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# Actualizing Faith Learning Integration: Exploring the Tensions of Mindful Teaching

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## Abstract

This reflective paper describes the experiences of a first-year faculty member negotiating the meaning and living out of faith learning integration within her particular institution. The triple tensions of mindful teaching (ethics/power, individual/collective, and contemplation/action) are framing constructs for this discussion of faith learning integration. Autobiographical narratives of three particular experiences in the author's first year offer opportunities for readers to reflect on the tensions inherent in mindful teaching as it pertains to faith and learning. The author invites consideration of the institutional supports and constraints within these conversations while sharing vignettes revealing the personal nature of these decisions.

## Introduction

Faith learning integration is a common term for Christian scholars (Badley, 2009; Fowler & Pacino, 2012), but it is not an easy concept to actualize. This is particularly true for new faculty emerging from secular universities and programs of education. I am one such individual committed to exploring these complexities within my work. In this paper, I reflect on my learning journey as a new faculty member in my first year at a faith-based university. Specifically, I examine the ways I have and continue to negotiate a key priority in my environment: demonstrating a faith-based foundation on which all teaching, scholarship, and service should rest, and negotiating the meaning of this work within my particular institution. I perceive this recounting of my experiences as valuable not only for my own process in discerning their meaning, but trust these reflections might support other new faculty members contemplating notions of wholeness in their individual pursuits of excellence.

In this reflective paper, I take up and explore the triple tensions of mindful teaching identified in the work of MacDonald and Shirley (2009). I weave together reflective vignettes of my own experience with their articulation of these tensions in order to personify and expand their meaning. This kind of autoethnography is context-conscious (Chang, 2011) in nature because it moves what could be construed as self-absorbed contemplation into larger conversations of the social, historical, and political realities of educational settings. I align myself with Chang's explanation of autoethnography as a self-focused inquiry; a process by which the researcher embraces self-data (made up of memories, self-reflection, and self-analysis) as a means to analyze and interpret experiences. These can then become a window through which to understand larger sociocultural contexts (Chang, 2012, p. 15).

The need for reflective papers such as this is evident in calls for explanations of how teachers discern opportunities for change within our demanding and multifaceted profession (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; MacDonald and Shirley, 2009). My work supports explanations of teaching that “recover the full...mystery of what it means to be one human soul educating another... finding in that instant of communication between teacher and student a spark of the divine, however obscure and misunderstood...”(MacDonald & Shirley, 2009, p. 84). It is this high goal to which I aim, as I recount instances of communication and insight along my first-year faculty journey.

## **Literature Review**

A great deal of literature exists on the subject of faith integration in educational settings (Badley, 2008; 2012; Fowler & Pacino, 2012; Glanzer, 2008). Common among these scholars is agreement about the importance of reflection and its ability to support notions of wholeheartedness in teaching and learning (Dewey, 1938; Palmer, 1993; Rodgers, 2002) as well as community connections between teacher and student that link issues of classroom life beyond the immediate context of a learning environment (hooks, 2003). I address two main themes in the literature to frame this reflective paper: (1) the integration of faith and learning in higher education contexts and (2) the values and tensions in the “mindfulness in teaching” movement.

### **Teaching as a Spiritual Practice: The Integration of Faith and Learning**

Discussions of faith and its role in scholarship go back to the very inception of school at the hands of the Christian church in the first and second centuries. Much later, Schleiermacher (1826/2000, as cited in Mannoia, 2000) articulated his position on teaching as a spiritual act, advocating for the closest attention to pedagogical decisions that involve a prioritized understanding of students’ interests and need. Schleiermacher also reminded teachers of the long view in education, emphasizing the importance of committing ourselves to our own intellectual and professional development in view of the fact that our interactions with students influence far more than a single educational moment.

