

Teaching from a Community Context: The Role of the Field Educator in Theological Education

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ABSTRACT: In January 2000, seventeen theological field educators participated in a consultation on teaching and learning. The consultation explored how field educators could sharpen the focus of their identity, clarify the paradigms and methods of their teaching, and influence teaching in the broader theological curriculum. The following six sections emerged from the conversations and shared learning experiences of the group: (1) process, insights, and reflections on key issues; (2) the identity of the field educator as teacher/director; (3) teaching method and methods in field education; (4) the field educator as teaching colleague; (5) research and the credibility of field educators; and (6) field education as a career in theological education.

Introduction

Troubled by a sense that all has not been well with our seminaries, theological educators, scholars, and church leaders have been actively assessing the state of our enterprise for at least two decades. A part of what was unsettling was the aftershock of distress that denominations and churches experienced as they coped with an era of rapid and continuous cultural changes in North America, which began in the early 1960s. Since the 1950s, which may prove to have been the final gala of the Christendom era in North America, mainline denominations have sustained stunning losses of membership, congregations, clergy, and clout. During that same era, in stark contrast, “new paradigm” or postdenominational churches,¹ and megachurches have surged onto the scene. The landscape of faith communities has been a jumble of losses and gains. We have witnessed the coming of church growth and our ambivalent responses, the “worship wars,” changing roles of women and openly gay persons, fluctuations in numbers and backgrounds of candidates for ministry, church

marketing accompanied by (or in response to) a consumerist bent toward church shopping, nationwide attention to clergy sexual abuse, waning denominational and doctrinal loyalties, the emergence of congregational programs of theological education, burgeoning new-age spiritualities, diverse perspectives and experiences of racism and economic disparity, the waxing and waning of ecumenism, the removal of prayer from school and the Ten Commandments from courthouses, followed by government advocacy for faith-based initiatives. Churches have experienced this storm and passed along its implications to the seminaries.

In addition to this aftershock, the same forces that have unsettled the churches have directly affected the seminaries. In the midst of the turmoil, theological educators have continued to examine the philosophical and theological underpinnings of current curricula and pedagogies and to revisit the models of church and church leadership that inform prevalent approaches to theological education. Current educational practices were shaped, by design and by evolution, to fit a cluster of perceived “realities”—the profiles of students enrolling in seminary, convictions about the *missio Dei* that churches and clergy believe they are called to serve at a particular time and place, and perspectives on what constituted appropriate congregational and denominational life and church leadership. Awareness that many of these formative assumptions no longer fit contemporary situations prompted a stimulating array of theologians, church leaders, and educators to engage the debate on theological education.² Their analyses and proposals are guiding the efforts of theological educators to adapt to the new and continuously changing world of the twenty-first century.

Theological *field* education has come of age during these decades. Theological field education began as something of a reform movement within theological education. A major weakness in ministerial education was on the minds of a group of seminary educators who began meeting in 1946 to discuss their programs of “field work.” In five meetings of this group, held between 1946 and 1957, the identity and agenda for theological field education became clear.³ In the book, *The Advancement of Theological Education*, an AATS-sponsored study, H. Richard Niebuhr, Daniel Day Williams, and James Gustafson in 1957 identified a problem to which the emerging discipline of field education was a response, namely the need for a more holistic, integrated approach to theological education. “Theological education,” they said, “tended to be too much an affair of piecemeal transmission of knowledge and skills.”⁴ Nine years later, Charles Feilding, in his book, *Education for Ministry*, also an AATS project, stated the problem more starkly: “the gap between the working ministry as seen in the seminary and practiced in the parish is alarmingly wide. . . . Theological education does not prepare for ministry.”⁵

Tension between the interests of the academies, as defined by eighteenth-century categories of theological scholarship, and the concern to prepare persons for the practice of ministry pointed to the need for reform at the

intersection of knowing and practice in ministry. These early field educators believed that by making student ministries an explicit and well-developed part of the educational process, it was believed, seminaries could help students bridge the gap between theory and practice. Biennial meetings of concerned theological educators evolved into the present Association for Theological Field Education (ATFE). Not only have programs of field education become a required part of theological education in ATS accredited seminaries, the integrative, contextual concerns that are at the heart of field education have now become explicit expectations of those seminaries.⁶

