

## ARTICLE

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# INCARNATIONAL IMMERSION-BASED LEARNING IN CULTURAL CONTEXTS: A CHARITY MODEL

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*The Religious Pastoral Studies and Behavioral Sciences Departments of a Midwestern college have collaborated in offering academic courses in theology and anthropology that include service immersion experiences with people of diverse cultures in South Dakota, North Carolina, New Mexico, Kentucky, and Honduras. This paper explores the incarnational dimension of immersion experiences between native peoples and college students. Using a contextual theology model, students and faculty from various social science and religious studies disciplines reflect with native people on the historical and contemporary elements of their culture and spirituality. This paper discusses the historical development of the immersion courses, methodology, curriculum design, student learning objectives and outcomes, incarnational value formation in Sisters of Charity charisms, and future directions.*

## INTRODUCTION

Since 1995, the Religious Pastoral Studies and the Behavioral Sciences Departments of the College of Mount St. Joseph in Cincinnati (MSJ) have collaborated in offering a curriculum of immersion academic courses in theology and anthropology with the Lakota Sioux people at the Holy Rosary Mission at the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota; the Cherokee people at Cherokee in North Carolina; St. Francis School Mission in Honduras; Tierra Madre Charity Mission in New Mexico; and the Christian Appalachian Project in several different counties in Eastern Kentucky. These courses are based upon a 6- to 12-day immersion experience, where students are submerged into another culture at the distance learning location, bracketed by three pre-trip and two post-trip intensive classroom sessions of 3 hours each. Each course is team taught by a sociologist and a theologian.

The purposes of the immersion courses include the following:

- To offer MSJ students a transcultural experience where they can participate in the realities of the indigenous culture first hand. Each of these courses is conducted with a marginalized culture which struggles daily with the realities of poverty and its implications. Students have the opportunity to stand in solidarity with the realities of poverty, to explore the relationship between themselves and the local people, and to examine the social justice implications.
- To expose students to an interdisciplinary way of learning which will engage them in seeing the dynamic interconnections between religion and culture of the indigenous people (McGee, 1992).
- To participate in service learning with the local people, in order to learn directly from the people, and to contribute to projects and services which will enhance their way of life.
- To share in the mission and ministry of the Sisters of Charity, founders and sponsors of the college, who have committed themselves through their mission to solidarity with the poor and women of the world. Each of the host sights has a history of Charity missionary presence (Kloos, 2003).
- To enable MSJ students to participate in a model of cultural and theological education that is truly contextual, taking the experience of the culture as one's starting point, and always coming back to the relationship of the people among themselves (Schreiter, 1985).
- To examine the social and structural forces which impact the history and contemporary life issues of the culture.

## **BACKGROUND OF IMMERSION CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT**

The immersion curriculum developed out of a long standing commitment of the college to service. For over 15 years, the college has sponsored and coordinated service experiences in local and distant areas to foster a personal commitment to service as well as to develop social outreach within the community. Faculty and students engaged in these service activities began to reflect critically on the need for greater academic development of the issues and concepts that students were experiencing in the social and cultural settings where they were serving. This was a paradigm shift from providing a cafeteria of service experiences to developing a service learning curriculum.

In response to this need, MSJ faculty developed the Mount Plus One Option for service learning in 1993. This model, funded by a grant by the Council of Independent Colleges, piloted the development of a service learning curriculum that is rooted in the academic programs. Existing academic

courses in any discipline can be offered for an extra service learning credit. Students donate 30 hours of community service to an agency or program to which MSJ has an enduring commitment, the faculty member donates expertise and time to mentor and reflect with the student on the learnings and academic connections between their service and the course concepts, and the college donates the tuition (College of Mount St. Joseph, 2005).

The Mount Plus One Option has been a successful model. Nearly one third of the faculty offer courses for service learning credit, and hundreds of students have participated in these courses. Participants have evaluated these courses very highly based on the goals of service, civic consciousness, community building, cultural diversity, and leadership. Building upon these goals, the faculty of the Religious Pastoral Studies and Behavioral Sciences Departments developed immersion course learning outcomes consistent with the Sisters of Charity philosophy. The immersion course learning outcomes ensure that students are prepared for citizenship in the world as well as empowered for compassionate leadership. Thus the immersion curriculum was designed to provide an impact experience which would empower students to experience the spirituality for mission and the charism of charity which characterize the essence of the Sisters of Charity mission. Palmer (1993) describes the impact experience as a “slow, subtle, nearly unconscious process of formation, something like the way a moving stream shapes the rocks over the long passage of time. Textual study, observation and analysis, and community life are the channels through which that stream flows” (p. 20). The immersion curriculum provides students with the opportunity to wade into this stream of life and learning.

