



Embodied Digital Pedagogies for Trauma-informed Teaching and Learning in Religious Contexts

Collaborative Session

Religious Education Association

Annual Meeting, 7 July 2021

<https://meh.religioused.org/web/rea2021/>

Preliminaries

- RECORDING: This session is being recorded
- Video/Camera: If you are comfortable doing so, we encourage you to have your camera/video on during this session. It's your choice!
- Chat: Feel free to use CHAT at any time to ask questions, provide input, express concerns. Feel free to send a PRIVATE CHAT to a presenter for things you prefer not to share publicly.
- Roundtables: We'll have activities during this session where we'll divide into smaller breakout groups. Please be prepared to share perspectives and ideas from your breakout group as we debrief afterward with the full group.
- Sharing: Keep confidentiality, share learning. (e.g. no social media post that identify a non-presenter without permission)
- Participation: Feel free to participate in whatever ways feel most safe, appropriate and supportive to you.
- Bio break: We have scheduled one bio break during this session. You are welcome to do whatever you need to do throughout the session to take care of yourself.

Introduction of Panelists

- Kate Ott, Drew Theological School
- Mary Hess, Luther Seminary
- Darryl W. Stephens, Lancaster Theological Seminary

Purpose of Today's Session

Today's session critically examines embodied aspects of digital pedagogies, addressing issues of

- trauma,
- race,
- gender, and
- sexuality

as they intersect within a religious or theological learning context.

Consider: How do appropriate pedagogical choices differ between in-person and digital spaces?

Objective

Participants will share and learn specific trauma-informed pedagogical practices and interventions for digital spaces, adaptable for congregational settings, secondary education, as well as theological education classrooms.



Grounding Exercise: 4-7-8 Breathing

- Sit with feet flat on floor, back resting comfortably, hands in relaxed pose on lap, palms up.
- Relax shoulders . . . neck . . . jaw . . . forehead.
- Eyes closed or soft gaze.
- Tip of tongue behind upper front teeth.
- Exhale completely.
 - Inhale thru nose for count of 4.
 - Hold breath for count of 7.
 - Exhale thru mouth for count of 8.
- Repeat 4-7-8 pattern 3 more times.

Shared covenant of presence

- a starting point of assessment with a group
- a chance to invite reflecting with each other before things get challenging – particularly given the need to learn digital tech in the process
- different versions for different contexts and people
- note the shift from “safe” space to “brave” space
- embody what you say to create trust
- authority, authenticity, agency
- take the time necessary to do this up front, and it will have benefits throughout the following learning (eg. FTE’s vocation care version of Theory U)

an example (from Fetzer and FTE)

- be fully present
- we come as equals
- listen generously
- no fixing without being asked
- turn to wonder
- hold each other with care and prayer
- keep confidentiality, share learning
- believe that it is possible for us to emerge from our time together refreshed, surprised, and less burdened than when we came

elaboration could be...

- **No fixing without being asked.** We are not here to set someone else straight, right a wrong, or author a grand solution. We are here to witness God's movement in and among our contexts and to build learning for the future. If you want the wisdom and resources of others, ask for it clearly!
- **Turn to wonder.** If you find yourself becoming judgmental or cynical, try turning to wonder: "I wonder why they shared that story or made those choices?" "I wonder what my reaction teaches me?" "I wonder what they are feeling right now?"

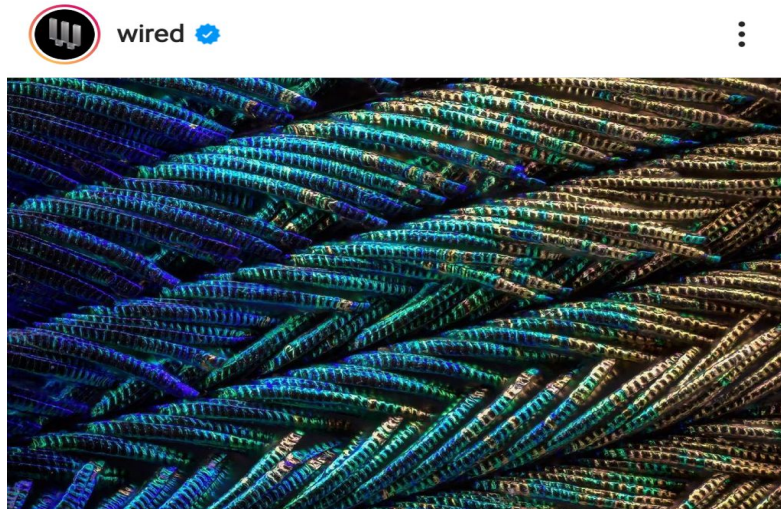


**what would you add or
change?**

don't forget...

