Journal of Intercultural Disciplines

National Association of African American Studies
National Association of Hispanic and Latino Studies
National Association of Native American Studies
International Association of Asian Studies
SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

The *Journal of Intercultural Disciplines* is published semi-annually in the fall and spring. Members of the organization will receive complimentary copies. Annual subscription for individuals is $30.00 and $50.00 for libraries, agencies, etc. A single copy of an issue may be acquired for $18.00. To obtain a subscription to the *Journal of Intercultural Disciplines*, print the subscription form located at http://www.NAAAS.org and mail with a check or money order (in US dollars) payable to:

Dr. Lemuel Berry, Jr., Executive Director
NAAAS, NAHLS, NANAS, & IAAS
PO Box 325
Biddeford, ME 04005

PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION OF MANUSCRIPTS

The *Journal of Intercultural Disciplines* publishes scholarly contributions of its membership within any academic field that facilitates understanding of the experience and behavior of populations of color, both in the United States of America and other countries. This includes reports of empirical research, discussions of current literature, original theoretical analyses of data, or literary productions, studies or programs. The Journal publishes the most selective work presented by its members from its annual national conference.

All manuscripts must comply with the following requirements: (1) have a maximum length of 18 pages; (2) include 25-30 words abstract; (3) be double-spaced (including references) and provide a one-inch margin on all sides; (4) have written only on the first page: author’s (authors’) name, address, email address, and the subject area that the manuscript reflects (African American Studies, Asian Studies, Curriculum and Instruction, Counseling, Latin American Studies, Native American Studies, Psychology, etc.); (5) be submitted in Times Roman font size 12; (6) have the author(s) name(s) clearly labeled on the disk; (7) include three copies of the article and a 3 ½” disk in Word Perfect or Microsoft Word before March 20th; (8) use the fifth or most recent edition of the *Publication Manual* of the American Psychological Association (APA) as a manual for style and manuscript format. Authors bear responsibility for the accuracy of references, tables, and figures; (9) use guidelines to reduce bias in language against persons on the basis of gender, sexual orientation,
racial, or ethnic group of reference, disability, or age by referring to the APA publication manual; (10) do not submit material that has been previously published or that is under consideration with another periodical; (11) have permission for lengthy quotations (300-500 words). It is required to have written permission from the copyright holder for reproduction. Adaptation of tables and figures also requires reproduction approval. It is the author’s responsibility to secure such permission. A copy of the publisher’s permission must be provided the Journal Editor upon acceptance of the article for publication.

Send manuscripts to: Dr. Esther Elena López
Editor, *Journal of Intercultural Disciplines*
St. Lawrence University
School of Education
24 Atwood Hall
Canton, NY 13617-1475
JOURNAL OF INTERCULTURAL DISCIPLINES

The Journal of Intercultural Disciplines is the recognized publication of the following organizations:

National Association of African American Studies
National Association of Hispanic and Latino Studies
National Association of Native American Studies
International Association of Asian Studies

Volume II
Spring 2002
Michael Mulnix  
University of the Incarnate Word  
San Antonio, TX

Linda Nell Phillips  
State University of New York  
Fredonia, NY

Beatriz Salcedo-Strumpf  
William and Hobart University  
Ithaca, NY

Willie Tolliver, Jr.  
Agnes Scott College  
Decatur, GA

Carol Wilkerson  
Carson-Newman College  
Jefferson City, TN

Esther Oey  
St. Lawrence University  
Canton, NY

Héctor R. Romero  
University of Texas Pan American  
Edinburg, TX

Kathryn Stam  
State University of New York  
Morrisville, NY

James Waterson  
St. Lawrence University  
Canton, NY
LETTER FROM THE EDITOR:

The National Organizations and editorial board are extremely proud to present to you, our constituents and supporters, the second volume of the Journal of Intercultural Disciplines. This publication continues to bring to the fore the organizations’ efforts to provide our audience with scholarly and diverse articles which focus on multicultural issues. It is a privilege to provide access to research and scholarly work that expands understanding and inclusion of attitudes, behaviors and values of people from diverse cultures presented by scholars who find themselves represented by those experiences.