The phrase “faith learning integration” was first coined in the mid-1950’s and has since become widely-used, despite a lack of consensus about its meaning or scope (Badley, 2009). These discussions focus on the various meanings individuals ascribe to the words faith, learning, and integration, and are shaped by myriad interpretations of priorities within various settings and disciplines. While many embrace the term, others, like Glanzer (2008) contend that faith learning integration language oversimplifies the work in which Christian scholars participate. He argues that the notion that faculty both create and redeem scholarship and learning more accurately portrays the broader and higher callings of scholarship in Christian settings.

Nevertheless, those who embrace faith learning integration have worked to provide ways of thinking about how it might be accomplished. Hasker (1992) invites educators to consider the fundamental principles of a Christian worldview relevant to their particular discipline, in addition to examining the epistemological, methodological, and ontological assumptions inherent therein. He invites scholars to consider the ways that disciplinary practice and Christian faith connect as starting points for the faith

integration journey. Those who are new to the endeavor might take comfort in beginning with what Abigail (2011) terms a “simple devotionism,” encapsulated in such activities as beginning or ending class in prayer, sharing an encouraging word, or reading an applicable Scripture passage. However, she exhorts faculty to consider how we might achieve “more sophisticated weaving of theology and discipline” (Abigail, 2011, p. 69) as we grow in our integration of faith and learning.

Autoethnographic explorations of faith and learning, such as this paper, are one way of engaging in the specifics of this work. It is especially worthwhile since conversations of this nature often become generalized across settings and institutions. Since, from a sociocultural perspective, understandings of faith learning integration are largely defined within particular contexts, I note here the various calls by scholars for those who use the term to say what they mean by it (Badley, 2009; Glanzer, 2008; Hasker, 1992). At present, I consider faith learning integration as an effort to demonstrate the fundamental importance of Christ in my teaching. It is sometimes, as I have heard it said, an effort to play the music of the gospel before singing the words—an effort to live out the reality of a God who loves and redeems us unto Himself. It is actualized in deliberate efforts to connect principles of my discipline with scriptural truth in the structure, content, and learning engagements of my courses. But where and when and how to do this with various groups of students continues to be something I have and continue to negotiate. Mindfulness of this process has become a critical condition of articulating the integration of faith and learning, thus I turn now to the second major construct supporting this paper: mindfulness in teaching.

### **Mindfulness in Teaching**

I perceive important parallels between faith learning integration and the mindfulness in teaching movement. While mindfulness has long been valued in ancient Eastern religious contexts, it is receiving increased attention in Western circles, particularly in the fields of social work, health care, and education (Brantley, 2012; Brown, 2010b). As a Christian, I have chosen to incorporate principles of the mindfulness movement from this relatively new Western perspective, particularly since my first faculty year has provided space to value the mindful reflection and meditative prayer so strongly valued in the Quaker faith traditions of my institution.

Langer (2000) defines mindfulness as “drawing novel distinctions” (p. 1), a process of increasing awareness and noticing in ways that engenders greater sensitivity, openness, and awareness of multiple perspectives. MacDonald and Shirley (2009) base their explorations of mindfulness in teaching on Langer’s work, along with research on teacher identity construction and the meditative practices found in various faiths. They identify seven synergistic characteristics of mindful teaching (open-mindedness, caring, stopping, professional expertise, authentic alignment, integration, and collective responsibility). While these characteristics provide helpful principles for pedagogical decision-making, they are of themselves insufficient to fully guide a teacher’s interactions with students. Further, MacDonald and Shirley are careful to advocate that these “synergies of mindful teaching are not about preaching or proselytizing, but about the responsibilities of each and every one of us to adjust our own behaviors in light of our highest principles” (p. 68).

Mindfulness is the means by which we grow in awareness of the present moment, experiencing everything (whether pleasant or difficult, wonderful or painful) with increasing intensity. It is a kind of “waking up” to the reality of our lives (Brantley, 2012), and it requires courage to more completely engage with what is, instead of pretending or perfecting in order to avoid it (Brown, 2010b). Mindfulness requires qualities of kindness, compassion, and equanimity, qualities we need to offer both to ourselves and to others in order to increasingly nurture mindfulness in our lives (Brantley, 2012).

