



2005 ATFE Biennium

**MODELS FOR DEVELOPING
REFLECTIVE CAPACITY**

Emily Click

Models for Developing Reflective Capacity

Emily Click
Claremont School of Theology

In these pages I have given some excerpts from my dissertation, in order to add more detail to my keynote speech given earlier today. In particular, I am giving more information about how other fields and theological field educators understand three key terms: mentoring, theological reflection, and curriculum integration.

Mentoring in Theological Field Education

What is Mentoring?

There is a wide universe of connotations to mentoring. Some writers call mentoring relationships “developmental relationships.”⁸¹ The richness of what we mean by mentoring is based in historical myths and persons. Mentoring takes place in an educational context as well as within organizational contexts. Mentoring focuses on individual development, yet it has enormous effect upon organizational development as well. Mentoring has spawned an enormous mixture of scholarly study as well as popular literature. This extensive world of meaning and experience of mentoring complicates its study. Each reader, mentor and student brings varying assumptions about meaning to mentoring that may project vastly differing expectations and outcomes. The *Mentoring Model* is actually a range of approaches, not a singular, tightly defined method.

Two historic contexts inform our present understandings of mentoring. First, there is the Homeric character of Mentor from *the Odyssey*. There also are exemplar mentors from biblical texts as well as from early Christian history. This heritage brings texture to our appreciation of the value of mentoring. We need not even know the specific histories of mentors for their influence to play upon the ways we configure mentoring programs, and the ways we envision the educational potentials therein.

Various authors of mentoring include the following possible roles: mentor, coach, therapist, guide, teacher, role model, sponsor, and evaluator.

Definitions, in general, mix several distinct elements and expectations of a relationship. There are:

- instrumental issues (providing access, promoting opportunity),
- emotional issues (providing support, challenging, enabling personal growth),
- evaluative concerns (determining the level of competence emerging in the mentee and using that as a basis for future promotion.)
- spiritual support and direction

⁸¹ See, for example, Faye J. Crosby “The Developing Literature on Developmental Relationships” in Murrell, Audrey J., Faye J. Crosby and Robin J. Eley, *Mentoring Dilemmas: Developmental Relationships Within Multicultural Organizations*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc., 1999. (3-20). Crosby explores the links between developmental literature, including Gail Sheehy’s 1976 *Passages* and Daniel Levinson’s 1978 *Seasons of a Man’s Life* (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978) and the emergence of mentoring literatures. Her particular focus is on the diversity issues within these developmental relationships.

While definitions mix and modify emphasis placed on these differing concerns, every mentor knows that the most important challenge of mentoring lies in determining which of these concerns should receive their attention.

Questions for Consideration:

1. How do you define mentoring?
2. How do you train supervisors/mentors?
3. How do you seek to inspire compliance with your requirements of mentors?
4. What do you hope the mentor will and will not do with the student?
 - evaluate
 - guide spiritually
 - psychological therapy (if not, why not, if so, what do you mean by this?)
 - pray
 - give a dynamic example that inspires and instructs
 - reflect theologically after events with the student
 - encourage the student to articulate emerging understandings, struggles, needs
 - examine personal issues that arise between the student and others
 - socialize
 - help student to find new ministry positions
 - advise the student on academic decisions
 - focus on issues such as confidence, vision, arrogance, ethics
 - engage the student with major responsibilities in a range of ministry events
 - allow the student to do individual, long-term counseling with congregants
 - allow the student to lead a strategic planning initiative in the congregation
 - expect the student to handle full responsibilities while the supervisor is on vacation
 - handle a large youth group with top leadership responsibilities

Meanings for theological reflection according to theological field educators

Over the course of the research for this study, I asked theological field educators to define what they meant by theological reflection. In general, field educators agree that theological reflection is a dialog or a conversation between contrasting sources of authority, such as experience and tradition. This conversation is made up of processes that address questions about experiences in relation to God's purposes and actions. These processes include analysis and description of events and relevant aspects of the faith tradition, as well as reflection on one's own identity and perspective. There is a common understanding that the *telos* of this conversation is faithful action. One field educator, the late Gary Pearson of Golden Gate Baptist Seminary, expressed this goal succinctly: "It's a process for doing theology to move theology from a noun to a verb."⁸²