We continue to strive to bring you a multitude of perspectives. The four organizations, the National Association of African American Studies, the National Association of Hispanic and Latino Studies, the National Association of Native American Studies, and the International Association of Asian Studies serve as the foundation of our national body, and foresee this journal as a link to cultures on all continents. This publication, in its brightest moment, will open and contribute to intellectual dialogue and the extension of research related to all people.

This issue includes a diverse array of articles from several academic fields. The articles are multidisciplinary and address issues recognized in contemporary society. Articles contained in this issue offer the reader two writing styles, MLA and APA. However, it is the goal of the editorial board to move into one writing style (APA) in future issues.

The editorial board welcomes suggestions and comments from its readers. Please forward information in care of the editor.

Esther Elena López
Senior Editor
St. Lawrence University
Canton, New York 13617-1475
JOURNAL OF INTERCULTURAL DISCIPLINES
FOUNDERS

Lemuel Berry, Jr., Executive Director
University of New England

Gary Baker
Virginia State University

Valery Y.R. Bates-Brown
Virginia State University

Juanita Evans
Virginia State University

Joseph Goldenberg
Virginia State University

Pansy E. Jacobs-Jackson
Virginia State University

Wallace McMichael
Virginia State University

NATIONAL BOARD

Joyce Buckner-Brown
Jackson State University

Rita Henry-Brown
Albany State University

Kay Hobson
University of Southern Mississippi

Pauline J. Holloway
Oklahoma State University

Eddie W. Jones, Sr.
University of Arkansas

Paul Kriese
Indiana University East

Elva G. Laurel
University of Texas at Brownsville

Esther Elena López
St. Lawrence University

Joanna Sanders Mann
San Jacinto College

Linda Nell Phillips
SUNY Fredonia

Brian K. Reed
Benedict College
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Letter from the Editor**  
6

**Social Structure and Role Expectations in**  
Uslar Pietri’s *Las Lanzas Coloradas*  
Debra D. Andrist  
10

**“The [Family] Story Comes up Different”:**  
Pattern and Freedom in Louise Erdrich’s Family Systems  
Gay Barton  
19

**Caught in the Middle: Indian Nations Go to War**  
Clarissa W. Confer  
32

**La Muñeca Como Proyección de la Mujer**  
Otilia Cortez  
51

**The Architect of Progressive Education:**  
John Dewey or Booker T. Washington  
Donald Generals  
66

**Women’s Identity Formations and the Intersections of Class, Gender, and Race in Representative Plays of Maria Irene Fornes**  
Julia Jay  
83

**Integrating Spiritual Philosophies into Teaching: Toward a Symmetric Model of Engaged Pedagogy**  
Esther E. López  
Michael W. Mulnix  
94
Mentoring African American Middle School Students: Applying Principles of Antiracism Education to the Problem of Closing the Black-White Achievement Gap
Paula S. Martin
Anthony G. Baxter

Listen up: Comparing Rhetorical Strategies in Chapter Ten and Chapter Twelve of Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself
Cullen Nicholls

Crossing the Cultural Divide: Cultural Adaptation and AIDS Prevention among Cuban American Women
Gloria P. Ruiz

Profane and Sacred Imagery in Hurston’s Janie of Their Eyes Were Watching God and Marshall’s Avey of Praisesong for the Widow
Margaret Judith Sullivan

