EMBODIED CRITICAL PEDAGOGY IN THE ONLINE THEOLOGICAL CLASSROOM

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INTRODUCTORY PRACTICE

HANDSHAKE EXERCISE

- Using our bodies in our own spaces
- Imagining embodied connection
- Levels of connection: not assuming any touch is okay
- Emphasis on consent
- Time to de-brief exercise
“AS A CLASSROOM COMMUNITY, OUR CAPACITY TO GENERATE EXCITEMENT IS DEEPLY AFFECTED BY OUR INTEREST IN ONE ANOTHER, IN HEARING ONE ANOTHER’S VOICES, IN RECOGNIZING ONE ANOTHER’S PRESENCE.”

BELL HOOKS, TEACHING TO TRANSGRESS: EDUCATION AS THE PRACTICE OF FREEDOM
Research questions:
1. (How) can embodied critical pedagogy be used in the online theology classroom?

2. What is the educational benefit of engaging embodiment even when students are in their own homes?
IS ONLINE PEDAGOGY DISEMBODIED?

- Zoom is designed to showcase one’s “head” and “voice”
- Focus is on oral and written communication
- Emotions and body language can be difficult to read
- Students may be geographically dispersed, no physical “shared space”
- Interstitial time is difficult - arrivals and departures are “sudden”
BACKGROUND TO RESEARCH PROJECT

- Taught Women’s Studies in Religion Seminar at Graduate Theological Union with Dr. Mahjabeen Dhala in Fall 2019, strong emphasis on embodied pedagogy particularly Theater of the Oppressed
- Course was scheduled to be taught again in Fall 2020, needed to be offered online due to pandemic
- Course had been requested online previously due to various accessibility concerns (i.e. students who are parents of young children, non-local students, disability, etc.) but we had been hesitant due to embodied pedagogy
- Fall 2020 course “pushed” us to see whether embodied pedagogy could be still engaged in an online format
- Took online pedagogy course to prepare
- Engaged students in participatory research project during and after the course exploring the value and meaning of online embodied pedagogy
SAMPLE PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES

- Opening rituals, engaging the body, “arriving” in the “space”
- Locating ourselves: creating collaborative Google Maps highlighting present location, home, spiritually significant places, etc.
- Noting physical locations
- Modified use of Theatre of the Oppressed and other embodied techniques
EXTENSIVE USE OF MENTIMETER

Go to www.menti.com and use the code 8632 8921

What three words best describe how you are doing tonight?
STUDENT INTERVIEWS

- “This class was the only time I was not lonely all year.” - H.S.
- “Placing myself on the class ‘where I am presently located’ Google map, I realized that I was living actually not far from another student. We became study partners and have kept in touch even after the semester ended.” - S. D.-F.
- “Having my classmates come to my Zoom Trans Open Mic night was amazing. Wow! I felt so supported and it was so cool to have all of these Americans coming to my event.” - P.D.
- “It was uncomfortable at first to be asked to move, but over time I came to love it. I can still remember the emotions I felt in connection to the readings - meaning I still remember the readings!” - G.M.
- “I have no idea if I could have taken this class if it was in person. As a new mom, it was incredible to be able to just adjust my camera up a little and breastfeed while in class.” - Z.W.
CONCLUSIONS

- Accessibility of course was increased due to online offering (6/15 students)
- Course community created was as strong or stronger than students generally found in-person (14/15)
- Use of embodied pedagogy augmented Course Learning Outcomes (13/15)
- Embodied pedagogy is still possible AND online classes can honor diverse forms of embodiment and circumstances (parenting, disability, cannot afford to live in SF Bay Area)
CLOSING PRACTICE

**HOLD, RELEASE, CONNECT**

- Seeing one another engage in the ritual: individual and communal experience
- Embodiment reinforces message
- Acknowledges not everything can or should be remembered or held, makes space for releasing the negative
- Imagining connection to people in adjacent Zoom boxes: blessing one another and not knowing who is blessing us
- Consistent marker of end time, creates threshold experience
QUESTIONS, FEEDBACK, REACTIONS?