Field educators' definitions of theological reflection

Gwen Ingram, of Fuller Theological Seminary, focuses on the way the process of theological reflection puts two crucial elements into dialog when she declares: "theological reflection is the interpretation of one's life and the world by a believer in terms of God and

⁸² Gary Pearson was quoted in a general discussion on theological reflection in Ontario, California, September, 2003.

God's activity."⁸³ Theological reflection enables the reflector to interpret life in terms of God's purposes and actions. Ingram then goes on to illuminate what that process looks like.

*Theological reflection is a complex method of interpreting (a hermeneutic) that bridges between a tradition (scripture, history, doctrine—each understood contextually) and meaning for the present (understood through multiple modes, e.g., psychology, sociology, economics, etc.) in terms of God and God's activity leading to action and communal praxis.*⁸⁴

In contrast, others focus theological reflection on the formation on the identity of the Christian minister. Randy Nelson, for example, uses this definition for theological reflection.

*A continuing, an extended conversation on the practice of ministry and the identity of the minister in which the resources of the faith tradition and the worshipping/faith community are brought to bear in order to enhance future ministry and help form the pastoral identity of the minister.*⁸⁵

For Nelson, then, in teaching theological reflection the primary *telos* is to shape the pastoral identity of the student. Identity, to be sure, is not understood independently of faithful action, but the focus here is not primarily upon the resultant actions but the minister's identity that shapes understandings of mandates for action.

Another interesting perspective comes from Craig Nesson, who focuses on the ways that theological reflection relates to communal work.

*Theological reflection is examining an event within its context from the perspective of what has been revealed about God's own character and activity. Theological reflection therefore takes seriously the witness of Scripture, tradition, history, and systematic theology in the process of deliberation. It asks the questions: How is God at work in this event? How do we understand this event in relationship to the reign of God revealed in the ministry of Jesus? Theological reflection is best carried out in a community, in which one can test one's thinking and find accountability.*⁸⁶

Nesson focuses on the ways that reflection connects the minister with community, in order for the community to engage in faithful action. This emphasis on the role of community in theological reflection was echoed in a discussion of field educators when they stated, "The community helps with accountability to move beyond one's own box."⁸⁷

Field educators generally agree that theological reflection must be connected with action. Reflection is not valued when it is strictly an abstract process that does not result in and inform action. Instead, reflection must not only begin in experience or action, but also must develop an impulse toward action in order for it to become valid theological reflection. Glenn Nielsen put it

⁸³ From a written response made to the question, what is theological reflection, October, 2003, Indianapolis, Indiana.

⁸⁴ From a written response made to the question, what is theological reflection, October, 2003, Indianapolis, Indiana. Terms in parentheses are original to Gwen Ingram.

⁸⁵ From a written response made to the question, what is theological reflection, October, 2003, Indianapolis, Indiana.

⁸⁶ From an email written response made to the question, "What is theological reflection?" November 2004 used by permission.

⁸⁷ A group of four field educators came up with a shared definition for theological reflection in a gathering in Ontario, California, September 2003. The field educators present were: Lynn Rhodes, Donna Duensing, Gary Pearson, and Richard Cunningham.

this way. “(Theological reflection has) a goal to more faithfully turn such reflection into acts of ministry for God’s people.⁸⁸

These quotes are a representative sample of the definitions given by field educators. In general there is consensus that theological reflection means bringing students to a higher level of understanding of their basis, in faith and in reason, for making meaning of action. They see the impulse toward faithful action as a necessary correlative to valid theological reflection. They often, though not always, see a value in teaching theological reflection in a setting removed from action, but none would disconnect such reflection from the actions that precede and follow upon it.