106

123

136

156
Integrating Spiritual Philosophies into Teaching: Toward a Symmetric Model of Engaged Pedagogy

Esther E. López
St. Lawrence University
Canton, New York

Michael W. Mulnix
University of the Incarnate Word
San Antonio, Texas

Abstract

This paper presupposes that integration of spiritual philosophies from both Eastern and Western traditions into more traditional teaching methodologies may well provide educators with a useful framework for building participatory, interactive and effective learning communities in higher education. Utilizing a so-called “engaged pedagogy”—whereby teachers are also considered healers who embrace the challenge of self-actualization, first for themselves and then for their students—it is argued that certain spiritual traditions can add significant meaning to in-class methodologies so that faculty are working hand-in-hand with students to create a vibrant atmosphere of learning that is dedicated to advancing and promoting the discovery of truth, mutual understanding, self-realization, and societal good. Such a holistic learning community would, by its very nature, encourage faculty and students alike to interweave participatory, ethical, diverse and innovative practices in day-to-day classroom experiences. The authors propose a “Symmetric Model of Engaged Pedagogy” that relates open systems theory to spiritual philosophies, providing a practical model for educators interested in formulating a more engaged, welcoming and inclusive pedagogy for the benefit of all.

The idea for this paper resulted from the authors’ desire to evolve pedagogically and their general observations that many of their professional colleagues seem less than satisfied at the end of a day’s
teaching, that many appear discouraged, worn down, disheartened. A fair number of the students appear in a similar light: lethargic, undedicated to their studies, cynical. Often, there seems to be no real “connect” between professors and students. Traditional teaching methodologies appear to be the norm—with professors standing in front of the class, reading from notes or a text, rarely engaging their students in any really meaningful dialogue. Only in very rare instances does the “conversation” shift outside the realm of the syllabus. Students know precious little about the professors; the professors, in turn, know even less about their students—their goals, aspirations, dreams ... in essence, their lives.

Without question, there are great teachers in most of our institutions of higher education, professors who are both engaged and engaging, those who enhance their lectures with real-life situations and who have the talent (and requisite energy) to interweave seemingly extraneous facts and incidents into the day’s subject matter so that the material covered is enriched, meaningful and, most importantly, internalized and remembered.

And so, we began to think about these rare individuals and the sort of teaching methodologies they are utilizing. Is there a common theme here? Can it be defined? If so, can it be shaped into any sort of a model that would benefit others?

In an attempt to come up with a common methodology, we initiated the study of the overall “style” of excellent teachers. Our preliminary findings indicate that, yes, there is a common theme and that, yes, it can be defined. But can it be shaped into an overarching model? We believe so. Our initial conclusion is that great teachers have an extraordinary ability to effectively communicate and, as important, to listen. Simplistic? Not really. After all, the ability to “communicate” chemistry is far different than the ability to “communicate” Chaucer. But, without question, there are as many excellent teachers of chemistry as there are instructors of literature. What is the commonality here?

We see many similar characteristics among these teachers: A sense of purpose, a unity of thought, an extraordinary ability to engage. Oftentimes the discussion ranged far a field from the subject matter at hand. In fact, in some instances the subject matter of the day wasn’t even addressed. And yet the learning process continued and, over the course of a semester, the classroom evolved into a true learning community. The discussions were lively. Students had as much right to their opinions as
did the professor. Often, the professor seemed more mediator than anything else—making certain those who wanted to speak had the chance and encouraging those who were more silent to offer up an opinion.

We then thought of these classrooms as microcosms of the larger “macro” university. We therefore looked at organizational theory and, specifically, systems theory. We placed classrooms into “open” and “closed” systems and described the open-systems oriented classrooms as allowing freedom of expression amongst students, diversity of opinion, and a wider range of debate. The closed-systems classrooms were, on the other hand, far more structured. The professors were not willing to allow conversation that extended beyond the lecture. These classrooms were, for the most part, far more quiet and the students less engaged.

We noticed a great deal of difference in the personalities of the professors in each of the “styles” of classrooms. Those utilizing a more open-systems approach (far less in number) appeared more liberal in thought and action. Many did not use notes but spoke extemporaneously. They paced. They gestured. They inquired and facilitated responses to questions. Just the opposite, were those using a more closed-systems approach: Conservative, calm, “traditional” in nature.

Was there a single word to describe the professors in the open-systems classroom? We decided it was charisma. And when we looked in Funk, and Wagnalls we saw “charisma” defined as: An extraordinary spiritual gift or grace granted to individuals for the benefit of others, as the power to heal.

