

# a new culture of learning

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association of practical theology / american academy of religion  
19 november 2011

# caveats

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- much of this presentation is based on a book that came out this past year, *a culture of learning*, and is my attempt to engage it in theological education; keep in mind my situatedness as a Roman Catholic in an ELCA seminary
- it's important to note that the book is a synthetic intervention in an *ongoing* base of research
- for deeper research data and analysis, look to *homago* book, and *now you see it*
- these slides are available online at: [www.luthersem.edu/mhess/aar11apt.pdf](http://www.luthersem.edu/mhess/aar11apt.pdf), as is the paper from which they are drawn: <http://www2.luthersem.edu/mhess/Hess2011AAR.pdf>

what is the “new culture of learning”?  
how does it intersect with theological education?  
are there analogies to the stories told here?

limitless information  
bounded environments

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metaphors of an information  
network, and the culture of a petri  
dish (31)



# learning-based

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argue that a teaching-based approach is sharing stable information “about” the world, whereas a learning-based approach is learning through engagement “with” the world (37)



# personal & collective

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as contrasted to the public and  
the private (56)



# construction of interpretive communities

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blogging is one example, but there are others as well (66)



in communities people learn in order to belong,  
in collectives people participate in order to learn  
(56)



# concerted cultivation

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referenced annette lareau's work here, and used this as a way into thinking about tacit knowing (71)



# tacit knowing

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stable knowledge is explicit  
knowledge, constantly changing  
knowledge is tacit (77)





tacit knowing: we learn by doing, watching and experiencing (77)

inquiry: not learning what we know, but asking  
'what are the things we don't know, and what  
questions can we ask about them?' (83)

# inquiry -> indwelling

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“indwelling is the set of practices we use and develop to find and make connections among the tacit dimensions of things” (85)



hanging out, messing around, geeking out

# build inquiry from passion

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“the new culture of learning is about the kind of tension that develops when students with an interest or passion that they want to explore are faced with a set of constraints that allow them to act only within given boundaries” (81)



what could all of this suggest to theological educators?



is this really all that new?

buechner: vocation is where your deep gladness  
and the world's deep hungers meet

world's needs... what of brokenness? what of the  
hiddenness of God? what of faith in a world of  
pain?

# strengths of theological education

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- esoteric knowledge
- rahner: the recognition of our finitude points to awareness of the infinite (that is, in recognizing our limits we point to the limitless)
- parker palmer: whole sight of mind and heart
- we have practice with making explicit the knowing which comes from tacit sources (spirituality, practices of faith, etc.)
- we have practice with bounded environments that are open (church, mosque, synagogue, temple)

# challenges of theological education

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- certain of our esoteric knowledge has become nearly inaccessible
- our lived sense of God's agency and power has been diminished
- our "bounded environments" are crumbling all around us (denominational shifts, sacred/secular, etc.)
- tacit knowing is often disavowed in certain academic contexts; or some of our "tacit knowing" is hierarchical power over, rather than kenosis
- much of graduate theological education errs on the side of being "teaching-based" rather than "learning-based"
- can we draw on, and offer, "concerted cultivation" of more than the academic?

what could/should we do?

*homo sapiens, homo faber, homo ludens*  
(90)

# *where* are we knowing?

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- in graduate theological schools (seminaries and divinity schools)
- in congregations
- in neighborhoods
- around the globe
- with the Spirit



# *what/who* are we making?

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- disciples (matthew 28:19)?
- communities?
- collectives?
- scholars?
- teachers?
- learners?

# how are we playing?

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- with ritual?
- with music?
- with the arts more generally?
- with philosophical argument?
- with social justice organizing?
- with scholarly disciplines?
- with institutional transformation?

David Tiede's "Academy, Abbey, Apostolate"?

are there analogies to these stories in our realm?

November 10, 2011

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are these analogous? which are of these are actively drawn upon in theological education? which do we utilize in our own learning?

the new culture of learning is a culture of collective inquiry that harnesses the resources of the network and transforms them into nutrients within the petri dish environment, turning it into a space of play and experimentation. (118)

that moment of fusion between unlimited resources and a bounded environment creates a space that does not simply allow for imagination, it *requires* it.  
(118)

only when we care about experimentation, play, and questions more than efficiency, outcomes and answers do we have a space that is truly open to the imagination. and where imaginations play, learning happens. (118)



can theological educators “hang out, mess around,  
and geek out”?

these ideas are an interaction with douglas thomas and john seely brown's book "a new culture of learning, published in 2011

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