness. It is a spirituality that deepens individual's well-being, and connects personal with social/structural issues for the greater good. It does not see spirituality and liberation as either-or, but both-and as "it involves living a dual engagement: engaging with those resources that provide spiritual nurture *and* engaging with the world through acts of compassion and justice" (Parachin 1999, 2). Although the concept was popularized by Thich Nhat Hanh, it has also long root in Christian spirituality.

Despite their commitment to different social justice causes, to some of my students, who equate spirituality or contemplation with silent meditation, this is a new and at times challenging concept, especially when the class presents race conversation as a spiritual practice. In most of the Western world, presuming silence and solitude as a necessary condition for contemplative spirituality comes from the long-lived history of Western Christianity and its practices. For example, Cynthia Bourgeault (2004), a popular leader of centering prayer defines contemplative prayer as “a wordless, trusting opening of self to the divine presence” (5), and declares that “silence is the normal context in which contemplative prayer takes place” (7). Standing in the long line of Western Christian contemplation tradition, Bourgeault presents that contemplation is kith and kin to silence and quiet meditation. That is, by extinguishing external noises through retreating from the necessity of mundane living, she along with other contemplative prayer leaders guide that we can return to life and work with renewed body and spirit.

This silence based approach to spiritual practices is a necessary condition for most Western Christian spiritual practices such as Prayer of Examen, Lectio Divina, Four-Stranded Garland Prayer, Contemplative Listening, Christian Guided Meditation and Imagination, and etc. Practical guide books for these prayer practices exclusively suggest practitioners to prepare themselves with silence to quiet their minds before moving on with a particular practice they are about to engage. By finding a physically quiet place, closing one’s eyes, engaging in a breathing exercise, and/or imagining oneself to be in a serene nature, practitioners are asked to calm themselves before doing a contemplative spiritual practice through which they hope to encounter the Divine.

In regard to silence being the prerequisite for contemplation, Barbara Holmes, a womanist theologian observes that it is a very Eurocentric understanding of Christian spirituality. She argues that in African American churches contemplation includes, but does not require silence. “Instead contemplative practices can be identified in public prayers, meditative dance movements, and musical cues that move the entire congregation toward a communal listening and entry into communion with a living God” (42). But in Eurocentric contexts contemplation and silence are believed to be synonymous. Contemplation as silence is a much narrower view than the original meaning of the Christian contemplation of the Early Church, particularly the desert spirituality (Holmes, 32-38). Defining contemplation as “an attentiveness of spirit that shifts the seeker from an ordinary reality to the *basileia* of God” (43), Holmes broadens the scope of contemplation beyond silent meditative practices that often require practitioners to carve out time from life’s multiple demands.

Encountered by God’s spirit through interactive spiritual practices, the community then is called to engage in God’s reign building work on earth through contemplative witness: standing for justice, creating a beloved community, acts of mercy, fighting against unjust power, and prophetic proclamation and action, etc. Holmes argues that what Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and many other justice movement activists practiced were contemplative witnesses (Holmes, 138). In other words, contemplation charges people to be in the world to create God’s reign where justice and peace for all people flourish. Regarding this, James Noel, a scholar of African American Christianity says that there is no contradiction between contemplation and social action in African American spirituality (Noel 1988, 25).

Contemplation as a companion of social justice in and for the world is in line with the meaning of spirituality defined by liberation theologians - Dorothee Soelle (2001), Robert McAfee Brown (1988), and Gustavo Gutiérrez (2011). Brown asserts that spirituality and liberation are “two ways of talking about the same thing, so that there is no necessity, or even a

possibility, of making a choice between them” (Brown 1988, 18). Janet Parachin (1999) and Joseph Nangle (2008) respectively call contemplation that does social justice action Engaged Spirituality. Nangle sums up the meaning of contemplation as “to see all reality through the eyes of the Creator and to love the world as God loves it” (45) or looking “at reality, especially the great – and small-struggles for human liberation, from God’s perspective, seeing possibilities where others might not” (47).