Our thinking led us to describe the open-systems approach as being “symmetric” and the closed-systems approach as “asymmetric.” After defining the word symmetric as “beauty or harmony of form,” we reflected about what we came to call “symmetrical styles of teaching.” Our thoughts found echo in works written by bell hooks’ (sic) who was using the enlightened phrase “engaged pedagogy” to describe her own unique style of teaching. It did not go unnoticed to us that bell hooks often quoted the Vietnamese Buddhist monk, scholar and activist Thich Nhat Hanh or that the phrases “self-reflection,” “self-fulfillment” and “self-actualization” kept cropping up. And so, when further studying those teachers who had the gift of touching the hearts and souls of their students—not only successfully conveying to them the assigned subject matter but also revealing to them a sense of wonderment about the world around them—we hypothesized that there was a relationship between just
such an “engaged pedagogy” and spiritual thought and action. We further hypothesized that effective teaching could well have its roots in certain spiritual traditions where teachers are also considered healers.

Our search led us on our own journey of self-discovery, and continues to do so. Thus, we have just begun to walk a path that is leading us to a better understanding of spirituality and its possible relationship to excellence in teaching. For example, we are learning that Confucianism emphasizes humility, politeness and respect. And we have seen in great teachers these same three traits. In Buddhist philosophy, peace of mind is gained through meditation; the ideal state of nirvana is reached by right living and believing. We are learning that self-improvement is found by always doing your best, by studying hard and by controlling undesirable emotions. Optimism and harmony are valued above all. And in great teachers we have identified the same traits. In Taoism it is taught that happiness can be acquired through obedience to the requirements of man’s nature in accordance with the Tao, or Way, the basic principle of all nature. We are uncovering the mystical dimensions of Taoism which employs a full complement of psychological and physical techniques: hygienic, gymnastic, respiratory, meditative, sexual, and alchemical with the ultimate aim being to nourish certain life forces possessed by the body from birth. We know now that Taoists place their faith largely in nature and adhere to a strict set of moral principles in order to maintain a sense of harmony and balance. And in great teachers we have identified many of the same principles, many of the same traits. Finally, we are recovering the wisdom of Toltec spirituality whereby a powerful code of conduct emphasizing “right living” can radically transform lives to a new level of freedom, happiness and love. This same sort of “right living” appears to characterize many of the great teachers we are getting to know.

And so our own journey of discovering relationships between self-actualization, self-awareness, symmetry in thought and action, and effective dissemination of knowledge is just beginning. This paper offers no conclusions to any hypotheses. Our ultimate goal in this initial discussion is simply to propose several ideas relating to teaching effectiveness that we hope will spark further debate.

An Engaged Pedagogy

bell hooks (1994) has labeled her effort to provide students with a progressive, holistic education as an “engaged pedagogy,” a term we will
use throughout this brief paper. Basically, an engaged pedagogy emphasizes the well being of all students and places particular value on student expression. This cannot be accomplished unless faculty themselves are fully committed to a process of self-actualization—a desire to use one’s talents, capacities and potential to achieve self-fulfillment. The Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh effectively argues that a healer, therapist and/or teacher should work to find fulfillment for his or herself first, otherwise he or she will not be able to help others in their quest for freedom and happiness.

The concept of teacher as healer intrigues us. With that in mind, we are investigating Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism and, most recently, Toltec spirituality. We soon realized what a large task this would be, and so narrowed our scope to Buddhism and Toltec teachings. Our nascent readings have begun to enlighten us to the fact that Buddhist monks and Toltec nákuals are not only teachers but also healers in pursuit of harmony of mind, body and spirit. For Buddhist teachers/healers the spiritual dimension lies outside of time and history. Their personal quest to discover this dimension begins with inward meditation and ends with world transcendence. Generally speaking, Buddhist teachers view current existence in terms of illusory pleasure and temporary, shallow desire. Ordinary life is played out within the great drama of karma and reincarnation. Karma, the seeds sown by one’s past actions, carries one through a series of endless rebirths in what is characterized as a world of pain and suffering. The only way to rise above such miscrey is through awareness, leading to a spiritual awakening. In other words, if one gains the wisdom needed to transcend the ordinary, then one can gain salvation and the peaceful bliss of nirvana.