- what will you agree to concerning having audio and/or video on?
- what is permissible in terms of sharing out to wider contexts while an event is happening?
- what practices do you want to encourage around using a chat function?
- how will you remind people to attend to their embodiment?
- (notice how we began with some of these!)

Weaving/Braiding Learning Experience



5,779 likes

wired This pure woven magic? It's what peacock feathers look like if you magnify them up to 500 times what you would normally see. "From afar you only see the pattern of the eye," Photographer Waldo Nell says. "From up close you can see the bundles of barbules and coloration unique to each segment. There is a lot of beauty hidden that you can only see up close."

See more of these marvelous photos at the link in the bio.

: Waldo Nell

<https://www.wired.com/2016/04/waldo-nell-the-intricate-beauty-of-peacock-feathers-under-a-microscope/>

We invite you to consider the pedagogical approaches of this session as different, yet overlapping. When woven together, they can create something distinct and new.

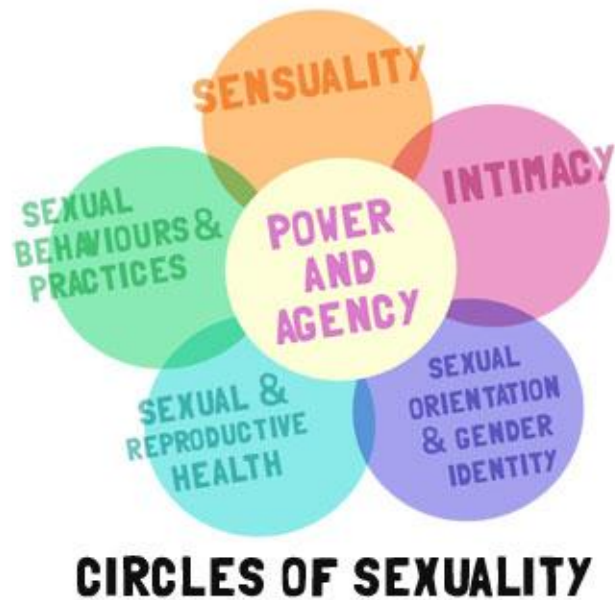
We will focus specific threads and so some of weaving of our own related to:

- Sexuality and digital pedagogy - Kate Ott
- Embodiment and trauma-informed pedagogy - Darryl Stephens
- Digital storytelling and anti-racism - Mary Hess

Then we will engage in a variety of roundtable and large group discussions.

Sexuality and Digital Pedagogy

This presentation will address pedagogical approaches to sexuality education and specifically focus on how to explicitly engage opportunities or affordances of digital technologies.



The Gender Wheel:
 the **BODY CIRCLE**
 the **INSIDE CIRCLE**
 the **PRONOUN CIRCLE**

The wheel is alive. All of the circles turn to show the infinite dance that includes every body inside and outside, as well as out in the world.

At the moment the **Gender Wheel** is turned to show one person's place in the dance.

When any of the circles of the wheel turn just a tiny bit in either direction, another place in the dance opens up, another place where someone belongs.

Words and ways of thinking are changing all the time as old, limiting beliefs transform and evolve.

©2018 Pinar Gonzalez, story and art from *The Gender Wheel - School Edition: a story about bodies and gender for every body* | www.genderwheel.com | the Gender Wheel™ is a trademark of Reflection Press

This keeps **Gender NOW!**

What can you do to honor nature and the dance we are all part of as things expand and grow?
 You can keep your understanding of bodies, gender and pronouns as dancing and alive and current as possible. This means knowing about lots of different kinds of people and including every body as a normal part of your regular, everyday life. Consider how you think, how you speak, what stories you pass on, what books and movies you look at, even how you learn about nature, or history or cultures. And always remember the wheel and your place in the dance.