There is significant overlap between the cluster of theological, philosophical, and pedagogical issues that are central to the practice of theological field education and the questions that have become prominent in the conversations about the state and future of theological education. The sometimes awkward fit of field education in traditional seminaries over the past half-century has highlighted some of the very tensions articulated in the current “debate.” Field education inherently and intentionally blurs the lines between church and academy, between serving and learning, between personal and spiritual formation and intellectual development, and between personal faith and professional competence. The debate turns on whether either the lines or the blurs are appropriate. Field education also emphasizes the contextual nature of *all ministry*, including the ministries of exegeting and interpreting, theologizing, and teaching. This emphasis is evident in the fact that many schools name their programs “contextual education” rather than “field education.” These concerns are prominent in the ATS Standards (as noted in endnote 6).

This perspective constitutes the backdrop for the following reflections stimulated by the ATFE/Wabash consultation held in Nashville in January 2000. The participants in that consultation and the authors of this report believe that the time has come for more intentional partnerships between field educators and the deans and faculty of our seminaries in pursuit of common goals. We believe that such partnerships will enrich our seminaries by enabling us to more effectively prepare women and men to serve God’s transforming purposes in and through the churches in these continuously changing times.

In January 2000, seventeen field educators⁷ from accredited seminaries across North America participated in a consultation on teaching and learning in theological field education. The consultation, held in Nashville, was jointly sponsored by the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion and the Association for Theological Field Education. Robert O’Gorman of the Institute of Pastoral Studies of Loyola University Chicago and Kathleen Talvacchia of Union Theological Seminary in New York planned and facilitated the four-day process. Lucinda Huffaker of the Wabash Center was a participant observer.

The consultation explored how field educators can sharpen the focus of their identity, clarify the paradigms and methods of their teaching, and influence teaching in the broader theological curriculum. The consultation

inspired rich scholarly discussion of teaching and learning in theological field education. There was a palpable sense among the consultants that, as a group, they were on to something very important and potentially groundbreaking for theological education as a whole: when field educators begin to see themselves primarily as teachers, they see their role and the values of field education as central to the purpose, flow, and rhythm of theological education.

The following six sections emerged from the conversations and shared learning experiences of this group, whose combined experience represents many decades of attention to ministerial formation. These sections are intended to broaden this significant conversation about teaching and learning to theological education as a whole—to deans and faculty, and specifically to theological field educators. These reflections (a) move the understanding of contextual education among seminary faculty and administrators to new levels, (b) serve as an example of holistic learning and credible scholarship, (c) identify exciting areas for research, and (d) bring to field educators clarity with respect to issues of identity, method, and collaboration.

The following sections, with the authors noted below,⁸ focus on:

1. Process and insights of the consultants during the four-day event, followed by in-depth reflections on the key issues raised, *What They Said*, by Robert O’Gorman and Michael Smith
2. Identity of the field educator: teacher/director, *Who They Are*, by Robert O’Gorman
3. Teaching method and methods in field education, *What They Do*, by Robert O’Gorman
4. The field educator as a teaching colleague on the theological faculty and field education’s role in the curriculum: “contextualization,” *Where They Work*, by Robert O’Gorman
5. Research and the credibility and contribution of field education, *How They Think*, by Kathleen Talvacchia
6. Field education as a career in theological education, *To What They Are Called*, by Kathleen Talvacchia

Section One

Field Education in Conversation

Several key questions focused the conversations in and learning activities of the Nashville consultation. What is the identity of a field educator: administrator or teacher? What method(s) are characteristic of or central to the practice of field education? Where does field education fit within the broad arena of theological education? Is it, or should it be, a discrete discipline? Does its generalist character limit its ability to be governed by the culture of the academies? How should field educators best participate in the ongoing reformation of theological education? Is the fruit of their daily engagement in the contexts and contextualizing of message and ministry something they should offer more boldly to their communities of theological education?