Holmes also argues that contemplation as engaged spirituality is much closer to the original meaning of contemplation credited to the desert elders of North Africa than the one exclusively associated with silent solitude (Holmes, 27; Battle 2011, 523). The desert elders retreated to the wilderness to live ascetically, fighting against the devil that was believed to rule over the dead buried there. However, it did not take a long for them to realize the necessity of communal living to keep their psychological and spiritual sanity, and thus formed monasteries and spiritual communities. To these communities pilgrims from the city came for prayers and spiritual advice, and then returned to their life in the city. This rhythm of retreat and return was a critical part of the desert spirituality, and its nature was communal, anti-imperial against Roman Empire, and not necessarily silent but expressed through diverse communal contemplative practices (Holmes, 34; Battle, 522-526; Stewart 2011, 86-87). Their contemplative prayers happened in all arenas of their lives where God also acts – intrapersonal, interpersonal, natural/cosmos/environmental, and systematic/structural arenas of human living (Driskill 2006, 82-83; Libert 2005, 125-146) and in various forms.

Holmes observes that the above communal spirituality of the desert elders started changing in the 12th century with the presumption that “the contemplative life was reserved for professional clerics or solitary individuals gifted by God in intensely mystical ways” (36). As the Western European Christianity became the dominant power along with colonialism, its view of contemplation as silent meditation became the norm as well. Eurocentric Christianity’s equation of contemplation with silence, Holmes further asserts, has been a reason for many African American Christians’ refusal to embrace silent forms of contemplative practices. As a survival mechanism from colonialism, racism and other forms of systematic oppressions the oppressed intentionally disengage with meditative and reflective practices that can evoke traumatic memories and consciousness they have stowed away (Holmes, 30). Rather, they find coping mechanisms in interactive and out-spoken contemplative practices such as shouting, singing, clapping, or dancing that give them a voice and outlet.

All of these suggest two main things: 1) nurturing one’s spiritual well-being can include but does not have to be in solitude and silence. Pedagogically, it means that offering diverse contemplative spiritual practices – both quiet and not quiet ones is important for students with different needs and ways of spiritual engagement; 2) separating spirituality from social justice actions are partial and false; Supporting my students’ needs, namely, healing from burn-outs and renewal for continuous social justice ministries and activism, requires a curriculum that is well-balanced between personal and structural pursuit for compassion and justice. Engaged spirituality invites my students to look contemplatively at the reality of our world and their own life and leadership in it the way God would look at.

III. Critical Pedagogy for Teaching Engaged Spirituality

How my teaching can help my students to nurture and deepen their personal spirituality on which their vision, commitments to social justice, communal connections, and compassion for human beings and the world are generated and sustained? How can spirituality, which helps

people connect with their deepest self and God, can be taught so that they become leaders for social justice, be taught? I find critical pedagogy, particularly Freirean critical pedagogy to be a kith and kin to engaged spirituality.

Critical pedagogy which developed out of critical theory (Kincheloe and Steinburg 1997, 24) seeks to humanize and liberate learners through emancipatory educational process and knowledge deployment. As critical theory is concerned with a just society where the oppressed are liberated, and thus have full political, economic, and cultural freedom, critical pedagogy tries to empower learners to be agents to create such a society. It sees that education is not a value-free activity in which learners are passive recipients of information presented as objective knowledge and truth, but is a political and moral activity whose goal is freedom, equality and emancipation of the oppressed. In other words, it has a twofold goal: 1) to analyze and illuminate how traditional education embodies values of the powerful of the society and the social ordering to serve their interests (Giroux 2011, 6); 2) to help learners “develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action” (Giroux, 2010).

The best way to achieve these goals is an emancipatory teaching-learning praxis. In critical pedagogy learners are no longer objects of education, but subjects of their own emancipation whose life contexts and experiences become critical starting point of their learning. Through critically reflecting on and analyzing their own realities, learners learn to think critically and systematically to improve their life conditions so that they can take necessary actions to build a more just and equitable life conditions for themselves and others. For this kind of education, Paulo Freire, a leading voice in critical pedagogy, emphasizes consciousness raising or conscientization as a fundamental basis of education (Freire and Macedo, 2000). He defines conscientization as:

the process in which men[sic], not as recipients, but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness both of the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives, and of their capacity to transform that reality through action upon it" (1970b, 27)

