

# Religious Education for a Changing World

*January Term, January 17-21, 2012  
9:00am to 5:00 pm*

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*The great end in religious instruction is not to stamp our minds irresistibly on the young, but to stir up their own ... All the elementary ideas of God and duty and love and happiness come to [the child] from his [sic] own spiritual powers and affections. Moral good and evil, virtue and vice, are revealed to him in his own motives of action and in the motives of those around him.*  
- William Ellery Channing (1837)

*I loved learning. [Classrooms were] the place where I could forget someone else's image of who and what I should be... I could forget that self and, through ideas, reinvent myself.*  
- bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* (1994)

*We have somehow to understand a dangerous and endangered world, and provoke others to understand it if we are in some fashion to transform it.*  
- Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination* (1998)

## Overview

This new cornerstone Religious Education (RE) course provides religious professionals with a comprehensive, integrated, overview of the past and present impact of RE philosophy, methods, and controversies. Students also grapple with issues of human and faith development in a multi-racial, multicultural world. *This course is required for all degree candidates entering fall 2009 or later.*

## Course Blueprint

Religious Education in its American Unitarian Universalist context has come a long way since the days of Benjamin Rush who, alongside kindred spirits in the 1790s, was searching for a way to correct immigrants who “drank too much” and lacked moral

cohesion! From its early days, RE has been one of the constant vehicles for passing along the traditions of Unitarians, Universalists and Unitarian Universalists. At the same time, it has also been the location where children, youth and adults could explore the great questions of what it means to live a quality life and face imminent death, craft intentional communities of care and support, and advance actions that correct social wrongs. In a 1960 lecture, Sophia Fahs, one of the redwoods of liberal religious education, stated that, “It is not our ancestors who will be changed by what we do. It is our contemporaries, and our descendants for generations to come, for whom we should be feeling responsibilities.” Indeed, Religious Education – as both noun and verb - is a central place in our tradition where values and practice meet and mingle. It is our public face, the container that holds and transmits our traditions from one generation to the next. It is a springboard for action and, equally important, a wellspring from which we draw inspiration, solace and deep connections to that which is Holy in our lives.

This course is designed to be a comprehensive introduction to ideas and practices that give Unitarian Universalist Religious Education its meaning and purpose. It is also a course that shows how to make alive those ideas to young and old alike. As one might expect, crafting such a course in a way that is satisfying for broad swaths of people is a near impossible task, for there is limited time in a seminar to explore the countless ideas and practices that merit our attention. Such a project is all the more complicated in that every student will have had experience in “being educated” in both formal and informal settings, so the course must balance issues of learning with those of un-learning and re-learning. But jumping into it is our challenge, and that is what we will do!

*Religious Education for a Changing World* builds on our UU tradition of thinking sharply while loving expansively and deeply. We will explore our rich **history of religious education** and make note of how formative women and men shaped its **philosophy**. Angus H. MacLean, yet another one of our big-thinkers, famously said, “the **method** is the message.” In that tradition, students will experience first-hand a variety of different teaching strategies that stir the **imagination** and evoke new ways of thinking and being. As an interdisciplinary people, UUs call upon a variety of sources that enable us to discern the terrain of the human spirit and experience. Having a solid understanding of **how humans encounter and make meaning of the world** in different ways is central to being an effective educator. The very role of education is to introduce new ideas into the mix, many of which will land as **controversial** on the ears and hearts of the receiver. The course will explore the issues that flummox religious education as well as religious educators (e.g., technology, intergenerational work, ageism, multi-racial families, gender and RE, power stratification, etc.). And, finally, context matters. Students in this course will be asked to investigate religious education as it lives presently in congregational life, defining its essence, and exploring ways it might go in the future.

It is also noteworthy that the entire course is designed with principles of anti-racism, anti-oppression and multicultural teaching and learning in mind, so as to model how this lens applies to religious education. Students should be prepared to learn and expand their *own* boundaries for learning through a variety of different media, mediums, and pedagogies.

### Who should take this course?

Any educational experience that lacks diversity of perspective and experience is not educational, it is a “orientation” or “training” session. This course welcomes *all* learners who want to understand how our history as educational pioneers can shape our future, and how our hopes and dreams for justice and equity can be a launching pad for social change. Seminarians and ministers will learn how to frame their roles as “principal educators” in congregational life. Religious educators will have an opportunity to share first-hand their insight on the inner workings of RE-Life while revisiting the theological framework that informs their practice. Religious workers will gain invaluable insight into how learning communities foster and support new ways of thinking and being. Everyone will walk away with a greater understanding of what is involved in teaching for spiritual depth, learning for the sake of justice and accountability, and advocating for democratic practices that advance the principles of Unitarian Universalism.

## Required Texts & Media for Summer 2011

Consult the LiveText “Course Overview” tab for the daily schedule of readings and assignments.

### Religious Education: History and Purpose

**Nelson, Roberta** (2008) (Editor). Claiming the Past, Shaping the Future – Four Eras in Religious Education 1790-1999. Text available from Liberal Religious Education Association (LREDA). See <http://www25.uua.org/lreda/content/shop.html> [Read whole book.]