Body: Transgender Girl
 Inside: Girl
 Pronoun: They

Body: Intersex Girl
 Inside: Nonbinary
 Pronoun: Tree

Body: Cisgender Boy
 Inside: Cisgender Boy
 Pronoun: He

Body: Cisgender Girl
 Inside: Cisgender Girl
 Pronoun: She

Body: Transgender Boy
 Inside: Boy
 Pronoun: He

Body: Intersex Boy
 Inside: Boy
 Pronoun: She

Sexuality and Gender in Online Conferencing



Affordance

- Pronouns as part of one's explicit identification
- Visual and audio engagement
- Movement through use of modalities like “grabbing the mic”

**Different platforms have different affordances!

Constraints

- No requirement to add pronouns
- Video on can cause unstable connections and can add to body image or body dysphoria for trans folks.
- Lack of movement given stationary window

Brief Descriptions of Sexuality-Related Pedagogies



These three approaches are described and given context in *Teaching Sexuality and Religion in Higher Education* (Introduction, p 2.)

- ***Perspective transformation*** is intended to increase moral awareness and empathy for other viewpoints by teaching students how context, experience, and knowledge shape morals, attitudes, and practices.
- ***Embodied learning*** enhances the perspective transformation approach, which can be misconstrued as a solely cognitive enterprise, by emphasizing the full physical, social, cultural, bodily, and psychological context in which a person lives and learns.
- ***Trauma-sensitive pedagogy*** develops awareness of the psychological, social, and theological implications of sexual assault [and other traumas] on the learner, instructor, and classroom environment. This is a holistic endeavor bringing many challenges and potential benefits to classroom pedagogy about religion.

Perspective Transformation

- Awareness of each student that they come to the learning environment with a worldview
- Every student has a unique and sometimes overlapping worldview with other students
- Encountering another's worldview does not require changing one's moral stance about a particular issue, but this may happen as one employs empathy
- Perspective transformation requires acknowledging different worldviews and their impact on morals, attitudes, and practices.

Chat Blast - What do you learn about participants and the classroom context through student pronoun identification or lack thereof?

Embodied Learning

- Knowledge and learning are a full body experience/engagement
- Embodiment is about the physical body and social context/experience
- Learners have bodies and thus their sexuality and gender are part of the learning environment and impacting their interaction with content, peers, and instructor
- Digital spaces are material and embodied.
- Embodied pedagogies recognize bodies as part of the learning process by engaging various senses, creative arts, meditation, movement, and so on.

Chat Blast - How do we feel about being on camera (or what does our name or use of language represent in asynchronous formats)?



Trauma-Informed Pedagogy

Presented by Darryl W. Stephens

Based on Darryl W. Stephens, “Trauma-Informed Pedagogy for the Religious and Theological Higher Education Classroom,” *Religions* 2020, 11, 449; doi:[10.3390/rel11090449](https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11090449).



Trauma Defined

“Individual trauma results from an **EVENT**, series of events or set of circumstances that is **EXPERIENCED** by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse **EFFECTS** on the individual’s functioning and physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being.”

—Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)



Trauma Basics

Trauma

- overwhelms normal coping mechanisms
- is the wound resulting from the event
- is experienced uniquely by each individual
- resides deep in the body
- is spiritually disruptive



Trauma-Informed Response

Trauma-informed classroom instructors

- **realize** the widespread extent of trauma in society,
- **recognize** the signs and symptoms of trauma,
- **respond** by integrating this knowledge into the practice of teaching, and
- **resist** doing further harm to trauma survivors.

—adapted from SAMHSA definition of trauma-informed response



Trauma-Informed Response (details)

Realize the extent: 66 percent of youth report lifetime traumatic event exposure

Recognize the signs:

- Difficulty focusing, attending, retaining, and recalling
- Tendency to miss a lot of classes
- Challenges with emotional regulation
- Fear of taking risks
- Anxiety about deadlines, exams, group work, or public speaking
- Anger, helplessness, or dissociation when stressed
- Withdrawal and isolation
- Involvement in unhealthy relationships



Trauma-Informed Response (details cont.)