The purpose of this first section is to allow a glimpse into the deeply personal dimensions of theological field education. Through a review of the agenda, learning processes, and conversations of this consultation, we take the reader into the embodied practices, purposes, struggles, questions, and convictions of a group of theological educators whose daily work keeps them hovering around the “bottom line” of the institutional purposes of their schools.⁹

Identity: Are field educators administrators or teachers?

The question, “Who are you?” elicits different answers depending on whether the asker wants to learn how I understand myself or to know my perception of how others define me. An exercise early in the Nashville consultation launched the group past the theoretical into an exploration of the day-to-day activities and roles that form and express the identity of field educators. Each participant was asked to list on newsprint, and then share with the group their *ideal* job description, their *real*, (i.e., functional job description), and their *official* job description. The process brought into clear relief the complex identity of the theological field educator.

The titles, status, and identity of the field educators vary significantly among the schools. Some are teachers. Their titles may be Professor of the Practice of Ministry or Professor of Christian Ministries, and their tenure-track status highlights the educational nature of their roles and identities: members of the faculty. Others have titles such as Director of Ministry Studies or Director of Contextual Education and are primarily administrators. Some serve under administrative appointment, are not tenure-track, and are not considered faculty. Their identity, function, and status are in focus. In a few cases, both roles are acknowledged in title and status. One is a Director of Field Education and Associate Professor of Christian Ministries on tenure-track with full faculty status and many administrative duties.

Ambivalence. As the consultation progressed, participants came to accept, and even embrace, their own ambivalence about their titles, status, and identity. The following comments from participants, edited for conciseness and clarity, reveal the paradoxes inherent in their work. The practice of contextual education requires both teaching (they are faculty) and administering (they are directors).

- “Faculty tend to reinforce one another in identity and in what is significant. For that reason, the more I identify as faculty, the more respect, status, and credibility I gain. Being a full part of faculty affects my ability to be central to the decision-making and makes field education more central to the teaching endeavor of the whole faculty.”
- “It depends on how you define teaching. I see almost everything I do as having a major teaching component, even when what I am doing looks, through the lens of most teaching faculty, like administration. Standard faculty research criteria expect a different kind of research than what is most helpful to my work as director, program designer, and field visitor. So, in a sense, the title ‘director’ gives me some valued freedom.”
- “Maybe it is not either/or. If a teacher is one who facilitates learning, then everything I do is teaching—visioning, planning, organizing reflection groups, recruiting and training supervisors, evaluating and approving sites, evaluating student progress, budgeting, problem-solving, developing and revising procedures and materials, as well as the work that I do for and in the classroom. All of my ‘directing’ is done in service of student learning. So, putting all under the identity of teacher is preferable.”
- “This discussion has revealed our ego struggles as being guild members, with the need to assert ourselves aggressively—qualities that pay off in academia. But in drawing attention to ourselves we draw it away from the context, which is the teacher. As we pursue an identity as teachers rather than administrators, it is well to see the temptations therein.”
- “Maybe we have problematized the title of ‘director’ in an effort to elevate the title of ‘professor.’ But I’ve begun to see a new richness in the title of director. As professor, I have fairly narrow teaching responsibilities, but as Director of Ministry Studies, I now understand myself to be invited to be widely concerned for all the ways that we teach about the identity, skills, and theoretical foundations for ministry.”

The mixed identity of field educators is further complicated by their sense that in some ways they feel like aliens in the culture of theological schools. Comments during our consultation hinted at their personal experience of living with uncertainty about where they belong. One of the participants, Lynn Rhodes of Pacific School of Religion, had said in 1987,

We are “bridge people,” which as the poet Marge Piercy reminds us is a fine place to walk over, but very difficult to live

on. We are connectors between the academies and the churches; between those who think theory and practice can be separate entities and those who demand relevance out of anything and everything we do. . . . We sometimes found ourselves on the boundaries of every group and institution, seminary, [and] church. . . . As chaotic, unfocused and diffused as that can be, I do believe it is also our strength: never having a place of stability; never quite legitimate.¹⁰

It is not surprising that field educators have tended to feel insecure about their place at the table of theological education. Field education exists within the larger world of theological education—a context traditionally governed by the values of theological scholarship. Even though those values and educational practices have changed in many ways since Schleiermacher’s fourfold division held full sway,¹¹ there remain in most schools traces of a bifurcation between theory and practice. The intellectual rigor of field education is not apparent because its objectives, pedagogies, structures, and means of evaluation do not fit standard academic models. Some at the Nashville consultation seemed highly sensitive to their lack of full affirmation and support from their schools and colleagues.