MacDonald and Shirley (2009) identify and discuss three particular tensions of mindfulness in teaching, evident in the polarities between ethics and power, individual and collective considerations, and contemplation and action. While it is impossible to completely overcome these tensions, they provide ways to recognize the value in instructional situations and actually become the moments in which we can mindfully navigate interactions with students. But before discussing these particular tensions in more detail and unpacking them with narrative vignettes, I first provide some personal background and institutional context.

### **Personal Background**

I grew up in a Christian family and came to a personal understanding of God’s love for me and provision for salvation as a young child. My own schooling experiences were public ones, with the exception of four years of undergrad education at a Baptist institution. I came to my small faith-based liberal arts university in the Northwestern United States from a large secular state university in the Southwestern United States. Prior to 2011, I spent 12 years in international and public education settings where faith integration was occasionally referenced but rarely delineated or supported. My career in public education, in particular, my years as a graduate student, led me to recognize the space and places for faith were outside the classroom doors and hours. In fact, of the approximately 28 full-time professors I interacted with in my graduate program, only one engaged me in conversations around faith, and that was in his home over a meal with other students. I learned quickly when to speak and when to keep silent.

It was also during those years that I learned how much I value the “messy” in learning and living, choosing to align myself with a socioculturally situated notion of learning. I began teaching from a stance that valued the social situations where learners can actively engage in knowledge construction. From this perspective, learning is a process of active engagement situated in particular contexts and shaped by cultural, historical, and political influences. As such, knowledge construction is neither a straightforward process, nor a particular thing or outcome. Its social situated-ness makes knowledge and learning a personal experience actualized in communication with others (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Lave and Wenger (1991) call this a community of practice; my own community of practice is made up of an ever-changing collection of colleagues, students, and friends with whom I share my world. My most immediate connections to other professors in my department have shaped my ideas about faith integration in this particular educational setting, although my limited opportunities to see others do this in practice mean I often learn from the ways people represent themselves or their actions in discussions around these topics.

## University Context

My university's faculty handbook describes faculty members' responsibility to demonstrate faith learning integration as follows:

A faith learning integration essay must demonstrate the candidate's current thinking and practice as to the integration of Christian faith and learning in the appropriate discipline. In most cases this essay should approach integration in the discipline in relatively broad terms. ("Faculty Handbook," 2011)

While this brief statement represents a dearth of information or explanation on this topic, several in the larger university community have engaged in conversation to actively explore these ideas. New Faculty Institute is one place where conversations about these things are welcomed and supported, but the institute is limited in its time and scope to cover the many topics pertaining to faculty's first year. When conversations about faith learning integration came up, it became obvious how many denominational ties are represented in the faculty body, with no formal structure for addressing the commonalities and differences across these faith backgrounds. The complexities of these issues became magnified when intellectuals of various denominations engage in these discussions—I found that our main point of agreement on these topics was that it is too uncomfortable to discuss in much depth.

Additionally, there are significant differences between the perspectives of graduate and undergraduate faculty and the student populations they serve, especially in terms of the institutional structures designed to support faith learning integration. For instance, undergrad students attend weekly chapel services, but graduate students do not; student life supports service and faith-based initiatives for undergrads, a service that is not utilized by graduate students who often work full-time jobs and live off-campus.

These realities are important factors in the sociocultural settings where I engage in conversations of faith learning integration. My own learning process in this area has been full of stops and starts—there have been times I have made my students uncomfortable by virtue of my own unease with these issues. But my particular history, along with my current context, and the classroom composition of each group of students with whom I engage, have all shaped my learning. These factors are an important part of the narrative.

Thus, in the balance of this paper, I further unpack the triple tensions of mindfulness in teaching as an entre into the discussion of my own learning process with faith learning integration. I illustrate each tension with a personal vignette to exemplify how each tension (ethics/power, individual/collective, and contemplation/action) is not dichotomous so much as situated on a continuum. My autoethnographic vignettes are designed to contribute to MacDonald and Shirley's (2009) conception of mindfulness by illustrating these continuums and providing particular explanations of the complexity of faith learning integration, through a mindfulness lens.