## **CHARITY HERITAGE**

The college mission falls under the umbrella of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati mission which “strives to give compelling witness to Christ’s active presence by doing justice, expressed as loving trust shaping all our relationships, and as sharing our individual and Congregational resources for the liberation of the oppressed” (Sisters of Charity, 1979). As a community of charity living the Gospel as expressed in the charism of Elizabeth Ann Seton, the Sisters of Charity vision themselves as persons who:

- choose to live simply in a complex world, committed to the healing of our global home.
- embrace cultural expansion in membership and ministry.
- learn from and are in solidarity with the poor.
- risk being prophetic in church and society.
- journey together toward wholeness.

This commitment is imbued with a deep faith in the active presence of God and strengthened by prayer, friendship, and community (Sisters of Charity, 1979). As the ministry of the Sisters of Charity has grown over the years to meet the needs of a growing, diversifying, and rapidly changing world, one unchanging dimension of their ministry has been fidelity to the spirit of Elizabeth Ann Seton.

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton (1771-1821) is the first native born American saint and the foundress of the Sisters of Charity, the first religious community of women native to the U.S. Her love of students and legacy in developing Catholic education in America is the reason why MSJ exists. She served as a mentor and wisdom figure for Catholic educators. Characterized as a woman for all seasons, she was the daughter of a prominent New England family, wife of a New York shipping heir, mother of five children, widow, single parent, convert to Catholicism, friend, mentor, and foundress of the U.S. parochial school system.

The political, economic, social, and religious context of the developing colonies in Seton's time was filled with optimism, challenge, and incredible growth and expansion. It is through this context that Seton garnered three guiding values. The first was education. Emphasis on education was a hallmark of the colonists. Literacy was the key to survival in this new world, and it was so prized that by the mid-18th century nearly all adult men and women could read. A second distinguishing value of Colonial society was the attitude toward church and state. Churchgoers expected their religious leaders to serve, not to rule. Servant leadership was a guiding model. Third, there was always a diversity of religious groups in the Colonies, many of the congregational type. Although religious prejudice existed, a common denominator of the American experience was the hunger for religious freedom and a climate of religious tolerance (Metz, 1993).

The Sisters of Charity community created by Seton ministered to the needs of this growing nation with the values of enlightenment Catholicism that permeated her age. The acceptance of pluralism, emphasis on reasonableness, intelligibility, self-sufficiency, flexibility, and adaptability were all part of this cultural milieu. Moreover, this age can be characterized by an optimistic view of the human person and the belief in the accessibility of a loving God.

When Elizabeth instructs the sisters, "Our free will is the noblest Gift of God," or reflects on how they are "made in his image to be like himself, our first, our last, our ONLY END," she is articulating the Incarnational spirituality of her day. And she continues in the spirit of her age, "The charity of our blessed Lord in the course of his ministry had three distinct qualities which should be the model of our conduct. It was gentle, benevolent, and universal." (Metz, 1993, pp. 213-214)

Seton was not only a good fit for the diversity of her culture, church, and world, but also for the cultural and religious diversity we face in our own. Her incarnational spirituality serves as the operative basis for a theological anthropology, which recognizes God as the invisible center of all of life. This woman for all seasons experienced this through the richness and diversity of her own life experience. In critical reflection upon her life, the theological charisms that are the foundation of charity education, are also the underlying theological presuppositions of the theology and anthropology immersion curriculum: conversion; charity in relationship; hope; and spirituality for mission.

## **IMMERSION CURRICULUM DESIGN MODEL**

The first dimension of the immersion curriculum design is to understand the history, culture, and spirituality of native peoples in their local context. According to Lartey (2000), beginning with the local context from a theological perspective means educating students using a practical theology which is committed to local theology. Bevans (1992) refers to this innovative approach to understanding theology as contextual theology:

Contextual theology can be defined as a way of doing theology in which one takes into account: the spirit and message of the gospel; the tradition of the Christian people; the culture in which one is theologizing; and social change in that culture, whether brought about by western technological process or the grass-roots struggle for equality, justice and liberation. Doing theology contextually is not an option, nor is it something that should only interest people from the third world or missionaries who work there. The contextualization of theology – the attempt to understand Christian faith in terms of a particular context – is really a theological imperative. As we understand theology today, contextualization is part of the very nature of theology itself. (p. 1)

In Figure 1, Trokan (1992) depicts an ecological perspective to illustrate these contextual curriculum assumptions. Human ecology is a way of thinking concerned with the interrelationships of organisms and their environments and the pattern of relations between organisms and their environment. Bronfenbrenner's (1981) pioneer work on ecology and human development indicates that cultural anthropology cannot be studied in the vacuum of the microsystem, but in multiple systems contexts of the mesosystem – school, work, church, community, other cultures – which are at the same time impacted by other macro systemic social forces in direct and indirect ways – government, media, environment, economy, and so forth. This multi-systemic perspective offers the learner a view of the richness and complexity of the history, culture, and spirituality of native people.