Integrative Teaching and Learning

Five basic areas that are part of the literature of integrative teaching and learning

I have identified five basic areas that are variously referred to in the general literature of integrative learning and teaching.⁸⁹ These five areas are: integrating theory and practice, head and heart, working on an interdisciplinary level, developing critical thinking, and thematically organizing the curriculum.⁹⁰

In a recent paper on nursing education, Mabel Hunsberger, et al suggest that maintaining excellence in clinical education calls for integration not just of theory and practice. It also calls for what they call an “integrative partnership model” in which clinicians and faculty work in equal partnership with each other to teach students in the practical setting.⁹¹ This is because no faculty person in nursing can possibly keep up clinically to the extent of an excellent clinician, due to rapidly changing technologies. However, clinicians also need continually to turn to faculty for their insights. So integration in this case points to something even more complex than integrating theory as ideas into practice. It points to the necessity of building integrative teams that together build a new expertise, about how to intermingle rapidly changing understandings of both theory and practice in the context of treatment of actual patients.⁹²

⁸⁸ From a written response made to the question, what is theological reflection, October, 2003, Indianapolis, Indiana.

⁸⁹ I am indebted for many of these insights to my colleague on the faculty at Claremont School of Theology, Carol Lakey Hess. As a part of our recent curriculum revision, she made several presentations to our faculty in which she distinguished between varying meanings for integration. Her thinking on the matter, and her presentations to our faculty, are foundational for my insights here.

⁹⁰ In an article on integrative studies in history, (Mary Ann Davies, “Integrative Studies: Teaching for the Twenty-first Century,” *The History Teacher*, 34 no. 4 (August 2001) (471-486) Mary Ann Davies explains the way that an interdisciplinary approach can be organized around a theme. She states: “A theme or pattern acts as the vehicle for organization. Students are presented with a variety of information about this theme... (using) materials (that) require differing modes of perception.” This article shows that to speak of an interdisciplinary approach now involves more than combining disciplines, it may also call for combining means of perceiving information, organized around a theme.

⁹¹ Mabel Hunsberger, Andrea Baumann, Janie Lappan, Nancy Carter, Alida Bowman, and Peggy Goddard, “The Synergism of Expertise in Clinical Teaching: An Integrative Model for Nursing Education,” *Journal of Nursing Education* 39, no. 6 (September 2000): 278-282.

⁹² A similar conclusion is reached by Daniel Davis et al in an article on integrating the curriculum in professional education for Architecture. There, the authors found that a new curriculum “promotes critical thinking, problem-solving skills and creativity by integrating realistic issues into the architectural design studios... These... courses ... increase the student’s awareness of the interrelationships between these areas of study.” Davis, Daniel, Elizabeth Petry, James Fuller. “Integrative Curriculum in Architectural Engineering Technology,”

The Carnegie endowment has made the teaching of integration a priority through its national project, “Integrative Learning: Opportunities to Connect.”⁹³ The Carnegie Foundation recognizes that the very meaning of integration is still diverse, even when it is focused on integrating various forms of knowledge and information. “Integrative learning comes in many varieties: connecting skills and knowledge from multiple sources and experiences; applying theory to practice in various settings; utilizing diverse and even contradictory points of view; and understanding issues and positions contextually.”⁹⁴ This statement clarifies that a holistic view of integrative learning recognizes that contextual understanding is part of a larger process that also includes coordinating learning approaches to learning and sources of knowledge. The Carnegie initiative has had broad influence throughout higher education, including theological studies. Its initiative gives voice to a growing trend of institutions to do more than pay lip service to the need to develop intentional strategies for integrative learning.

There is much more to be said about integrative learning and teaching. These examples show that the entire arena of higher education is moving forward in understanding the importance and methods of integrative learning and teaching.

Proceedings of the 2001 Conference for Industry and Education Collaboration (CIEC) held January 30-February 2, 2001 in San Diego, CA.

⁹³ Footnote the Carnegie website

⁹⁴ From the Association of American colleges and universities website definitions “a statement on integrative learning”, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, March 2004.