**Oakes, Jeannie and Lipton, Martin.** (2003) Teaching to Change the World (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). McGraw-Hill: Boston [Historical context that has shaped our culture of “education.” PDF chapter in LiveText]

**hooks, bell.** (1994). Engaged pedagogy. In Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom. Routledge: New York. [PDF chapter in LiveText]

**MacLean, Angus** (1962). *Method is the Message*. Unitarian Universalist Department of Education: Boston. [PDF essay]

**Nelson, Roberta** (2001). *The teacher as spiritual guide*. In The Essex Conversations: Visions for lifespan religious education. Skinner House Books: Boston. [Read essay. PDF]

## Learning & Teaching Styles, Developmental Theory

**Goodman, Diane.** (2001). Promoting Diversity and Social Justice: Educating People from Privileged Groups. [Comprehensive overview of “identity development theory” that will be useful for self-knowledge, and also helping others see the world in more complex ways. PDF Chapter; LiveText]

**Gardner, Howard.** (1993). Multiple intelligences: the theory in practice. A reader. Basic Books: New York. [PDF Chapter, LiveText]

**Wilkerson, Barbara** (ed). (1997). Multicultural Religious Education. Religious Education Press: Birmingham, AL. [Read Part II of the text. For the purposes of this course, choose and read about a racial/ethnic group you will most likely serve in your ministry.]

## Teaching Methods

**Dayton, Tian.** (1990). Drama Games: Techniques for Self-Development. Health Communications, Inc.: Deerfield Beach, FL. [Excellent resource for creating learning experiences that foster meaning-making. Intergenerational. Purchase and skim for in-class workshop.]

**Dewey, John.** Experience and Education. (1938). Simon and Schuster: New York. [Read text]

**Palmer, Parker** (1993). To teach is to create a space... In To know as we are known: Education as a spiritual journey. Harper: San Francisco. [PDF excerpt, LiveText]

**Wink, Joan.** (2005). Critical pedagogy: Notes from the real world (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). Pearson Press: Boston. [Critical pedagogy is both a “theory” and a form of practice that is extraordinarily useful for any educator committed to equality, empowerment and real-world learning. The methods used for the course are nested in these ideas. Read text].

## **Films** (Please view prior to January)

1. Film: “Half Nelson” (2007). Director: Ryan Fleck.
2. Film: “Class” [Entre les murs or “Between the Walls”] (2008). Director: Laurent Cantet.
3. Film: “Winter’s Bone.” (2010). Director: Debra Granik.

4. Film: “The Kids Are All Right.” (2010). Director: Lisa Cholodenko.

*NOTE: There will be additional short readings and evening assignments over the course of the week.*

**Excellent Resources** (optional readings for life-long learning):

Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin, Eds., *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook*, Routledge, New York NY, 1997.

Boys, Mary (1989). *Surveying the territory: Religious education in Educating in Faith: Maps and visions*. Sheed and Ward: Kansas City, MO.

Channing, William Ellery (1819). *Unitarian Christianity*. Delivered at the ordination of Rev. Jared Sparks, Baltimore, Maryland.

Derman-Sparks, Louise and Ramsey, Patricia G. (2006). What if all the kids are White? Anti-Bias multicultural education with young children and families. Teachers College Press: New York.

Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco CA, 2000.

*Essex Conversations: Visions for Lifespan Religious Education*. Unitarian Universalist Association: Boston.

Thomas Groome, Educating for Life: A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent, Crossroads Publishing, NY, 2001.

Dale McGowan, Parenting beyond belief: Raising ethical, caring kids without religion. AMACOM: New York, 2008

Maria Harris, Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church, John Knox Press, Louisville KY, 1989.

Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran, *Reshaping Religious Education: Conversations on Contemporary Practice*, Westminster Knox Press, Louisville KY, 1998.

Hurd, Tracey L. (2005). Nurturing children and youth: A developmental guidebook. UUA: Boston.

Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, *Teaching from the Heart*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis MN, 1991.

Barbara K. and William R. Meyers, *Engaging in Transcendence: The Church's Ministry and Covenant with Young Children*, The Pilgrim Press, Cleveland OH, 1992.

Noddings, Nel. (1995). The philosophical thought of John Dewey. In Philosophy of Education: Dimensions of Philosophy Series. Westview Press: Boulder: CO.

Jean Nieuwejaar, The Gift of Faith, Skinner House, Boston, MA, 1999.

Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, S. Steve Kang, and Gary A. Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom: Multicultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation*, Baker Academic Grand Rapids MI, 2004.

Padraic O'Hare, The Way of Faithfulness: Contemplation & Formation in the Church, Trinity Press International, Valley Forge PA, 1993.

Parker Palmer, The Courage to Teach, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco CA, 1998.

Rebecca Parker, *Education as liberation in The Essex Conversations: Visions for lifespan religious education*. Skinner House Books: Boston, 2001.