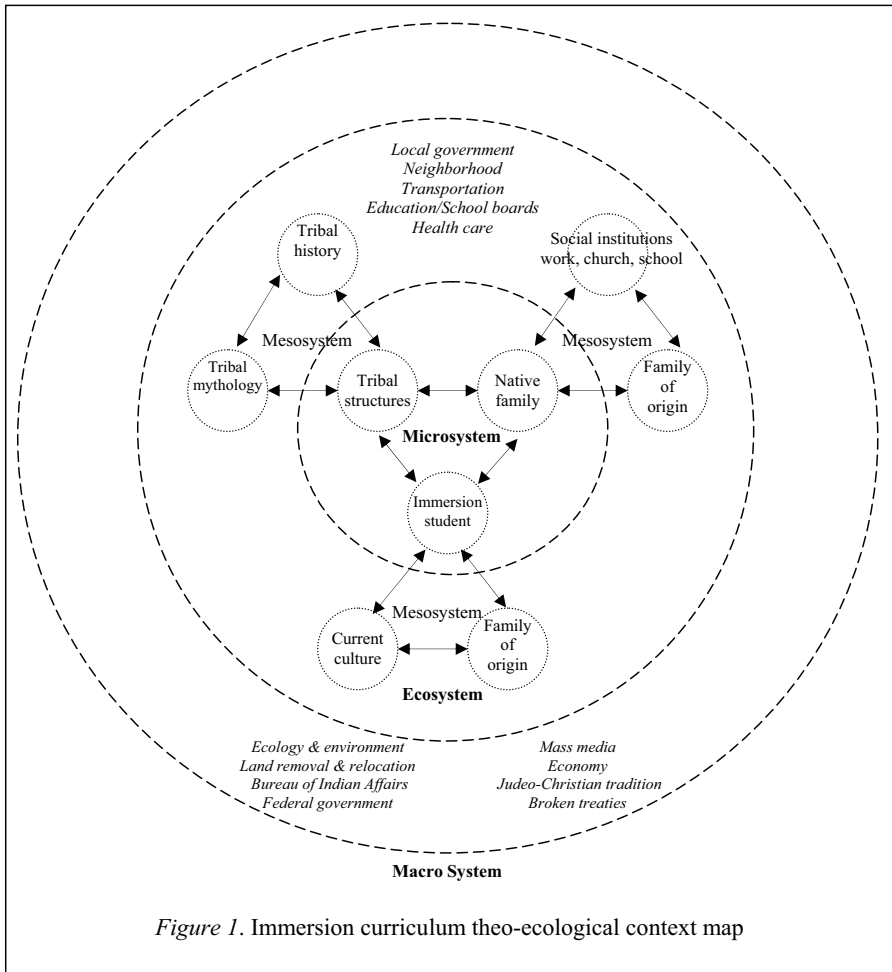


Figure 1. Immersion curriculum theo-ecological context map

Contextual theology consults each of the multi-system units on the immersion curriculum theo-ecological context map as sources of information and understanding about native people. Woodward and Pattison (2000) assert that contextual theology borrows from the experience of praxis-based liberationist theologies that apply the tools of suspicion to theology and a critical hermeneutic to the social and political order. Contextual theology is committed to understanding and promoting the perspective that marginalized groups and individuals experience institutionalized injustice and oppression in such a way that their voices are not heard and their interests are ignored.

The second dimension of the immersion curriculum design entails an interdisciplinary teaching and learning process. Each course is team taught

by a sociologist and a theologian in an effort to deepen the potential learning about the religion and culture of the indigenous people. Interdisciplinary teaching and learning offers several benefits to the student. In a world of complexity and diversity, interdisciplinary learning requires students to examine issues through the lens of more than one discipline. They are obligated to practice the skills of listening, reflecting, conversing, synthesizing, and integrating. Through the interdisciplinary teaching and learning process, students are engaged firsthand in the complexities of contemporary problem solving (Barkley, Clifton, deCourcy, & Kloos, 1998).