Respond appropriately

Instead of asking “What’s wrong with you?”
ask, “What has happened to you?”

Resist further harm

Minimize risk and harm caused by retraumatization and secondary traumatization

Trauma-informed pedagogy is not:

crisis intervention; acute care; creating a therapeutic space for individuals; group therapy;
spiritual direction; or teaching about trauma



Principles and Values of Trauma-Informed Pedagogy

Safety: physical and emotional; tools include trigger warnings and grounding exercises

Trust and Transparency: be clear and transparent about policies, procedures, expectations, professional boundaries, and roles—including self-disclosure in the classroom

Empowerment: enhance student agency through learning covenants and choices of assignments, deadlines, and modes of interaction

Collaboration: become part of the social support network by meaningful sharing of power and decision-making, when possible

Context and Narrative: attention to cultural, historical, and gender issues; sit with the ambiguity of trauma, avoiding the common impulse to redeem the narrative



Care for instructors

- risk of vicarious or secondary trauma (sometimes accompanied by compassion fatigue)
- recognition of our own trauma histories
- importance of debriefing with colleagues, pastors, counselors, and other professionals about the emotional, spiritual, and physical toll



Grounding Exercise: 4-7-8 Breathing

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digital storytelling

- carefully designed storytelling work can be a very creative and empowering form of trauma-informed pedagogy
- digital storytelling can be understood as many things, everything from simply a story shared digitally (which is prevalent in most of our hegemonic cultural spaces) to specific and intentionally created personal stories that are embedded in digital spaces so as to be shared
- [Sonja Vivienne](#): “digital storytelling is a workshop-based participatory media practice focused on self-representation”



four kinds of stories...

- stock
- concealed
- resistance
- counter

[Well explained in the work of Bell, Roberts, Imani, and Murphy](#)



stock stories

- stock stories are the most public and ubiquitous in dominant, mainstream institutions, such as churches, schools, government, workplaces and the media
- stock stories are those told by a dominant group, passed on through historical and literary documents, and celebrated through public rituals, monuments and media representations
- stock stories tell us a lot about what a society considers important and meaningful; for example, stock stories about race and racism provide a useful point of analysis for understanding how racism operates



concealed stories

- concealed stories coexist alongside the stock stories but most often remain in the shadows, hidden from public view
- though invisible to those in the dominant society, concealed stories are often circulated, told and retold by people in the margins whose experiences and aspirations they express and honor, and they provide a perspective that is often very different from that of the mainstream
- we have to be careful, however, that as we engage concealed stories we are not simply reinscribing counter-factual stories, or refusing to contest dangerous stories (eg. Q-Anon); ask “who are they concealed from? for what purpose?”



resistance stories

- are stories, both historical and contemporary, that tell about how people have resisted forms of oppression such as racism and homophobia, challenged the stock stories that support oppression, and fought for more just social arrangements
- resistance stories are the reserve of stories built up through the ages about challenges to an unjust status quo
- these stories include stories of people who have been excluded (though sometimes included and vilified) in history books, but who have nevertheless struggled against various forms of oppression. Such stories can teach us about perspectives and practices that have existed throughout our history up to the present time thus expanding our vision of what is possible in our own work for the kin-dom of God



counter stories

- counter stories are new stories that are deliberately constructed to challenge the stock stories
- they build on and amplify resistance stories
- they offer ways to interrupt the status quo and work for change
- these stories enact continuing critique and resistance to the stock stories and enable new possibilities for inclusive human community
- many of us within religious settings consider our stories to be “counter” stories -- but they are often also, or even only, stock stories that reiterate and reinscribe oppressive systems



digital stories may embody any of the four

- pre-produced digital shorts can be very useful in trauma-informed work, particularly in critiquing dominant representations (stock stories)
- pre-produced digital shorts that have been specifically created for anti-racism work take some of the burden off of BIPOC storytellers, by making their stories available in wider contexts (concealed and counter stories)
- digital storytelling itself can be a process that is an empowering form of anti-racism work (counter and resistance stories)
- storying practices to support people telling their own stories, within carefully designed and convened spaces, can be healing



storying practices designed for good convening

- four elements (feelings, actions, values, narrator) (B&H, 81)
- tell a story / title it (B&H, 82)
- circle of voices (B&H, 111)
- grab a song, understand its lyrics as addressing transcendence (eg. Springsteen's "Letter to you" as a psalm) (Hess, 133)
- mash-up a psalm and a popular song (Hess, 133)

