

Fall 2015

Spiritan Pedagogy: Responses and Questions

Darlene Weaver

Stephen Hansen

Sandra Quiñones

Jason Margolis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-horizons>

 Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Weaver, D., Hansen, S., Quiñones, S., & Margolis, J. (2015). Spiritan Pedagogy: Responses and Questions. *Spiritan Horizons*, 10 (10). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-horizons/vol10/iss10/17>

This Education is brought to you for free and open access by Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spiritan Horizons by an authorized editor of Duquesne Scholarship Collection.

Dr. Darlene Weaver
Dr. Stephen Hansen
Dr. Sandra Quiñones
Dr. Jason Margolis

SPIRITAN PEDAGOGY: RESPONSES AND QUESTIONS

ACCOMPLISHING TASKS AND BEING WITH: A RESPONSE TO DRs. HANSEN, QUIÑONES, AND MARGOLIS

...authentic learning...

The essay by Drs. Hansen, Quiñones, and Margolis is a rich discussion of education and the Spiritan ethos. Several features of the discussion are especially important to the task of ethics education, and forming students in moral and civic virtues more particularly.

*...the telos of
education...*

The authors identify *authentic learning* as a common thread in the stories their essay shares. Authentic learning meaning helping “students to see that their learning has real-world implications that can benefit society.” Authentic learning is arguably the telos of education. Education should do more than train students in a strictly technical sense or more deeply inscribe them into cultural patterns of individualism, consumerism, and exceptionalism. Education should enable critical reflection on these patterns and expose students to ideas that reconfigure their sense of identity in more communal patterns. It should instill in students a sense of mission and stewardship: their education should bear fruit in the world for others.

*We can “serve” in
ways that are actually
presumptuous,
overbearing, or simply
thoughtless.*

Nonetheless, attempts to serve others, however well-intentioned, can be morally problematic. We can “serve” in ways that are actually presumptuous, overbearing, or simply thoughtless. We can treat others as passive recipients of our energy and expertise, and reinforce the very social patterns of inequality that we claim to want to ameliorate. In their essay Hansen et al share a story from Audrey Kane that speaks of a mismatch between her students’ approach to service and the needs of the community members they were supposed to serve. The story raises a good question:

how do we educate students who will want to serve, yet teach them that ways of serving are not all equal? Put differently, how do we educate them for serving through authentic relationships?

*...serving through
authentic
relationships?*

Drs. Hansen, Quiñones, and Margolis provide a clue in another story they share, this time from Eva Simms. Before Simms sends her students to serve in community she asks them to reflect on their own experiences of inhabiting a special place. This exercise encourages students to recognize a common human experience (inhabiting a special place as a child) and the diverse ways in which this experience manifests itself (different places, different motivations or needs for selecting them, and so forth). The reflection process thereby awakens students’ capacities for

...awakens students' capacities for compassion and empathy.

When we cannot fix a problem we can be with those affected by it.

...educating for empowerment...

compassion and empathy. Simms uses this strategy to empower students as agents, to help them to “drive the bus” in terms of using their knowledge, talents, and creativity to accomplish a task for the community they serve. To the extent that student initiative is tempered by compassion, empathy, and respect for the dignity and agency of the community they serve, the students may avoid thoughtless or presumptuous methods of service.

In addition to preparing students who will serve, and who will serve well, a Spiritan ethos can assist educators in preparing students who can be in authentic relationship with others when their attempts to serve are stymied or unravel. The problems we want our students to take on are complex and sometimes intractable. Students seeking to use their education to accomplish a task can also expect to meet with indifference and opposition, at least in some quarters. How can we equip students for such moments? Here education informed by a Spiritan ethos can help. As the General Chapter in Maynooth (1998) states, Spiritans “go to people not primarily to accomplish a task, but rather to be with them, live with them, walk beside them, listen to them and share our faith with them.” When we cannot fix a problem we can be with those affected by it. That “being with” is itself a form of service, and one that may bear fruit in ways we cannot guess or control. In their essay Hansen et al note the risks of being explicit about one’s Spiritan intentions as an educator. There are likely many situations in which it may be wise not to be explicit. However, sharing Spiritan stories and texts can illustrate moral differences among ways of serving, and help students understand the import of “being with,” especially when accomplishing a task is not easy or possible.

Some Questions

Drs. Hansen, Quinones, and Margolis argue that empowering students is part of a Spiritan approach to education.