Another facet of interdisciplinary learning is that it affords students the opportunity to practice crossing boundaries, exploring what might happen when multi-dimensional learners participate in actual social analysis and social development. For most marginalized native people, whether or not they are located on a reservation, disciplinary boundaries are often seamless between history, religion, culture, politics, environment, and economy, unlike the compartmentalization view found in the dominant culture. Students are invited to think in the reality of the indigenous culture's experience and worldview (Salamone & Adams, 1994).

The interdisciplinary teaching and learning approach involves sound theological methodology. Quality theological reflection is a process of consulting and considering the multiple sources of Scripture and tradition, personal experience, and cultural information gleaned from the fields of anthropology, sociology, psychology, political science, ecology, and philosophy (Talvacchia, 1997). This method assumes that God is present in and through all three sources. It also views all three sources as systemically interdependent and necessary for informed theology, because each source in isolation is limited (Killen & deBeer, 1998; Whitehead & Whitehead, 1995). Balanced theological reflection occurs when students attend to information in each of these sources and then take the information and place it in dialogue, engaging in mutual clarification. Students are then challenged through theological reflection to expand and deepen their religious and cultural insight. Finally, students are moved from decision to action, when they appropriate the insights from their dialogue into informed choice and ethical endeavors. Palmer (1993) describes this approach as a process of knowing the truth, requiring a personal dialogue between the knower and the known, a dialogue in which the knower listens to the world with obedience.

A third dimension of the theology and anthropology curriculum is that it encompasses collaborative learning on multidimensional levels:

- The indigenous culture and its people are the primary instructors.
- Students learn about history, culture, and religion as they co-labor

- with persons in their homes and communities in shared service.
- Faculty learn from other faculty in the interdisciplinary classroom.
- Faculty and students form a learning resource community as they live together for an extended period of time as a minority people in a distance learning and community setting.
- The MSJ community and the indigenous community share learning and resources as they commit themselves to deepening an enduring future commitment.
- By participating fully in the course experience, faculty members model for their students active incarnational learning, that is the care of the Christian community for one another as our response to Jesus and the Gospels.

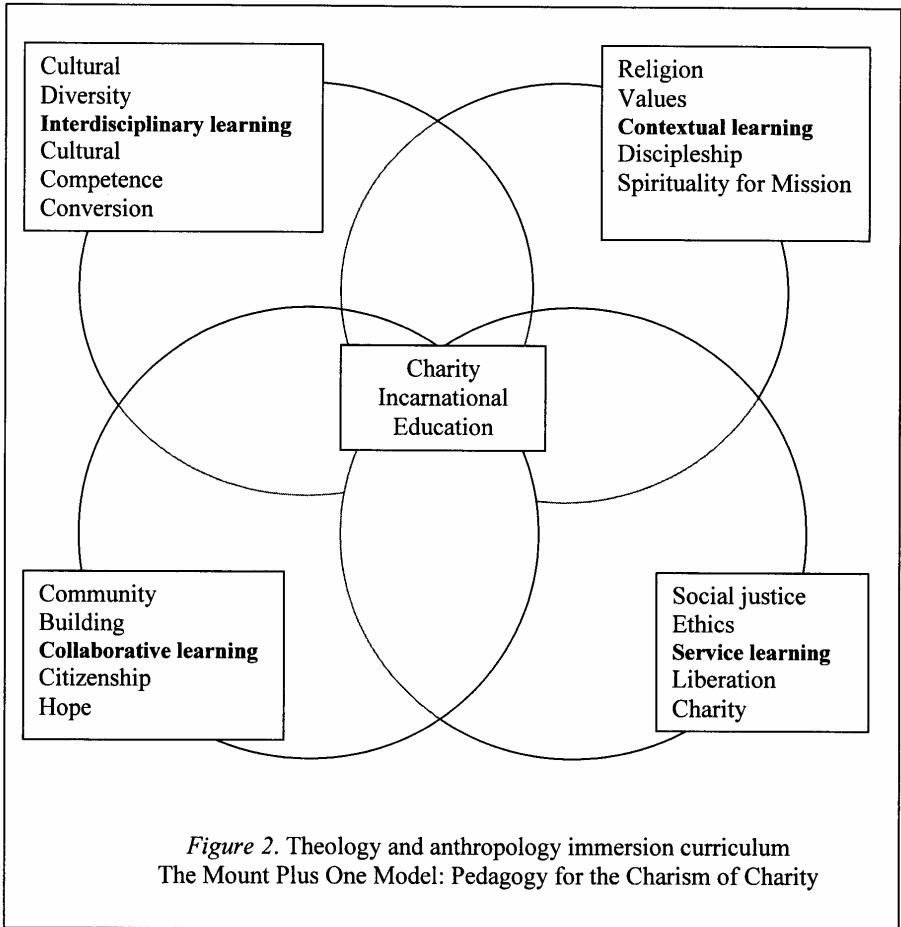
The original and authentic meaning of the word professor is one who professes a faith. Palmer (1993) explains that a true professor is not one who controls facts and theories, but rather one who affirms a transcendent center of truth, a center that lies beyond one's fabrication. This center of truth enters history through the lives of those who recognize it and brings learners into community with each other and the world. If professors are to create a space in which obedience to truth is practiced, they must revisit the authentic meaning of their occupation. To do so, they need to cultivate personal experience of that center of truth. The immersion curriculum is based on making collaborative learning an integral part of the pedagogy. It prizes the relationships that are created between and among people. It is precisely in these relationships, and our care for them, that authentic truth and learning occurs.