Elizabeth M. Strong, The Larger Message: Universalist Religious Education's Response to Theological and Cultural Challenges 1790 to 1930, Meadville Lombard Press, Chicago, IL, 2004

## **Pre-Course Assignment \***

### The Religious Education Landscape Project

Educational processes are never static, and require the investigator to consider several distinct yet related elements in order to gain a fuller understanding of its character. Issues such as theology, culture, demographics, staffing, budget, schedules, community and church history, even current events have extraordinary impact on the hows and whys of any RE program. Your task during this course is to explore issues of context in light of the curricular decisions that are made by RE teachers, staff and/or ministers.

Prior to our collected time together, get a first-hand understanding of the workings of religious education in a UU congregation (or, if you are not a UU, then your home congregation. If you are enrolled in the Congregational or Leadership signature course, you should consider using the D/MRE in your Teaching Congregation. Persons who are currently D/MREs should consider choosing another UU congregation, or a non-UU congregation in your community). Take into account that children's religious education programs often coincide with the program year of the church.

\* Please complete your explorations before the end of November, which is when RE programs tend to shift into a Winter Holiday schedule.

### Phase One

1. Choose a congregation that has programs for adults, youth and adults. If possible, your Teaching Congregation would be an excellent choice!
2. Set up an appointment with the person in charge of RE in your selected congregation. Explain that you are taking this course, and wish to learn how this particular congregation has decided – for whatever reason! – to conduct religious education as it does. You will need to explain that your first task is simply to observe, and after the Intensive week in July, you will return with another set of questions based on our class discussions and readings. The pre-interview should take up to one hour, and the post-class interview may take up to two hours.
3. Conduct the interview. Consider questions such as:
  - a. How, when and why was RE started in the congregation?
  - b. How is it organized? (e.g., organizational chart, staff, enrollment figures)
  - c. What is the general philosophy of RE? Are there specific sub-objectives the program seeks to achieve? Are goals different for different age groups?
  - d. What do you see and hear people learning? How closely does that evidence match stated intentions?
  - e. How are instructors recruited, oriented, and supported?
  - f. What are the particular challenges of doing RE in this congregation (congregational culture issues, politics, staffing, theological diversity, etc.)?
  - g. Get permission from the director to attend ONE class session for EACH of the following groups: a children's class (3-12 year-olds); middle/high school; and an adult RE course.
  - h. Include other questions that provide insight into the "culture of RE" in this particular setting
4. Attend one class session for **each** age group in order to jot down observations of what you see and hear happening. Create a worksheet to your liking that allows you to take DETAILED field-notes. Pay particular attention to:
  - a. the goals and outcomes of the session you are observing (if possible, you should ask the teacher about her/his goals prior to the course);
  - b. the difference between the explicit curriculum (the stated goals) and the implicit curriculum (the unstated goals that are actively being taught). What participants are *really* learning?
  - c. who is participating in the course (notice issues of verbal and body language)? How does that participation look different for various people?
  - d. the instructors style and preferences in terms of his/her decisions about use of instructional strategies?
  - e. To what degree does each class have the potential to change the way children/youth/adults live in the world? In other words, does the lesson

have potential to shift/change the STRUCTURES of how they make sense of things (i.e., issues of development)?

- f. how does the physical set-up – the *aesthetics* – of the room inform how people are learning?

### Phase Two

5. Think about *yourself* as a learner at each stage of instruction you witnessed. Where would you have been engaged? Where would you have lost interest? Consider how your own preferences and needs make your responses true for you. How were your experiences different or similar to your peers? *Capture your musings in a journal entry that you attach to your field-notes.*
6. Clean up your notes and bring a hard copy to the in-class meeting.

### Phase Three – Preparation for our January Term Intensive Week

7. Post a 300-500 word essay in our electronic forum, LiveText, about your first impression of Religious Education based on what you observed. Post in LiveText under the assignment, “Pre-Course Observations.”
8. Consider your previous experiences with group learning (formal and informal). Write a list/chart out the factors or conditions that were necessary for you to learn well. What would have made more learning more complete? Read the document, “Suggestions for Effective Group Discussions in a Cross-Cultural Learning Community,” considering the factors mentioned. *Come ready to discuss these elements and then “covenant” with colleagues on the first day of the course.*

NOTE: Feel comfortable contacting me with concerns or questions about this project. Indeed, it is expected that you’ll need to shape this assignment to your context, and the culture of your congregation and/or community.

### **Post-Course Assignment**

1. Make arrangements with the Religious Educator in the chosen congregation for a second appointment (which may be tricky, given summer vacations). You will engage him/her with a list of questions that attempt to reconcile what you learned during your prior observation to the course with the class-based discussions.
2. Final Reflections:
  - a. Your learning about the motivations of Religious Education and what you encountered. What is your role as a ministering-educator to what you witnessed? What are the challenges and opportunities?

- b. Every act the ministering-educator makes – regardless of its intentions – makes a statement about your philosophy/theology. Design an educational experience for *middle-school students* that makes your theology real in their eyes. [Details, including developmental cues, for this assignment will be distributed during the course.]

## **Final Course Reflections Due by April 1, 2012**