For this, he proposes problem-posing education that questions problematic issues in learners' lives, especially oppressive social phenomena through dialogical inquiry between the teacher and learners, and among learners who would systematically analyze identified problems, and find constructive action plans for change as a learning community (1970a, 71-86). Critical consciousness, in other words, is raised through a continuous dialectical and praxis-oriented process in a communal learning context: unlearning, learning, and relearning. This dialectical process aims to disrupt unequal and oppressive power dynamics in class, race, gender, sexuality, gender identity, and other hegemonic curricula hidden in scholarship, in schools, and in the larger society beyond the classroom (Leonard 2009, 19; Apple 2004, 77-98).

Freirean Pedagogical Methods

Although Henry Giroux emphasize that critical pedagogy is not a teaching method, but a way of thinking and a mode of intervention (2010), in the following section I will briefly describe Paulo Freire's literacy teaching methods for two reasons: 1) to explore further the actual pedagogical dimension of critical pedagogy; 2) to gain insights for teaching engaged spirituality in my own teaching context.

In his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970a) Freire documents his own failure and transformative experiences of teaching: from teaching Portuguese using traditional teaching methods to employing methods relevant to the peasants' desires to improve their lives; from telling them what to memorize to helping small groups to struggle together for mastery; from teaching in a culture of unquestioning assumptions to empowering the peasants to generate for hope and action for their own lives. He presents specific teaching methods he developed and used for literacy training in *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1974). His literacy training methods have four phases:

1. The first phase is the study of the context of his learners by spending an extended period of time in their communities, participating in informal conversations with residents, observing their culture, and listening to their life stories, and identifying community's key and recurring words and themes to be used in teaching.
2. In the second phase, the teaching team chose "generative words" from their collected vocabulary lists that would later be used to help students develop elementary skills in decoding and encoding print. Freire believed that generative words should have emotional attachments to learners that evoke their unjust social, cultural, and political living condition.
3. In the third phase, generative words with emotional provocation were presented in the form of drawings of familiar scenes in the life of the community. Each scene depicted conflicts found within the community for students to recognize, analyze, and attempt to resolve as a group. In the course of problem solving depicted in the picture, learners would "name" the embedded generative words, giving teachers the raw material for developing reading and writing exercises.
4. At the final phase learners worked with a discovery card contained a generative word separated into its component syllables, giving learners the opportunity to recombine syllables to form other words in their vocabulary.

These four phased process clearly show critical pedagogy's educational philosophy, particularly the process of conscientization. It starts with getting to know learners' life circumstances, and the learning process and materials are closely related to learners' reality. It is also a communal. Through a communal learning process learners are encouraged to be co-teachers and learners to one another, and find a solution for their community while implicitly learning how to read. This learning process is also very political. It challenges learners to ask whys behind their reality, and to imagine and find ways to build a more just world.

I am particularly drawn to the Freirean pedagogy for teaching engaged spirituality in my current contexts due to following reasons. First, as it emphasizes students' own experiences and current contexts as the starting point of education, it can help my students to bring forth their spiritual needs, and find ways to nurture their spiritual leadership for social change in conversation with rigorous studies and healing practices of engaged spirituality.

Second, Freirean pedagogy also highlights the purpose of education is helping students critically assess the world they live in, paying attention to power dynamics and dominant ideological assumptions, and find their role for creating an alternative world. Many of my students come from various social justice activism and ministries often with wounded and burn-out experiences. They tend to be suspicious of anything appear to be mainstream ideologies. For them, starting with their own experiences will help them to ease into the course which will

lead them to critically analyze their own assumptions as well as their experiences with the dominant society. Freirean pedagogy will be also helpful for students relatively new to critical thinking as the starting point is their own life world.

Third, Freirean pedagogy is highly communal. Learners are challenged to identify and solve problems together as a learning community. A new and emancipatory knowledge is generated through a communal process. This is a critical element for my students to learn. Those students who come from dominant cultural contexts, despite their lived experiences of discrimination, tend to be very individualistic in their pursuit of spiritual nurture. They are most likely to focus on their own wounds and healing from them alone, ignoring their privileges that can harm others. Other students, who have worked at small non-profits as a solo program developer and executer, at times implicitly and explicitly bypass the communal problem solving process.

