

The Method is the Message (M494INT)

August 15-22, 2020
Ferry Beach, Maine

Instructor:

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Course Description

The Method is the Message. Extending the pedagogical legacy of Angus MacLean, one of our UU redwoods for Religious Education into the 21st century, this course explores how to strategically create learning experiences in light of how children and adults learn and grow. Students should expect to grapple head-on with models of cognitive, faith and identity development in a multi-racial, multicultural world. The course is appropriate for directors of religious education, ministers, religious educators and classroom teachers, professors, social workers, graduate students developing curriculum – any person interested in creating a learning community that deepens self-knowledge and a capacity for social change. Enrollment is limited to 18 (taught annually in Chicago and Ferry Beach).

Course Blueprint

Overview

MacLean had a strong hunch that we *act* our way into being differently in the world – that people make meaning by interacting with problems, and wrapped inside that process, come to new levels of understanding. In a ground-breaking 1951 lecture, "*The Method is the Message*," MacLean proclaimed that *how* we teach is often more important than the content itself. Indeed, such a framework still signals who we are as a progressive, religious movement, and it also shapes how we can think about relationships, construct knowledge, and build justice-minded communities that bring about personal and social change.

In the tradition of hermeneutics, this course moves us in and out of the theories that shape our understandings of learning and the educational strategies that actually expand what we know and feel. And, because everything we do must be done in the context of our multi-racial, multicultural world, all aspects of the course models

such a worldview pedagogically, spiritually and interpersonally.

Students will explore empirical developmental theories that give insight into how we learn and make sense of the world (such as Kegan, Gilligan, Fowler, Minnich); how our identities are shaped by social systems of privilege and oppression (such as Hardiman and Jackson, Cass, Helms); and, finally, how insights from multicultural education and ecological psychology help us understand and develop a conception of individuals and groups that is expansive and humanizing (such as Plotkin, Bordas, and Fowler).

Methods

Because the method *is* the message, each day of the course will focus on a particular theoretical framework, and then shift to an experiential modality where the ideas are translated into teaching and learning strategies. For example, we might explore the developmental needs of multi-racial youth from a theoretical perspective, and then sample teaching strategies that support future growth and development. And, because this course is taught, literally, on the sandy shores of the Atlantic Ocean, there will be ample opportunity to incorporate nature's landscape directly into every aspect of our learning.

Participants in the course should **be prepared to bring** a curriculum they have or want to teach, or a qualitative data set that includes rich descriptions of human experiences, or a specific learning problem, or a "kind of learner" you would like to gently nudge into broader ways of thinking, feeling and knowing. Students will rely upon those samples in order to create appropriate learning experiences for that population.

Resources

The tradition of Unitarian Universalists calls upon many sources – both religious and secular – to get beyond partial understandings of human experience. Thus, the course will incorporate a variety of different resources from within and outside the UU tradition.

Pre-Course Work

Students will be expected to complete a set of readings prior to the course. The final reading list will be released on June 4.

Post-Course Work

The course is designed to provide rich feedback on curriculum plans during the intensive week. Students should expect to leave on the final day with a solid proposal for their project. After the course, students will write a reflective paper on their learning, and upload their curriculum to our electronic forum in LiveText.

Course Outcomes

Students will be able to:

- Design learning experiences for individuals and groups that promote self-knowledge, and individual and group growth and development;
- Articulate the role of human and faith development in becoming more fully human;
- Design learning experiences that take people from “where they are” to a more inclusive, broader or different place;
- Develop curriculum that promotes more inclusive, democratic habits of heart and mind;
- Employ the lens of “multicultural competency” in curriculum development;
- Form “learning communities” that support growth and development;
- Apply learning style theories that take into account individual preferences, cultural norms, and socially constructed identities (such as race, class, sexual orientation, and so forth);
- Incorporate anti-racist/anti-oppressive competencies into learning experiences;
- Integrate the arts/aesthetic learning into learning experiences;
- Use qualitative research design methodologies in service of social change;
- Model how to incorporate spiritual practices to support individual and group learning;
- Reflect on the role of the teacher in the development of learning experiences.

Resources

The following will **likely** be included in the course:

[NOTE: a final reading list will be available to students enrolled in the course]

Texts, Book Chapters, Articles:

- Juana Bordas’ *“Salsa, soul and spirit: Leadership for a multicultural age”* (2007)
- Carol Gilligan’s *“In a different voice* (1993)
- James Fowler’s *Life Maps: Conversations on the Journey of Faith* by James Fowler & Sam Keen, WordBook Publishers, Waco. (1980).
- Tracey Hurd’s *“Nurturing children and youth: A developmental guidebook”* (2005)
- Association of Higher Education’s *“Identity development of diverse populations: Implications for teaching and administration in higher education”* (2003)
- Robert Kegan’s, *“The Evolving Self”* (1982)
- Elizabeth Minnich’s *“Transforming knowledge”* (2005)
- Bill Plotkin’s, *“Nature and the human soul: Cultivating wholeness and*

- *community in a fragmented world* (2009)
- *2020 Report on Faith Development* (2010)
- *The MOSAIC Report* on the status and experience of youth of color in White contexts (2009)

Literature, film, podcasts:

- “Sula” by Toni Morrison
- “Plainsong” by Ken Harruff
- “The curious incident of the dog in the middle of the night time” by Mark Haddon
- “The Story of Stuff” (podcast)
- “The Class” (film)

Statement Regarding Adaptation or Accommodation

NOTE: Students experience difficulty in this course for a variety of reasons. If you need course adaptations or accommodations because you are differently abled, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible. Likewise, see me if you encounter difficulty with the course or feel that you could be performing at a higher level, or have a learning style issue that provides a challenge. As an instructor, my obligation is to ensure that the work you encounter is relevant to your needs and is accessible. Unless you negotiate inadequate conditions, I will assume your learning needs are being met. . The MLTS Chaplin, David Owen-O’Quill, is also available in the Student Services Office, x238, for spiritual support.

Mark A. Hicks is the MacLean Professorship of Religious Education at Meadville Lombard Theological School (Chicago) and a former professor of educational transformation at George Mason University. He holds a doctorate degree in philosophy and education and a Master’s degree in higher and adult education, both from Columbia University in New York City.

As a teacher, musician, social activist, administrator and organizational change consultant, he is recognized nationally for creating curriculum and educational experiences that promote forms of robust reflection that leads to self-knowledge and social change. He is the developer of the UUA’s curriculum to build multi-racial, multicultural congregations, *Building the World We Dream About*, which is part of the Tapestry of Faith adult curriculum. He is a lay leader at All Souls Church, Unitarian in Washington, DC.