## **Ethics and Power: First Steps**

The tension between ethics and power explores the inherent power structures evident in Western education settings, where numbers-based policies and advancement goals might tempt teachers to teach out of our own power and needs rather than students'. Teachers' efforts to be ethical in molding young minds always lies at tension with our own desire for power—acknowledged or not (MacDonald & Shirley, 2009). Mindful and faith-based ethics would encourage us to treat our students as autonomous with their own needs and desires, which lies in tension with larger pressures (real or imagined) for certain outcomes that teachers may wish to accomplish. Beyond that, a commitment to mindful teaching as evidenced in this tension means that every communication reflects in tone and manner a deep respect for others.

In describing this first experience, I address the tension between ethics and power by sharing my first engagement with students on the topic of faith. Initially, I felt concern that my own responsibility to initiate faith learning connections might lay in tension with the ethic of care (Noddings, 2003) I wanted to establish with students. I worried that some would not be comfortable with conversations of faith in the context of a literacy theory class, but I also felt compelled to address it at the outset of our course.

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On the first night of my first class, I entered our classroom a full hour and a half ahead of my scheduled teaching time. I had prayed about how this foray into faith integration might be received by my students, when some might not profess faith at all. I had also discussed this issue with my department chair; about how exactly one brings faith into what I had previously categorized as a public sphere during my previous years as an educator. I remember asking him, "Should I pray out loud?" His answer: "Do what feels most comfortable to you."

I decided to learn what felt most comfortable to my students—after all, it was their class. I felt strongly the need to know their comfort level with these things even as I tried to move within my own. I brought index cards and broached the subject carefully, after introductory remarks:

I am new to this process, having come from public education settings where faith is an unacknowledged issue in the business of learning. But we're in a faith-based university, and I believe that should have some bearing on our course experiences. Faith is a large part of my life, but I manifest that in different ways, with different people, at different times. And I'm curious to know how other professors here have handled this in their classes. I also want to know whatever you are comfortable sharing with me regarding your own faith journey.

Thus was my first step into building a community of trust (Parks, 1986) wherein teachers make plain what their students need to hear: "I am extraordinarily perplexed over this problem, too. Let me share with you the way it looks perplexing to me" (Mannoia, 2000, p. 185). It did not feel risky to relinquish my power position in favor of a student-centered learning ethic—I had learned to do that long ago. What felt risky was not knowing what I would do with their feedback.

I nervously passed the cards around the table and tried not to fidget while students wrote at various lengths and silently passed the cards back to me, facedown. I scanned them quickly enough to recognize that there were various states of openness represented in the room, thanked them for taking the time to share with me, and moved on.

Later that night, I read students' comments more carefully and learned that for two of my students, this was their first class at this university and they had no experience with professors trying to integrate faith into learning ("sorry!"), but they did feel open to the idea. Another student explained that prayer was how she got through the day and that she wouldn't mind more. Two students claimed that while they did not actively attend church or practice a certain faith, they understood that this could be important. The last student said she aligned with Catholicism but valued the Jewish faith honored in the school setting where she taught.

This gave me a great deal to contemplate. I was a bit surprised not to find anyone "like me" in the class, a blatant example of how we adopt particular identities and seek out those who validate them. Overall, I sensed openness among my students, but felt I would need to tread lightly. Perfect. That was all I felt comfortable doing, anyway.

Initially, I began class each week by reading a selection from Cowman's (1999) collection of devotional thoughts, but abandoned it after two weeks of lackluster feedback from students regarding its appropriateness and connection to their own lives. Around that time, I began informally finding out how everyone was doing, gently insisting that we "go 'round" at the beginning of each class so that everyone could share something, no matter how small a detail, about their life. Students perked up around this common activity...tired faces lifted a bit as teachers reflected on the funny moments of their day or commiserated about budget cuts, principal observations, and sick students. Something in my perception of faith learning integration shifted slightly as I noticed this. Maybe an important part of it was the need to know my students and help them know one another (Palmer, 1993).