Service learning, based upon the Mount Plus One Service Learning Model, is the final dimension in the design of the immersion curriculum. Objectives for the immersion courses have been designed to educate and channel students to creatively approach social problems while building a sense of community in neighborhoods. Immersion learning accomplishes this through an experiential, action-reflection model. Building upon the academic goals of the Mount Plus One Service Learning Model, the goals of the immersion curriculum include:

- enriching student experiences through service activities,
- revitalizing civic consciousness,
- renewing the commitment of the college to its communities,
- re-discovering the foundations of a civic education among the diverse groups of people engaged in service,
- imparting skills of critical analysis, problem solving, and leadership,
- providing volunteer and technical advice to communities working to improve the plight of the poor.



The components of the service learning model (see Figure 2) include community building, values and spiritual development, social justice, and cultural diversity.



## COMMUNITY BUILDING

Service learning enables students to learn and experience community efforts to help residents build up their own communities and build relationships with staff and residents from tribal agencies as well as the faculty, staff, and students from MSJ. This element of the model is most directly linked with the outcome of citizenship. Implicitly, it exposes students to a theology of church or ecclesiology whereby they develop a vision of community in light of the native story to develop their own communities in dialogue with the Christian story.

## VALUES AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

The immersion curriculum offers students an opportunity to put their faith and values in a practical context supported by input from those with whom they work. In the context of the immersion experience, students have the opportunity to place their own faith values in dialogue with those of the indigenous culture. It is in this conversation that students are invited to examine which religious and Gospel values they will appropriate in their own life. From a theological perspective, Himes (1995) refers to this as the movement toward development of a personal spirituality, in which students explore how they will choose to walk with God.

It is within this element of the immersion curriculum that the charisms of a Sisters of Charity education are revisited. Foley (1993) described these charisms as conversion, charity, spirituality for mission, and hope. Not only are these charisms modeled by the committed men and women who serve in the missions among indigenous cultures, but also by the people of the indigenous culture themselves as they struggle to live with Gospel integrity in the face of poverty, environmental destruction, and marginalization. These charisms provoke the following essential theological questions for the students: What does conversion mean in my own life? What values in the indigenous culture am I being called to embrace? What values in my own culture am I called to embrace or let go of? What does charity mean to me? How am I called to be in covenant relationship with others? What does caregiving and caretaking mean in my relationships: to self, to others, to the environment, and to community? How am I being called to justice in my own life? How do I live in solidarity with the poor? How do I witness to the charity and love I have experienced through the hospitality and generosity of this culture? What is my mission in light of this experience? How do I walk with God's spirit in my life? How do I discipline myself to the values of the Gospel? How do I support these values and companion others on the journey of faith? How do I live with hope, meaning, integrity, and trust, in the midst of suffering, despair, poverty, and injustice?

It is in addressing these questions, and in the search and struggle for their answers, that students move into a theological education that not only transforms their values and experience, but has the promise of being incarnational, whereby the core knowledge, beliefs, and values from these courses will become integrated with their personhood and spirituality.

## SOCIAL JUSTICE

The immersion context engages students in examining the connection between realities of community residents and issues of justice and fairness. In the Lakota and Cherokee courses, this means a direct examination of the

issues related to reservation status, the history of broken treaties, land rights, health care, economy, housing, Bureau of Indian Affairs, tribal politics, and environmental and ecological concerns. Social analysis invites students to consider the native responses to these issues and also challenges them to develop their own appropriate responses to these issues. The explicit hope in this element of the model is that students will develop the skill of social analysis, thereby applying Gospel values to complex social problems. A second feature is that students will become advocates and agents for social change in the communities where they work and live. Implicit in this element of the model is a theology of liberation. Himes (1995) articulates the core of this perspective, “we as God’s people experience God’s freedom, liberation, and salvation when we actively work for justice” (p. 38).