In a small but important book, Batchelor (1997) reminds us that Buddha was not a mystic who claimed privileged, esoteric knowledge of the universe, but a teacher who taught us to understand the nature of anguish, let go of its origins, and bring into being a way of life that is available to all. What Buddha taught, says Batchelor, is not something to believe in but something to do—and he maintains it is a practice that all can engage in, regardless of background or belief, as we live every day on the path to awakening.

In the Toltec spiritual tradition, science and spirit are one and the same since all energy, whether material or ethereal, was derived from the one source and influenced by the same universal laws. As in Buddhism,
Toltec wisdom emphasizes the healing nature of the teacher, which ultimately leads his or her students to freedom of thought and action.

The Toltec come together as masters (*naguals*) and students (*jaguars*). With the ultimate goal of transcending ordinary life and gaining personal freedom, *naguals* help *jaguars* to understand they need to have courage to face the truth of who they are in life and, through that knowing, change their way of living. According to Ruiz (1997), Toltec knowledge arises from the same essential unity of truth as all the sacred esoteric traditions found around the world. Though it is not a religion, Toltec honors all the spiritual masters who have taught on the earth. While it does embrace a certain spirituality, it is most accurately described as a way of life, distinguished by the ready accessibility of happiness and love.

There are common themes that run through these Eastern and Western philosophies. Words such as “freedom,” “awakening,” and “energy” are reoccurring. In both traditions, the teacher is clearly seen as healer. With that in mind, we are just beginning to test the hypothesis that teachers or helping professionals who work to create participatory spaces for the sharing of knowledge, who emphasize the well-being of all participants, and who are committed to the ultimate goal of facing the truth of who they are and who they want to become can, in the long run, provide his or her students with ways of knowing that allow them to live more full and complete lives. In other words, professors who actively embrace the challenge of self-actualization—those who are in tune with their own aesthetic needs, experiencing and understanding beauty and knowledge for its own sake—are far better able to create teaching practices that fully engage their students, giving them life-long tools to be able to enhance their creativity and their capacity to transcend the nature of the ordinary.

Such teaching methodology can, of course, be quite threatening to the status quo. In her research into effective and innovative teaching practices, bell hooks (1994) has discovered that many professors hold “intensely hostile responses to the vision of liberatory (sic) education that connects the will to know with the will to become.” (p. 19). In our own initial interviews with select faculty, we find this to be true: A clear majority reject any thought of interlacing holistic, creative behaviors into standardized lecture formats. Most appear to feel this brings religion into the classroom. Several have mentioned Constitutional concerns or mission statements of the institutions at which they work. Many feel that teaching anything outside of the material they have been hired to teach—be that
accounting, chemistry, English, nursing or whatever—is, at best, extraneous and, for some, a total waste of time.

This attitude is diametrically opposed to the pedagogical teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh who calls on students and teachers alike to be active participants in the learning process, to link awareness with practice. His unique methodology offers a way of thinking about pedagogy that emphasizes a holistic approach to learning and spiritual practice. According to bell hooks (1994), embracing this philosophy may require some professors to overcome years of socialization that has taught them to believe teaching is less effective if students and professors regard one another as “whole” human beings, “striving not just for knowledge in books, but knowledge about how to live in the world.” (pp. 14-15).

In our preliminary interviews, we are finding that a “good” professor is often thought of as an individual who is fully engaged with the art of teaching but with precious else. Little time is spent discussing world issues, broad philosophical treatises, or creative concepts. For the most part, the classroom remains as orthodox as ever. Sure, we find teachers using PowerPoint or electronic blackboards instead of chalk. But the thinking generally remains the set agenda: Today is Chapter 12 and Thursday is Chapter 13 and next Tuesday is....