I decided to search for readings that more directly connected faith to public school teaching settings and found Fiore's (2010) collection of short story reflections on his teaching journey, *What They Have Taught Me*. When I asked students if they thought this book might be more appropriate for discussions of faith related to our profession, they readily agreed. These anecdotal reflections on a teacher's faith lived out in inner-city school settings prompted further discussion among my students and provided additional opportunities for us to explore the tensions between the power we had as teachers, the pressures we felt to use that power in certain ways within an outcomes-based educational system, and the ways these things lay in tension with our desire to be ethical in our interactions with students.

The unfolding of faith discussions in this particular learning context taught me that, while it lay within my power to raise and pursue faith conversations with students, I could not do it at the expense of the ethical obligation to know them. I found it critically important to acknowledge each individual's life and personal needs within the context of that class. And students reciprocated, asking me about my life and giving me opportunities to share about my own life. It was here that I learned how my willingness to pursue faith

learning integration in a mindful manner increasingly revealed that making space for the personal details of students' lives reduced the power differential between myself as expert and students as learners. It made it increasingly possible to acknowledge the ethic of shared learning in the realm of faith learning integration.

### **Individual and Collective: Cohort Considerations**

The second tension in mindful teaching is between the individual and the collective. MacDonald and Shirley (2009) illustrate this tension in the tendency for educators to provide one another with mutual support to the exclusion of what might be best for an individual child or an underserved population. As a collective of educators, it is easy to think we are doing everything we can for students while ignoring the ways this mindset prevents us from doing exactly that. Within this tension lies the potential for groupthink, a phenomenon wherein educators avoid conflict, “preferring silence to commentary in the face of injustice” (MacDonald & Shirley, 2009, p. 71). Negotiating this tension involves deliberate efforts to overcome passivity, balancing the need for thoughtful concentration with the need for civil courage.

For me, this tension was epitomized in the context of an off-campus course I taught for a cohort of teachers working in a high-needs population. I was tempted towards passivity about faith in the context of this particular educational context—a cohort of teachers from five different schools, one of which was on a reservation. I felt anxiety about coming in as a cultural outsider to a public educational community who worked hard on behalf of their student community, yet who were also experiencing state and district pressures to meet testing benchmarks. How does faith learning integration enter into these kinds of public settings? In sharing this second experience, I reveal the difficulty of navigating my own individual aim to integrate faith in public contexts in the face of students' collective desire to leave faith out of the learning process, altogether.

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As I drove the five hours to my first weekend meeting with these teachers, I thought of my own years of teaching and going to school—it was so difficult to add an intensive graduate course to schedules already full with work and family obligations. Meeting my students for the first time, I sensed immediately that they had little time for anything not deemed academic. Having come from this public school environment myself, I could relate, but I also felt the individual tug to avoid passivity about faith, despite the courage it would require to address it in the face of the students' collective desire to avoid it.

During our second class, I shared a TED talk by Brené Brown (2010a) on the power of vulnerability. I chose it because I found parallels in her research that correspond not only to my own faith-based ideals in teaching but to larger professional values of open-mindedness (Rodgers, 2002), caring (Noddings, 2003), integrative experience, and collective responsibility (MacDonald & Shirley, 2009). Brown asserts that without the willingness to be vulnerable or honest with others, we numb ourselves not only to the pain we try to avoid, but to the joy we so desperately seek. For me, Brown's point lies at the heart of a teacher's highest calling: to know, care for, and love one's students, staying open to the humanity of the profession despite all outward pressure to measure, standardize, and conform.

I cannot recall my exact words of introduction to the video except that I made reference to my own faith as a Christian and its influence on my life and work.

Silence.

No one nodded their head or made eye contact.

I stammered through an explanation that I was evidencing my own vulnerability in choosing to spend valuable class time showing a video such as this, but hoped they would stay open to the message and consider Brown's words. And then I pressed "play."