## **CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

Students interact with people in communities of different race, ethnic background, economic strata, and cultural heritage. For most students, this is the first time in their lives that they find themselves in a context where they are a minority person in a majority culture. Students have an opportunity to learn the strengths of another culture and to explore the differences as well as the commonalities between the native culture and their own. The hope is that students will develop the cultural competency to understand and effectively relate with people of diversity. The pedagogy of discipleship aims to educate students with an implicit Christology: behind the face of this diversity is the face of Christ. As described by the theology of Paul, the human diversity we encounter is a gift, a gift of the spirit, given to build the reign of God (1 Cor. 12:4-11).

## **IMMERSION COURSE OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES**

The theology and anthropology courses specifically address the following learning objectives:

- To develop an understanding of the historical and social background of the indigenous culture.
- To explore the dynamic interplay of religion and culture on the local people, as well as the economic, political, and ecological systems which impact their lifestyle, values, and behaviors.
- To demonstrate the ability to incorporate religious, cultural, and Gospel values into personal commitments which recognize the connections with marginalized people of our world.

- To build an appreciation, sensitivity, and interpathy for cultural diversity and the opportunities it presents, through immersion in the local environment. Interpathy is standing within and embracing the other's worldview (Augsburger, 1986).
- To develop a personal sense of a spirituality for mission through interaction and relationships with Sisters of Charity.

These learning objectives are based, in part, on Augsburger's (1986) work in transcultural counseling. The learning objectives are realized through three pre-immersion and two post-immersion intensive classes, each 3 and one half hours long. These classes systematically treat the topics of cultural anthropology, tribal history, political relations, tribal government, tribal myths, rituals, spiritual beliefs and practices, relations with Christianity, and social analysis of contemporary conditions. Figure 3 offers a more detailed sample of a course content outline.

Five elements are common to the immersion courses and serve as the foundation for the course content:

- Historical focus on examining the marker events of each tribe. For the Cherokee this is the Trail of Tears and for the Lakota the Massacre at Wounded Knee. A key focus in the learning process is to engage students in these events from the perspective of Native Indian historians, writers, and educators.
- Critical examination of U.S. government treaty policies (from annihilation to assimilation) and their impact on the tribes historically and in contemporary life.
- Examination of the meaning of the land to the native culture and spirituality in light of the historical pattern and struggle of removal, relocation, and reservation status.
- Critical exploration of the role of Christianity and its missionary role in civilizing the natives on the reservation historically, to its contemporary partnering with Indian leadership and the lived syncretism with native Indian religious beliefs.
- Critical examination of Indian spirituality and cosmology and their impact on contemporary life.

In particular the following key concepts are addressed:

- Role of spirit as the center of Indian understanding of the mystery we call God, and Indian worldview through prayer, the sacred circle, and the four directions.
- Kinship: Lakota *mitakua oyasin* – all my relations reflect the interde-