But what about the truly excellent teachers? What sets them apart from the status quo? This is what we are beginning to learn from them:

That, for the most part, we are failing to engage our students in a significant way, to involve them in the learning experience. Engaged teaching emphasizes involvement and participation. It is not a passive exercise. It is active, and it is hard work. It involves thinking about the world beyond one’s self. It requires the teacher to become self-actualized, to actively engage him or herself in the drama of the universe, the complexities of the spirit. It mandates we think in the present. It mandates we think on our feet. It forces us to think creatively and to make big mistakes. Yes, it is hard work. But it is exciting. It is fun. It means that no two classrooms are ever quite the same. And, so, engaged teaching can be threatening. It can destroy in one day the concept of teacher as the dominant authority, as “all-knowing” and always correct. In many ways, yes, it eats away at authority. It creates equality between student and teacher. It creates a learning community where everyone has an equal chance at the dissemination of knowledge, at the discovery of new ideas, of suggesting unique ways of looking at the world. An engaged classroom
is always changing. It is dynamic. By its very nature it is rebellious. It is untamed, because it is truly alive.

A Proposed Model

We have found it useful to incorporate principles of open systems theory into a possible model for teaching effectiveness. In other words, the language of systems theory allows us a unique and effective way to blend Buddhist and Toltec philosophical principles with the construction of an engaged pedagogy. A number of writers have suggested that to effectively serve society, a college or university must adopt a more open-systems, symmetrically-oriented world view. For example, Gilligan (1981) wrote that “If the aim of higher education is to develop the life of the mind, then such education, in its entirety, bears a clear relationship to the pattern of moral development” in college students (p. 155). White (1981) argued that institutions of higher education “must improve their standing as humanitarian environments” (p. 170). And Douvan (1981) maintained that colleges and universities should put greater effort into finding ways “to help our students move toward increased capacity for intimacy in an increasingly impersonal world” (p. 210). It follows, then, that a symmetrical approach to communication in the classroom should parallel the development of humane, caring educational institutions. Our argument here is that Buddhist and Toltec spirituality could prove highly useful when structuring just such an open-systems, symmetrical methodology.

bell hooks describes just such an approach when she writes (1994):

Engaged pedagogy has been essential to my development as an intellectual, as a teacher/professor because the heart of this approach to learning is critical thinking. Conditions of radical openness exist in any learning situation where students and teachers celebrate their abilities to think critically, to engage in pedagogical praxis…. Profound commitment to engaged pedagogy is taxing to the spirit…. My commitment to engaged pedagogy is an expression of political activism…. Ideally, education should be a place where the need for diverse teaching methods and styles would be valued, encouraged, seen as essential to learning… (p. 202-203).

Building on research that J. Grunig (1989, 1992) completed on open (symmetrical) and closed (asymmetrical) systems in the corporate world, we argue that the same theories can be applied toward educational
institutions. According to J. Grunig, for organizations to be effective in the United States, they should be operating as open systems practicing a symmetrical style of management—serving the public interest, developing mutual understanding with their publics, and contributing to the overall welfare of society. In other words, to be excellent at what they do, organizations must adopt a symmetrical worldview.

Mulnix (2001) related open-systems, symmetrical theory to marketing in higher education and argued that institutions characterized as being socially responsible, collaborative, ethical and holistic were far more likely to be viewed in a positive light by their various publics. We would argue here that teachers with a symmetrical worldview (holistic, socially responsible, collaborative, caring) are far more likely to adopt elements of an engaged pedagogy. On the other hand, those teachers who operate in a more traditional, asymmetric orientation would be less likely to utilize such pedagogical principles.

Open systems theory and symmetrical presuppositions should, therefore, stand as major elements of any theory of “engaged pedagogy” in higher education. The traditional “closed-system” classroom is suddenly transformed into an “open-system” learning environment where both students and faculty are engaged as a community of learners. According to bell hooks (1994):

The quest for knowledge that enables us to unite theory and practice is passion. To the extent that professors bring this passion, which has to be fundamentally rooted in a love for ideas we are able to inspire, the classroom becomes a dynamic place where transformations in social relations are concretely actualized and the false dichotomy between the world outside and the inside world of the academy disappears … education for critical consciousness can fundamentally alter our perceptions of reality and our actions. (p. 195).