With these and other compelling reasons, I have designed a class on spiritual formation for leadership in a critical pedagogy framework, and below is a description of the class. As a format to embody the Freirean method in my particular class, I utilize a participatory observation method.

IV. Putting Engaged Spirituality and Critical Pedagogy Together:

A Praxis of Generating and Sustaining Hope at a Theological Classroom

With students with diverse backgrounds in every possible sense as described earlier in the paper, it is important for me and my students to co-create a culture of collaborative learning. For this purpose, I start the class with an invitation to students to briefly share “what nurtures their spirit?” as a part of their self-introduction on the first day of the class. Building on what they share, I introduce a broad definition of engaged spirituality, one that I integrated from the work of Sandra Schneiders (1998), Joseph Driskill (1999), and Barbara Holmes (2004): The study of spirituality is concerned with the lived experience of faith, the communities which nurture it, the practices which sustain it, and the moral life which embodies it. In other words, spirituality is concerned with all of life as it is lived and experienced by believers- their beliefs, ethical stands, actions, motivations, historical context, social location and all other salient influences on the lived experiences of one’s faith in a community. This operating definition helps me to introduce the reasons for studying spirituality for social change through a layered participant observation method that the class is engaging throughout the semester. The following reasons are provided in the first two class sessions:

- 1) To understand the tradition(s) that have shaped us;
- 2) To explore spirituality of others in a way to be fair and just to them;
- 3) To understand issues of our world more deeply as most of injustices in our world are intersected with oppressive theologies and spiritualities of dominant groups;
- 4) To provide leadership for spiritual communities;
- 5) To nurture/ deepen our own spirituality.

As a way to study-practice engaged spirituality through a Freirean critical pedagogy, the following class assignments are required of the students in addition to engaging with lectures, reading discussions (first hour of the class), learning/practicing a Christian contemplative practice (second hour of the class) and being in a covenant group with a leader (third hour of the class):

- Reflection Paper on the Spirituality of One’s Own (Faith) Community;
- Learning About a Social Justice Site as a Covenant Group through literature and available written/online materials – the sites are selected by the instructor and the director of Contextual Learning Office (DCLO) after reviewing each student’s application profile during the summer before semester begins;
- Research Paper on the engaged spirituality of a leader(s) related to the student’s field of ministry to explore how the leader’s spirituality is forming and informing his/her/their leadership, and developing student’s own definition of engaged spirituality for his/her/their social justice ministries;
- Site visit for three hours as a group, and spending extra nine hours as a group or an individual for follow-up observations, interviews and/or engagements;
- Observation Paper on the Engaged Spirituality of the Observed Site;
- Teaching Project on Engaged Spirituality utilizing a particular spiritual practice to enhance social justice awareness/commitment to a chosen audience of each student. The teaching should be executed before submitting the paper, and thus include their post-teaching reflections that incorporate their participants’ feedback on the program, their learning experience and the instructor’s teaching leadership.

Engaged Spirituality Through Freirean Critical Pedagogy

Step 1

Through above assignments students gradually learn about the participant observation method that is similar to the phase 1 of Freire’s literacy training method. Before they write their first paper, Reflection Paper on the Spirituality of One’s Own Community, I introduce them to the basic method of participatory observation as a way to frame their paper: Description-Analysis-Evaluation-Response (4-Step Guideline). This paper has a dual purpose: 1) to provide an opportunity for students to do a critical assessment on how their own faith community has shaped their view of spirituality so that they can see their own theological/spiritual assumptions and biases; 2) to help them learn and practice “objective”, unbiased and ethical observation methods. In their first paper in seminary most students tend to write very passionate, evaluative and judgmental paper on their own community, and thus I find myself spending a substantive amount of time on commenting on their papers with further explanations about the above 4-step paper guideline, and also repeat the guidelines in the class. The table below is taken from the syllabus where I explain each component of their paper (i.e. observation method).