Session 1		Session 2		Session 3		Session 4		Session 5	
Introduction Overview, syllabus, & itinerary		Introduction Overview		Introduction Overview		Introduction Overview		Introduction Overview	
<b>Anthropological &amp; Historical Focus</b>		<b>Anthropological Focus</b>		<b>Anthropological Focus</b>		<b>Anthropological &amp; Theological Focus</b>		<b>Social Analysis Circle of Praxis</b>	
Background of the Lakota people Stereotypes Anthropology & culture areas History timeline Assimilation vs. self determination		Sioux relations with U.S. Naturalistic movements Peyote and Ghost dance Traditional ceremonies Handout Grobsmith questions Religious ritual & symbolism		Contemporary life Legislation & gambling Lakota language Art & culture: Quilt work/beads		Theology & social analysis Land Health Economy Housing Ecology Health care		Group analysis of immersion issue Summary of learning Student presentations Faculty perspectives Brainstorming on future Closure	
<b>Theological Focus</b>		<b>Theological Focus</b>		<b>Theological Focus</b>		<b>Theological Focus</b>			
Theology Spirituality Faith, religion, creed  Video: "Crazy Horse"		Sacred stories & sacred objects Myth Cult Spirit Truth  Storytelling & religious perspective Audio: <i>Lakota Sacred Stories</i>		Sacred rituals & ceremonies Sacred pipe Sweat lodge Vision quest Sundance Yuwipi  Video: <i>Live &amp; Remember</i>		Post immersion theological reflection On people, culture, and spirituality			
<b>Readings</b>		<b>Readings</b>		<b>Readings</b>		<b>Readings</b>		<b>Readings</b>	
<i>Pipe and Christ</i> , Ch. 1-5 <i>Lakota of Rosebud</i> , Ch. 1 & 2 <i>Black Elk Sacred Pipe</i> , Ch. 1-3		<i>Pipe and Christ</i> , Ch. 6-10 <i>Lakota of Rosebud</i> , Ch. 3-7 <i>Black Elk Sacred Pipe</i> , Ch. 4-6		<i>Pipe &amp; Christ</i> , Ch. 11-16 <i>Lakota Woman</i> <i>Black Elk Sacred Pipe</i> , Ch. 7-8		Excerpts from "Economic Justice for All" REL 515 Augsburg, Ch. 1-5 U.S. Catholic Bishops Statement on "American Indians" Holland & Henrott "Social Analysis" Research materials for case study		Research materials pertinent to the final paper REL 515 Augsburg, Ch. 6-11	
NOTE: Additional articles may be assigned due to interest and themes.									
<i>Figure 3. Immersion curriculum course content outline: Lakota culture and spirituality</i>									

- pendence of all of life, and life's dependence upon the spirit.
- Religious myths and sacred stories, and key rituals such as the pipe and the sweat lodge, examining the core truths of each tribe (Brown, 1989; Stolzman, 1992).
  - Tribal governance: Lakota *tiyospaye* – extended family revealing a shared form of governance and care for the people.
  - Ecotheology: Examining the Indian posture of companionship with the earth versus the domination model of Western culture.
  - Role of Indian art, artifacts, music, and dance in expressing the culture and spirituality of the people.

Guided reflection is a structured element of student course expectation. Students reflect individually through the use of a personal journal. Students also gather together in class to process the historical, cultural, social, educational, and theological insights that are occurring through the experiences they are having and their connection to assigned readings. Concepts for guided reflection are:

- How does public policy contribute to or alleviate social problems?
- What environmental factors cause health risks in the community? (e.g., pollution, crime, housing, trash)
- What are the needs of people and the resources which they have to meet those needs?
- What are the interacting systems which affect communities and individuals?
- How am I like the other person with whom I am working?
- What imagery do I use to define myself? How do others define themselves?
- What is the history of the tribal structure, and how is it tied to the community?
- What is the relationship between the tribal government and federal, state, and Bureau of Indian Affairs governing structures?
- How have social conditions/issues of this community changed over time?
- What do I see that relates to issues of social justice and fairness about how people are treated?
- What differences in culture do I experience with the people with whom I work?
- What are the resources and strengths of the culture?
- What problems do people in this community confront?
- What do I see or experience that impacts my own faith?
- What core values and beliefs are at the heart of the experience?
- How will I integrate this experience into my personal spirituality?

The immersion curriculum course content outline depicted in Figure 3, attempts to diagram the synergistic outline of a sample course curriculum. As each of the major learning objectives is developed through these courses, the goal is not only knowledge, but also the transformation of the student, and the integration of the curricular values into the life of the student. Himes (1995) provides a basis for this integration by explaining that immersion education is rooted in service. The transformation of the student is based in the integration of being and doing, theory and praxis, action and reflection, of being with the other and for the other, and of making oneself available to the environment of the other with all of the associated risks, vulnerability, poverty, injustice, beauty, and richness. It is through immersion learning that students learn most profoundly that it is not what they give to the other that is most significant, but how they have been given and gifted by the other, often from whom they initially expected nothing.

## STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

In exploring the design and curriculum model of these immersion courses, a critical pedagogical issue is to examine the learning outcomes by answering the following questions: What do we want our students to learn? What knowledge, skills, and attitudes do we wish them to develop as a result of these courses? What should students look like as a result of our educational efforts? In grappling with these questions, faculty often respond with phrases such as education for transformation, education for liberation, education for Gospel values, education in virtues, socially responsible citizens, culturally competent, socially critical, change agents for justice, and embodied with spiritual values. Ramey (1991) views the reflection upon these questions integral to the creation of leaders, citizens, and disciples.

