What's Your Story? - Storytelling and Interreligious Dialogue in Religious Education

Presenter:
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“That’s what we storytellers do. We restore order with imagination. We instill hope again and again and again.”
Walt Disney
Abstract

• College campuses are filled with undergraduate students who have a story. Educators (I am focusing mainly on Religious Educators) can create a classroom setting where student’s voices can be heard and they can share their story. But, how can students learn to hear the story of “the other?” Someone who may not speak their same language. Someone who is of a different faith tradition. Someone who does not live in their community. Religious educators can set the atmosphere for students to learn from one another in the classroom and from others (religious leaders) outside the classroom. Interreligious dialogue can be a transformative and liberating process. It can be a practice of freedom where one can think critically and creatively to imagine and discover a new reality as they participate in transforming their world. Storytelling is the means by which transformation and liberation can happen in the classroom setting – either on or off campus.

I think there is something in young people everywhere- this capacity to dream and to say ‘we have been made for something better than this’ and then doing it’ - Archbishop Desmond Tutu
Icebreaker (10 minutes)
My context and the challenge: (5 minutes)

• The experience I bring to the subject is my own work as a faculty member for seven and a half years teaching undergraduate students from sixteen Christian liberal arts colleges in the area of religious education. The issue I found is that majority of the students had limited experience being in the presence of “the other” or someone of another faith tradition and lacked the knowledge to have mutual dialogue. In order to tackle this issue, I engaged the students outside the classroom in interreligious dialogue with a diverse group of religious leaders who told their faith story. Experiential Learning outside the classroom setting provides students with deep learning in collaboration with knowledge based theory within the classroom.
Theoretical Interaction (15 minutes):

• In this workshop, I will interact with the voices of scholars in James Heft’s book *Passing on the Faith*, which is a compilation of essays from a diversity of scholars given at an international conference entitled, “Faith, Fear and Indifference: Constructing the Religious Identity of the Next Generation.”

• I will take a close look at Paulo Freire practice of freedom in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, where he states, “education is a means by which people deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.”

• In addition, Mary Boys’ “Learning in the Presence of Others,” three interreligious concepts will be discussed (1) theological understandings of another tradition and of one’s own; (2) a spirituality that sustains persons in engaging in dialogue; and (3) educational designs that enable persons to engage at both the affective and cognitive levels.

• To bring practicality to the workshop, storytelling will be used to intrigue the imagination of the participants. At the heart of interreligious dialogue is listening to another’s story.
Tell your Story!

Stories are powerful things. They take you into new worlds, full of new sights and sounds and smells and feelings. In these new worlds, things may be done quite differently from the way they are done at home or at school. People in story worlds may value and believe in different things from you. But you can live in that different world as long as the story lasts. You learn a lot, and enjoy yourself too - The Slaying of the Dragon by Prabhu Guptara
Religious Educator: What’s in your classroom?

Action: (15 minutes)
Storytelling is the interactive art of using **WORDS and ACTIONS** to reveal the elements and images of a story while encouraging the listener’s imagination. The following books will be used to bring storytelling to life and how Religious Educators can incorporate storytelling in their classroom, congregations, and other programs.

- Eboo Patel, *Acts of Faith, The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation* and a close look at his organization Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC)
- Anne Streatry Wimberly, *Soul Stories, African American Christian Education*
- William Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith*
- Susan Shaw, *Storytelling for Christian Education*

The common thread within these books is that storytelling is transformative and liberating.

Depending on the number of attendees, participation will be key to ending the session!