Students listened respectfully and participated in round-table debriefing conversations after the video. I heard only snatches of their conversation, which shifted or slowed dramatically when I lowered myself into a chair at any table. So I could not get a sense of things beyond the general understanding that students appreciated the content but perhaps did not understand the relevance. This was my perception until one student said to me directly,

I respect you for addressing this issue and showing us this video. I'm a Christian too and I think we need to talk about these things. But you probably lost the respect of most everyone else in this room by saying you're a Christian.

This was a painful note on which to begin, and it shaped the resulting course experience in ways I am still coming to understand. I worry that I placed my own individual priorities over the needs of the collective, even in my indirect discussion of faith through a research-based talk on vulnerability. I worry that I was grossly unaware of the cultural tensions involved in a white educator sharing about faith within a Native American and Hispanic culture-dominant school district that had been burned in the past by well-meaning but overbearing missionary-types. I worry that the silence with which teachers greeted this conversation caused my civil courage to crumble; I did not purposely open faith learning discussions in whole-class settings for this cohort again.

For me, this experience with faith learning integration epitomized the pull between my individual desire to do what I was supposed to do by raising issues of faith in a collective learning context so purposefully divorced from wholehearted and mindful examinations of these issues (MacDonald & Shirley, 2009). I overcame passivity by engaging in the discussion, but fell back in the face of students' desire to leave faith out of learning, altogether. In hindsight, I have realized that the mindfulness required to feel the depth of this discomfort and write about it publically is enormously significant. I am living out the ideals of mindfulness in teaching by fully acknowledging the pain of losing my students' respect, while acknowledging that I am learning. This work has enabled me to move out of mentally castigating myself for not knowing to a more mindful place of recognizing that while I don't fully know, I am still worthwhile and better able to participate in future conversations because I did not run away from this one.

These teachers and I made the best of this experience, but I am cautious about claiming that I know what to do in the future. I only know that this experience provided a moment of clarity in which to recognize my

failure to understand. And this motivates me to continue my search for new understandings of how to actualize faith learning integration in settings where many students do not name Christ (Badley, 2009).

### **Contemplation and Action: Deciding When to Act**

MacDonald and Shirley (2009) deem the tension between contemplation and action as the chief concern in the pursuit of mindful teaching. For them, contemplation is a process of reflection and meditation designed to support calm, purposeful direction in one's teaching endeavors. Mindfulness researchers would expand this by saying that it is only possible to reduce stress by clearly seeing all that is in front of us, remaining "aware and present in order to give ourselves the best chance to make the most skillful response to whatever situation life offers us" (Brantley, 2012). But contemplation is a practice all too often neglected by busy educators engaged in their profession. The stress of teaching is actually leading many educators away from the profession at an unprecedented rate (Bomer, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). And those who do not leave often get caught up in the busy-ness of educative pursuits to the detriment of contemplative work.

In my own experience, this tension between contemplation and action is reflected in an implied refusal to prioritize the areas in which I ought to act. Often, I simply contemplate efforts of faith learning integration without moving to actualized instruction. It is easy to keep silent rather than take action. There are clear parallels between this tension as articulated by MacDonald and Shirley (2009) and the work of Brown (2010b), which describes the courage and vulnerability required to be still and contemplate, but even more so to take action. In this third experience, I share my efforts to negotiate this tension within faculty discussions about faith learning integration.

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Feeling a bit raw from the mid-semester grind, I lowered myself into a chair at a departmental scholarship meeting for a conversation on what it means to integrate faith and learning. This was my first opportunity to attend this kind of meeting and I went to listen. I was still making my way through the fuzzy stages of adjustment in my first year, paying attention to the community of practice around me as best I could. I was in the silent phase of my academic journey.

My colleague opened the meeting with a question:

To what degree is an individual faculty member responsible to articulate a conception of how faith impinges on academic work (teaching, service, and research) in more detail than that faculty member's institution has articulated its corporate answer to that same question?

And so we approached the core of the faith learning integration dilemma.