The first learning outcome is to create leadership for the future. Leadership is the art of simultaneously empowering oneself and enabling others toward a more comprehensive personal and collective human development. The fundamental responsibility of leadership, according to Ramey (1991), is to make a commitment and a contribution of lasting public value to the quality of life, work, and society. Covey (1991) maintains that the aspiration in creating leadership for the future is not just to produce individuals who will work efficiently in a system, but to create transformational leaders who embody the following qualities:

- principle-centered
- preoccupied with values, morals, and ethics
- focused on mission
- maintains a long-term vision
- empowers human resources and potential

- integrates strategies with values and mission

Leadership presupposes an integration of character, skills, self-knowledge, systems knowledge, accountability, and responsibility.

The second learning outcome is citizenship. Citizenship is defined as a member of a state or nation who owes allegiance to it and is entitled to certain rights, such as voting. Coleman (1994) and Bellah (1985) emphasize the fact that citizenship implies some idea of a common good greater than particular interest and civic benevolence as members of a common historic people. Citizenship rights are membership rights in a historic community. Education for citizenship implies the following curricular agenda:

- awareness of and responsibility for the common good as an ongoing habit
- cultural competence: the development of cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity
- community connections: the facility and insight to see the interconnections between the politics, economy, environment, history, culture, and religion of a particular community in a global world.

Citizenship is best learned in and through participation in the civic community, and the relationships which develop because of enduring commitments.

The third learning outcome of this curriculum is a pedagogy of discipleship. For Christians, a Christian view of discipleship includes a substantive view of the social good. This means embracing peace based on justice; preferential treatment for the poor; freedom based within the context of the community and the common good; the image of God's covenant of justice as vindicating the most marginal of people. According to Coleman (1994), a discipline of discipleship proposes a determined anthropology of the human person as created in God's image. It takes shape in specifically ecclesial prayer, community, moral discernment and discourse, action, and service and worship. For the Christian, the reign of God is rendered present in history precisely by the praxis of Gospel values of the followers of Jesus. The pedagogy of discipleship invites students to critically engage Gospel values in the social context of their life incarnating their meaning in their world view, practical commitments, and moral responses. This is precisely the Sisters of Charity charism of spirituality for mission (Foley, 1993).

## **FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

The immersion curriculum proposes to educate for leadership, citizenship, and discipleship through the integration of contextual theology, interdisciplinary learning, collaborative learning, and service learning (Garbin, 1991).

Student feedback provided on post-immersion course evaluations indicates congruence between learning objectives and learning outcomes.



Course assessments specifically address the areas of cultural diversity, community building, social justice and ethics, and religion, values, and spirituality. Students in general appear to be achieving the intended course objectives of the curriculum. In the assessment and evaluation of the student learning, the following directions surface for the immersion curriculum.

First, as challenging and rewarding as the interdisciplinary model is within these courses, most instructors experience the instruction in their own discipline as incomplete and unfinished. Lest this be interpreted as criticism, it underscores the process and richness of a bifocal approach and the instructional reality that our best efforts always represent a commencement in the mind and heart of the learner.

Second, as highly rated as student assessment surveys are with regard to the learning outcomes, not all students match this learning curve in their actual assignment performance. Faculty report that the traditional-age students in particular appear to have a wide range of performance and consistency in their ability to synthesize critical concepts, written theological journal reflection, social analysis skills, and the integration of course learning into their personal lives. Demonstrated knowledge, skill, and attitude in oral and written formats are factors to be addressed. How we assist students with these skills and the integration of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains is critical to theological education.

Third, as can be witnessed in the narrative comments of the students, the course curriculum is experienced as transformative. Faculty experience this transformation in some students as being emotionally overwhelming, to the point of emotional paralysis. For some students, this emotional impact can last for months, even years. Much work and research needs to be done with regard to reentry issues for students, to enable them to deal with the emotional learning curve, as well as to empower them to integrate and translate their learning on the campus and in their communities. Development of post-immersion reflection opportunities and retreats will assist in addressing this issue.

Fourth, even with the best articulated learning objectives, the indigenous culture, environment, and people will have their own set of objectives for the class. Flexibility is the pedagogical key to survival in this distance learning framework.

Fifth, the college has made an enduring commitment to the local communities that host these courses. Ongoing work needs to be done to celebrate the indigenous cultures on the campus, as well as to place students in these host sights for internships, practicums, clinicals, residences, and student teaching. Continued development in this area will enhance the relationship between the college campus and these native cultures, as well as assist in the ongoing integration of course learning for the immersion stu-

dents, while providing them with multiple leadership opportunities.

Finally, as the parable of the fig tree suggests, the fruit of the vine will only ripen in its due season. The type and depth of learning that students will garner 5, 10, and 20 years from now is research which still awaits us.

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