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As a young southern woman during the mid-sixties, I wanted to participate in the civil rights movements birthed in my own city: Atlanta. My Southern Presbyterian raising emphasized the power of covenant community shaped by textual study and ethical engagement for positive change. To witness meant to engage my theology in partnership with others in my community beyond the church walls. So, I began working with a storefront youth program, part of another then storefront center, the Martin Luther King Jr. Center on Auburn Avenue. This work converged with a summer program for children that co-located in a Methodist church in the same neighborhood. The children in our program, ages four to fourteen, arrived each day around 10:00 a.m., after a breakfast at the Black Panther house up the street. We played, we sang, we learned to swim, we read books, and we tried to discover who we were, where we were, and where we wanted to go. I lived in the community too, so I was immersed in this experience while reflecting on my Christian commitment. I found myself moving from experience back to the teachings of my church, to community action meetings in the neighborhood, to prayer, and so on.

Then there was the seasonal swing from Buttermilk Bottom and Bedford Pines back to my New England education, and back to the streets the next summer. Back to the classroom. This became my learning spiral: ideas to practice and practice to ideas. In divinity school where I focused on urban ministry, I was introduced to Paulo Friere's paradigms and feminist, praxis-oriented theology. But only later through similar readings, did I grasp the power of more inductive learning in reciprocal relationships for meaningful analysis, retheorization, and action. I read John Dewey's educational philosophy, exploring ways students and teachers could create meaningful and intellectually substantive knowledge from experience. David Kolb's learning styles theory provided a map explaining how different learners engage the processes of learning. Moreover, he articulated those processes describing the interconnections of theory, analysis and reflection, hypothesis-making and testing, and concrete experience.

Obviously for a long time and still, I find my most generative intellectual discoveries and pragmatic practices for flourishing living in the interweaving fabric of what is now called experience-based or community-based learning and teaching. Passionate about those connections, I eventually came to direct the experiential learning program at Emory University. With other faculty and students, we are creating classes and conversations for examining, implementing, and assessing this ecology of living and learning: We call our approach, Theory Practice Learning (TPL).

In my TPL classrooms, I have learned a lot about the joys and foibles of this teaching and learning strategy. The specific goals and content of each class and the different learning styles of the students shape the ways I use TPL. In "Introduction to Religion," we used simple site visit reports followed by small group discussion and analysis. For the section on textual approaches in "The Methods of Religious Studies" course, Kevin Jaques and I literally cut up a text asking small groups to reorder it and justify their decisions. It was magnificent to watch students succeed in their struggles to piece together these texts according to methods we were studying. But it also was difficult to keep our balance in accomplishing our learning goals while giving enough time to these more participatory and dynamic processes of discovery and learning.

Elements of the traditional classroom do remain in TPL classes, of course; but these classes do require more flexibility, clarity of overall pedagogical intention, and patient planning than traditional courses. Continual reflection on the learning process is key, though it should never overwhelm the theoretical or pragmatic experiences of learning. We and our students keep track of our multiple layered explorations of learning and doing through a variety of techniques. Specific exercises of critical analysis and reflection can be gathered in a structured portfolio. Regular student-supervisory sessions with community partners involved in an internship course provide intellectual input from multiple perspectives. Hands-on exercises such as simulation games or precisely structured observation of phenomena increase opportunities for synthetic thinking about theory and practice.

In the Religion Internship and the Violence Studies Internship classes, both of which I have taught, we use a reflection process we call the "Midpoint Peer and Self-Evaluation Guide." Fundamentally an assessment tool, this guide helps students identify and think about their learning process up to this point. Are their initial learning goals still relevant? Where are their points of confusion and/or insight? This midpoint reflection process enables us to take our integration one step further by examining how effectively and usefully we were engaging this pedagogy.

Karen VanderMuelen and I developed this "Mid-Point Peer and Self-Assessment Guide." Below are some excerpts from that assessment tool:

Mid-Point Peer and Self-Assessment Guide

Throughout the class we are concerned to put theories of community and commitment into practice while developing skills of critical reflection. This evaluation provides an opportunity for class members to focus on their own process and progress, comment on that of their peers, and reflect together on the impact and opportunities of the class. The emphasis in this peer

assessment is on practical matters, such as how well a peer listens, offers suggestions, affirms, and appropriately critiques. It also asks how these practical skills are or are not enhancing intellectual growth. It is not an evaluation of relationships and/or emotional connection or disconnection.

Part I: Self-evaluation

In 1-2 pages, discuss the following:

1. What practical steps are you taking to fulfill your learning contract at this point?
2. What blocks you from fulfilling your learning contract? Think intellectually, experientially, internally, and externally.
3. This as an opportunity to reflect on what you are doing at a level one step removed from portfolio reflection exercises. Be pragmatic and evaluative. Where are you going? How far have you come? How does our TPL approach fit with what you had hoped/expected?

Part II: Peer Assessments

In one page (each) reflect on the work and learning of your peer group members. Come to the peer group with the following written or considered (the community evaluation process in group will be negotiated among yourselves and with your leader. Whether you will speak these to one another or simply trade the papers and then discuss them is up to the group. But each of you will need a hard copy of the comments of your peers):

1. Distinctive contributions your peer makes. Is this person one to provide helpful questions, additional resources, links to their own work, connections to readings? What is his/her 'role' in the group?
2. Peer manner. How does he/she indicate that he/she listens: by further questions, corresponding anecdote or personal insight, or connections to readings? Is the tenor of interaction one of encouragement, helpful (or not) challenge, humorous, etc.? How does he/she respond to questions, comments, encouragement and criticism from others?
3. Learning style. Which of the following does your peer tend to learn by:
 1. concrete experiences — learns best by doing, prefers hands-on learning
 2. reflective observation — learns best by raising questions, analyzing inherent potential and ongoing effects of an idea or incident
 3. conceptualization or theory — learns best by calling to mind theory and comparing

experience to it

4. active experimentation — learns best by taking an idea or incident and applying it
5. asks the "what next" question

These are only meant to get your thinking going. You are in no way restricted to these questions or learning styles. Feel free to draw on your experience of your peers not only in peer group but also class interaction and placements if you are working together as interns.