Description	Analysis	Evaluation	Response
The student provides a <u>thick description</u> of what s/he/they observed: you clearly and respectfully describe what you observed without making judgmental statements, and let	The student provides careful analysis of the observed community’s distinctive spirituality <u>in its own context</u> to understand why and how that community does what it does: you support your	The student provides thoughtful and thorough theological-socio-cultural evaluations (theology, race, ethnicity, gender, class, etc.) of the observed community’s	The student offers an emerging nature, distinction, or pattern of the observed community’s spirituality, and make constructive suggestions and comments to the observed community

the observed community speak for itself. During your visit, try to take field notes describing what you see, hear, feel, notice including physical environments, and feel free to quote your notes in the paper.	analysis with the community's available resources such as the webpage, historical document, etc.	distinctive spirituality with supportive literature. Here you bring your previous training from different disciplines and experiences to make some evaluations on what you have observed.	whether/how the community is observing engaged spirituality or not. The student also makes critical reflections on her/his/their learnings from this observation for her/his/their own current and future ministry contexts and spiritual leadership for social change.
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Analysis vs. Evaluation

Analysis – understanding a community's distinctive features in its own context: Why they do certain things the way they do. What are some of its historical and cultural backgrounds? A Historical moment in their history for that?

Evaluation – Reviewing a community's features in a broader context as you analyze their life together through a macro lens using supportive literature.

For example, you can Analyze a community's worship by saying that because of certain experiences in the past, they do not seem to have visible women's leadership in the worship.

VS.

Evaluation – you can say that although the community says that they welcome and affirm everyone's gifts, the invisibility of women's leadership is problematic given their...

According to feminist theologian Boyung Lee, such behavior is shown in...

Obviously these components are a very condensed version of the participatory observation method without being in the field, but the idea is to help students to learn the importance of paying attention/listening, and thick description, starting with their own community that they think they know well. This exercise also surprises some students as they start noticing things they have never noticed before, which also have positively and negatively shaped their own spirituality.

Step 2

This initial introduction to participatory observation is expanded further through two others ways. First, a social justice ministry/activism site is assigned to each covenant group that has about eight students, and as a group they need to research about the site through available literature and online materials first, and visit later as a group for observation and interviews to understand how spirituality for social transformation is at work in the assigned site. Last fall four sites were chosen by the instructor and the Director of Contextual Learning Office (DCLO) of PSR after reviewing each student's application files. The sites are ones that PSR has either long-term relationships or ones that PSR is cultivating new partnerships:

- The Health Reform Forum of the Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland in partnership with Alameda County Health Department;

- Urban Adamah, a Berkeley based educational farm and community center that integrates Jewish tradition, sustainable agriculture, mindfulness and social action;
- CultureStrike, an arts-based social justice strategy hub particularly for migrant artists, women artists and artists of color to create alternative narratives and culture change;
- Berkeley or Oakland City Council, the legislative body that governs the city with a reputation of being a most progressive legislative body in the country;
- First Congregational Church of Berkeley, a typical mainline congregation with the majority white members and progressive theology.

In each covenant group students with their group leader are expected to help one another to gain as much information as possible about their site, and its mission, history, work and spirituality.

While they are learning about the site, they are introduced to some of the markers of Engaged Spirituality embodied in the life of social justice leaders through one of the text books, *Engaged Spirituality: Ten Lives of Contemplation and Action* by Janet Parachin (Howard Thurman, Simon Weil, Elie Wiesel, Marian Wright Edelman, Thich Nhat Hanh, Rigoberta Menchú, Vine Deloria, Jr., Joanna Macy, Rabindranath Tagore, and Dorothy Day). The class also offers sessions on African American Spirituality focusing on race, diverse spiritual practices from the global south focusing on communal and liberation spirituality, Kingian Nonviolence Principles, Courageous Conversations on Race as a spiritual practice, as well as traditional Protestant spirituality and contemplative practices. These topics, designed to invite my students to reflect on what it means to be a spiritually and theologically rooted leader for social change, also provide opportunities for them to communally and individually generate markers and natures of engaged spirituality, ones they may or may not utilize for interpretation of their observation at their site.