What does your own experience of educating for empowerment reveal? What tensions or risk have you experienced in this work? Consider the social location of your students. What does it mean to empower them in this context? What strategies have you used?

Drs. Hansen, Quinones, and Margolis describe one Spiritan approach to education as non-colonizing.

What does this mean to you? How might a Spiritan approach to education involve re-education, or practices of consciousness-raising? What obstacles to non-colonizing or post-colonial education have you encountered? How have you responded to those obstacles?

Dr. Darlene Fozard Weaver

Dr. Darlene Weaver
Dr. Stephen Hansen
Dr. Sandra Quiñones
Dr. Jason Margolis

Toward Spiritan Pedagogies of Practice: Three Strands for Reflection. A Response to Dr. Weaver

Dr. Weaver astutely blends considerations of the Spiritan charism, student characteristics, and strategic classroom practices in her article to offer a Spiritan pedagogy for ethics education that is invitational in tone. While her focus is on the teaching of ethics, these three strands of her article are highly relevant to educators in other disciplines who might want to embrace a Spiritan pedagogical approach.

First, Weaver's emphasis on the Spiritan charism reminds educators that teaching can take on the flavor of the Congregation's charism and ethos. She teases apart two sets of Spiritan characteristics for educators: historical and theological. While some faculty might find the overtly theological strand difficult to align with their discipline, the historical strand ("global vision, a sense of community, concern for the poor, a commitment to service, high academic standards, and academic freedom") are Spiritan hallmarks that can flavor the teaching in disciplines less welcoming of theological approaches.

Second, Weaver's recognition of student characteristics ("a generational disposition") can help to remind us of the importance of understanding the cultural perspectives that students bring to the classroom. Helping students to begin to think and act as disciplinary experts requires instructors to be aware of the cultural perspectives that are impeding their growth and learning. Sometimes students' perspectives ("an appreciation for tolerance and a distaste for moral dogmatism" and "incoherent forms of relativism and moral subjectivism") can act as roadblocks. Weaver's recognition of her students' cultural perspective allows her to meet them where they are and to help them begin to think and act as disciplinary experts in the field of ethics.

Finally, Weaver's strategic classroom practices remind us that the purpose behind using a teaching strategy is what transforms it from being simply a good teaching practice to being a Spiritan pedagogical practice. She aligns her use of classroom teaching strategies to create a learning environment that fosters the kind of Invitational ethical instruction that she associates with Spiritan pedagogy. While the strategies are not Spiritan per se, her use of the strategies "to create a constructive learning environment that embodies many of the elements of Spiritan education" infuses them with Spiritan purpose.

...teaching can take on the flavor of the Congregation's charism and ethos.

...the importance of understanding the cultural perspectives that students bring to the classroom.

...the purpose behind using a teaching strategy is what transforms it from being simply a good teaching practice to being a Spiritan pedagogical practice.

...create a constructive learning environment...

1. Weaver identifies some student characteristics that act to hinder their learning as ethicists.

What student characteristics impede learning in your discipline? How might you purposefully approach these characteristics as a Spiritan educator, and what teaching strategies might you employ to address these obstacles to learning in your course?

2. Weaver uses many teaching strategies that are not Spiritan per se, but her use of the strategies serves a Spiritan purpose of creating a Spiritan learning experience.

How do the teaching strategies that you use align with your understanding of a Spiritan pedagogy?

3. Weaver describes how she intentionally models academic rigor in her class as part of the capacity building process. She describes capacity building as “the cultivation of rapport with students that is characterized by mutual respect, intellectual rigor, and enthusiastic co-learning.” Her approach to academic rigor is grounded on a dialogical approach to walking with learners. Think of your own efforts to model academic rigor with your students.

In what ways does modeling academic rigor relate to “being in dialogue” with your students and/or “being in dialogue” with community partners as part of capacity building?

4. In her essay, Weaver states that ethics is an inherently dialogical discipline and thus describes several indirect dialogue strategies that she uses as part of the teaching and learning process (i.e. shared interpretation of selected quotes or definitions, relevant demographic information, the sharing bowl).

Could you see yourself using these strategies as part of your instructional practice? How are these strategies similar to, or different from, the strategies you use to engage students in dialogue? Do you view your discipline as inherently dialogical? How might indirect dialogue strategies be useful not only for coming to an understanding of a disciplinary issue, but also for co-constructing new knowledge with students?

...a dialogical approach to walking with learners.

...co-constructing new knowledge with students?

Dr. Steven Hansen, Dr. Sandra Quiñones, and Dr. Jason Margolis