As previously stated, the faculty handbook at my institution shares little about the specifics of faith learning integration, mentioning only that faculty are expected to integrate faith with their discipline of study, and to write an essay evidencing that in their third and sixth years. Support structures for new faculty have been put in place in recent years in the form of a New Faculty Institute, which includes

informational pieces on the faith heritage of our university, along with opportunities to dialogue in a forum of other faculty members about their perspectives on these issues. But these two or three conversations, while valuable, have done little to help me appropriate a true understanding of a way forward in faith learning integration work in my first semester, much less give me an idea of what I might write to prove my ability to integrate faith and learning. I felt the caution with which such discussions were raised and interpreted what went unsaid as a lack of understanding about what direction to proffer.

Fortunately, members of my department have taken up these questions with a greater sense of purpose and urgency, desiring to shape the expectations for scholarship in our teaching-oriented university. My colleague was hitting the issue head-on. After a round of head-nods and chagrined looks, faculty members ventured into a listening discussion with acknowledgements that while what we were expected to do was insufficiently supported, people still had ideas they could share.

I sat there contemplating the issues, and without planning to break my own silence, I opened my mouth. I shared briefly about the awkward interaction with my cohort of teachers several weeks earlier and expressed my lack of understanding with how to proceed or what it would ultimately teach me about this process of faith learning integration. I confessed to not knowing... a vulnerable moment, to be sure (Brown, 2010a). As I left the meeting, I felt a vague sense of unease. I acutely felt the outsider status in my community of practice regarding this issue. While I sensed my colleagues' support, I wished I had contemplated more instead of speaking out, an action I regretted almost immediately. What would my fellow faculty members think about me? How far would my admission of not knowing go?

Abigail (2011) points out that many experience the pain of feeling that they are an outsider and struggle with "feelings of alienation and differentness. The difficulty though...is that there is no 'inside.' It is a myth, an illusion. We desire to belong but cannot achieve it. In our longing, we fail to see the benefit of assuming little and questioning much" (Abigail, 2011, p. 83). These words epitomize the tension between contemplation and action. We must devote time to thoughtful contemplation and prayer if we are to mindfully engage in teaching acts that align with our deepest desires, but moving from contemplation to action forces us to call upon our courage. Can we abandon our assumptions of what others might think? Are we willing to invest in the cost of questioning much? In this instance, my action to speak out of contemplation and my colleagues' openness to my words momentarily deconstructed the myth of the inside, and made it more likely I will take action in the future.

## **Final Reflections and Future Directions**

As I have engaged in conversations with others on this topic, I find that my thinking about these issues has evolved since the original draft of this article. To me, this is representative of my commitment to continued growth and exploration of faith learning integration. I do take encouragement from course feedback comments from my first semester of teaching, where a student wrote,

Thanks for always taking the time to talk and pray for all of us! It meant a lot, and [I appreciate] [sic] your willingness to share about your life. I learned a lot in the course, and I feel my reading theory & instruction was greatly improved.

These words constitute one of the best words of encouragement I have ever received and spur me on to further exploration. What does the integration of faith and learning mean for my discipline? Where does this integration take place? In students' minds and hearts? In mine? In the curriculum (Badley, 2012)? To this point, I have believed integration to be my responsibility and evident within my interactions with students and the larger classroom ethos I helped create. But I have not yet learned how to support my students in pursuing their own faith learning integration. My desire to help students do this for themselves is at the heart of a critically conscious education advocated by Freire (1970). I believe his concept of reading the world as a precursor to reading the word is key to equipping students to identify and work against oppression, an educative practice that dovetails beautifully with mindfulness.

Additionally, I continue to seek clear ways of assessing how well I have achieved faith learning integration in my various courses (Badley, 2009; 2012), particularly in courses like my cohort where student contexts and interests lie so far afield of my institution's. Palmer (1993) speaks eloquently about this quest: "The mind motivated by compassion reaches out to know as the heart reaches out to love" (p. 8). This reaching out exemplifies the heart of my own spiritual sanctification process, as a learner and a teacher, and constitutes a call for each of us who acknowledge the call to integrate faith and learning.

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