For the mid-term project each student is required to write a research paper about a social justice leader in the field of their ministry interests – a public figure or an individual whom they know. In this paper students explore how the chosen leader’s spirituality is forming and informing his/her/their leadership, and then identify the characteristics of this leader’s engaged spirituality as well as students’ own learnings from the identified engaged spirituality for their own leadership. Their own definitions of engaged spirituality would later serve as another lens for analysis and interpretation of their site observation. Like the first reflection paper, students are asked to follow the Description-Analysis-Evaluation-Response framework, but this time their description and analysis should have more depth. As a preparation for this paper and the coming site visit, I give more explicit instructions on the 4-step framework, particularly differentiating observation and interpretation. I also lecture on methods of interviews, how to generate open-ended interview questions from observations, and ways to conduct focus groups (in this introductory class, students seldom move to this stage though). These are introduced not only as methods for site visit, but also ways to conduct needs assessments for their final teaching project, and in their ministry and social justice work contexts where many of them develop curricula for diverse groups and for leadership training from theological/spiritual perspectives.

Step 3

In early November a regular class session is canceled. Instead each covenant group is on their assigned site for a minimum of three hours initially, and each student is required to spend nine additional hours after the visit for further observations, interviews and other activities before they turn in their observation paper in early December. All the logistics for each group’s visit

including the time of visit and invited activities they can participate while on the site are handled by each group via their group leader after the initial contacts that instructor and the DOCL make. Before their visit each group is required to create their ethical behavior covenant on the site, and review ways for participatory observation provided by my lecture and handouts. Usually when my students are on their site, a host(s) gives them an introduction, invites them to participate in certain routine activities (negotiated with me and the DCLO in advance), and allow them to spend some unstructured time for observations and interactions with other regular participants. Typically, the site visit ends with a community gathering time when my students can ask questions from their visit to the host and/or regular participants. After the site visit each group is required to meet to debrief, to compare their field notes, and to generate follow-up questions and action plans – whether they want to organize another group visit or individual visit for further observations and interviews.

After wrapping up the total of twelve hours of site visits, students submit their observation paper (expected to be) fully utilizing their pre-visit research, initial and follow-up visits/interviews as well as their field notes. Again they are asked to frame their paper with the Description, Analysis, Evaluation and Response format. In terms of content, the students are first required to describe what they have observed in detail, and then analyze how engaged spirituality is at work in that site by interpreting its characteristics, patterns, and embodiment utilizing what they have studied in the class about engaged spirituality. The students are also expected to provide their in-depth reflections on what it means to create a community of engaged spirituality based on their participant observations, and what new insights they have gained about their own spirituality and leadership.

Step 4

As a final project where the students bring everything they have learned in the class, they create a teaching project for a group of people of their choice (non-class members) to help increase their awareness of social justice grounded in spirituality. For this they have to incorporate a spiritual practice they have experienced either in the class or in their covenant group. This project is an exercise for the students to think further about how to bring both participant observation and engaged spirituality into their ministry and activism because the paper assignment requires the students to provide the assessed needs of their participants through listening, research, observation, and other methods. In other words, the students should show why the chosen topic (what) and process of teaching (how) of their teaching project are meeting the needs of their participants, beyond what they feel passionate and comfortable to teach. The critical importance of listening to people and contexts in pastoral and social justice ministries is reiterated in this final project.

V. For Further Learning...

While designing and teaching this class for over a decade I realize again and again the importance of the format and contents of our teaching needing to be in sync. Engaged spirituality that nurtures one's spirituality for social justice actions cannot be taught by books and lectures alone. Students need to be able to reflect on their own spiritual and intellectual needs, find ways to nurture them in a community, and explore ways to bring their nurtured soul into the leadership to create a more just world. In other words, they cannot generate hope for the hopeless world without having and sustaining hope within themselves. As our world experiences more serious violence every day, the role of religious education that brings information,

formation and transformation of people and community together is even more critical. Although teaching through engaged spirituality and critical pedagogy requires so much more work of the instructor to identify students' contexts and needs where teaching and learning begins, I find it very fulfilling teaching experience that lets me to practice my own engaged spirituality and pedagogy. Above all, religious education is both a spiritual and pedagogical activity as we lead people out (*e-ducere*), anchoring (*religare*) in God.

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