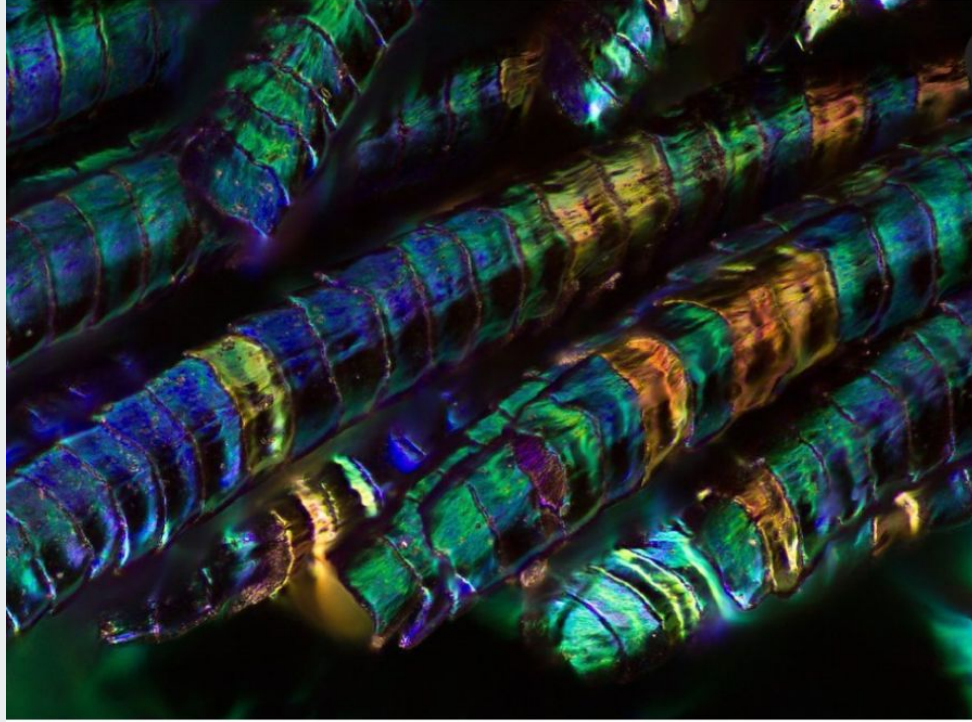
Stephen S. Brookfield and Mary E. Hess, *Becoming a white antiracist: A practical guide for educators, leaders and activists* (Stylus Publications, 2021)

Mary E. Hess, *Engaging technology in theological education: All that we can't leave behind* (Rowman&Littlefield, 2008)



examples too numerous to note!

- here is [a slidedeck](#) of some of my favorite examples of each of these four kinds of stories
- for the purposes of this workshop, I want to share a short video that is of the fourth kind of story -- a counter story, told by people in their own words as part of their own creation; if we have time, I can share others as well
- [“House for All Saints and Sinners”](#) video produced for “TheNines” evangelical Christian conference



Pulling the Threads

Roundtables about differences and overlaps that arise among the three foci.

Zoomed image of Peacock Feathers

<https://www.wired.com/2016/04/waldo-nell-the-intricate-beauty-of-peacock-feathers-under-a-microscope/>

Bio Break

Will return in 5 minutes.



Conversation Starter

Shared insights and
responses from panelists

&

Roundtable responses and
additions to challenging
moments

Zoomed image of Peacock Feathers

<https://www.wired.com/2016/04/waldo-nell-the-intricate-beauty-of-peacock-feathers-under-a-microscope/>

Grab the Mic

Large group discussion session



Thank you!

Session Resources - <https://meh.religioused.org/web/rea2021/>

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