With this in mind, we would categorize two models as follows:
### Symmetric Model of Teaching

- Open-systems orientation
- Innovative
- Postmodern
- Interdependent
- Truth Constructing
- Perspectivity
- Interpretive
- Decentralized
- Participative
- Collaborative
- Flexible

### Asymmetric Model of Teaching

- Closed-systems orientation
- Traditional
- Modern
- Independent
- Truth Imparting
- Objectivity
- Deductive
- Centralized
- Exclusionary
- Individualistic
- Rigid

These models, of course, are entirely theoretical and will need to be validated through both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. If, indeed, such a model of “symmetric engaged pedagogy” can be developed, then practical implications would need to follow. In other words, what can teachers do to foster or implement such a model in their own classrooms? Possibilities include: asking students to write journal entries from their readings and class experiences; assign papers at the end of class and ask that students reflect on what they’ve learned; break into small discussion groups where students would work from flexible and interchangeable roles such as: “reporter,” “note taker,” and “social skills facilitator” roles; co-construct and post critical thinking questions prior to class; and rotate co-facilitation of the class among both students and teacher(s).

## Conclusion

Even at this early stage of our research, we argue that the choice of spiritual philosophies (East or West), the number of philosophies studied (it could be two or it could be twenty) and the blending of those studies (Confucianism, say, with Toltec thought, Taoist with Tlingit, or Zoroastrianism with Quakerism) isn’t nearly as important as the basic inclusion of holistic perspectives into modern pedagogy in higher education. However, the untested hypothesis presented here is that a thoughtful blending of the elements of both an Eastern and Western doctrine of spirituality will add a certain intellectual and emotional richness and a diversity of expression in the classroom, thereby creating a culture that encourages debate and demands intellectual freedom. It is
ultimately our position, therefore, that teachers who are themselves self-enlightened and self-actualized and who interweave holistic views (integration of mind, body and spirit) from spiritual philosophies into their day-to-day teaching methodologies will create a classroom environment that is, in and of itself, enlightened and actualized. Spiritual thought, therefore, can be of significant use in formulating an encompassing, kinder, and gentler pedagogy that nurtures a more engaged student body.

The Buddhist scholar Pema Chodron talks about the way teachers can function as both intellectual and spiritual role models. As cited by bell hooks (1994) Chodron writes:

My models were the people who stepped outside of the conventional mind and who could actually stop my mind and completely open it up and free it, even for a moment, from a conventional, habitual way of looking at things.... If you are really preparing for groundlessness, preparing for the reality of human existence, you are living on the razor’s edge, and you must become used to the fact that things shift and change. Things are not certain and they do not last and you do not know what is going to happen. My teachers have always pushed me over the cliff.... (p. 207).

Although there is significant diversity between and within the major Western theistic and Eastern spiritual traditions, there are basic “themes” that transcend the differences among world spiritual perspectives. They all basically agree that human beings should strive for a certain holistic balance in life—that killing, stealing and lying are wrong, for example—and that we should strive to grow spiritually and, by so doing, better promote the welfare of our fellow man. It appears to us that this worldview—this Weltanschauung—is really at the heart and soul of both Buddhist philosophy and the Toltec way of thinking. Holism—the premise that a living organism has a reality other and greater than the sum of its constituent parts—is the bedrock upon which these philosophies rest. It is our initial thinking, then, that teachers who effectively integrate holistic thought into the classroom experience bring a certain passion and emotion into the teaching experience. They challenge their students to think “outside the box.” They integrate highly specific knowledge with a broad-based effort to understand not only the world, but the universe, to understand not only the here and now, but to imagine—and debate—the life hereafter. By developing an engaged pedagogy through an infusion of spirituality—of holism—the very nature of the classroom experience is dramatically changed.
References