Credibility and call. Field educators as a community are aware that they bear some responsibility for a number of factors that contribute to the persistent uncertainty they feel about their place. One is the relatively high turnover among field educators. Field educators come from a wide variety of disciplines and experience. There is no clearly defined career path to field education, nor are there PhD programs in theological field education. Some serve in field education temporarily while they wait for positions in the classical disciplines. Perhaps due in part to the transient tendencies of field educators, as a guild they have failed to develop a journal or a coherent body of literature exclusively focused on theological field education. Furthermore, there is no single academic department that constitutes field education. This cluster of interdependent factors is evidence of the failure of field educators *and* the larger system of theological education to nurture this movement toward full maturity. When measured by the standards of the classical disciplines, which tend to prevail in theological education, field education remains underdeveloped.

Yet, in a way that symbolizes the paradoxical situation of field education, conforming to the standards of the classical disciplines may not be desirable. Must field education continue to develop its resources and structures? Without a doubt! But its maturation may be guided by values that transcend the standards of the academy. Participants in the consultation were aware of the need to continue to seek credibility as competent, thinking, disciplined participants in the community of theological education. They need to reach levels of education comparable to their faculty colleagues and need to persist in serious research and publishing. The goal, however, may not be to establish field

education as another credible academic discipline. To do so could tacitly endorse the fragmented approach to theological education that their calling inherently resists. For the sake of credibility, field educators need to demonstrate in their integrative, contextualizing work a level of discipline and long-term commitment comparable to that of scholars and teachers in the classical theological disciplines. The more fundamental aim, however, is to nurture a collaboration that includes colleagues in faculty and administration, as well as clergy and denominational leaders, in adapting or designing theological education practices that defragment theological education and ministerial formation and make their disparate parts cohere.

Theological field educators are called to model for their students as well as their faculty colleagues a high level of competence in a broadly defined, generalist practice of ministry. Many of the students whom they help to educate are called to serve as practitioners in congregational ministry, i.e., as generalists. To become a generalist (e.g., a pastor) need not imply that a student does not have what it takes to become a “specialist” (e.g., a professor in one of the classical disciplines). Shockingly, theological faculty have been known to intimate or overtly counsel select students that they are too bright to become pastors, advising them to pursue scholarship, writing, or teaching instead. Field educators still strive to model for those students who are called to be generalists a rigor of the whole person (intellect, heart, spirit, relational ability, character) in exercising competent, committed, and disciplined ministry that draws deeply from many wells in order to minister good news through presence, words, and practices that are faithful as well as appropriate to their contexts.

Conversations about the *identity* of the field educator were at the heart of the entire consultation. Perspectives on identity provided a crucial foundation for the discussion of teaching methodologies. These perspectives were also integral to helping field educators imagine how best to rethink, with their faculty colleagues, the aims and practices of theological education.

Method: What is distinctive about teaching in field education

Teaching, under the umbrella of theological field education, occurs in several venues beyond the classroom. Our participants had no trouble naming them. When they evaluate and select placement sites, when they engage students in reflection on their vocation and together discern the site and supervisor that are the best match, when they coach students through placement interview processes, when they recruit and train supervisors, when they conduct site visits and student evaluations, and when they facilitate reflection seminars—in all of those activities—they are teaching and facilitating learning. Participants in the consultation sought to determine whether there is an identifiable methodology that is central to their practices in these various settings.

They concluded that Pastoral Theological Reflection (PTR), a mode of teaching by action/reflection, is central both as a means for enhancing ministerial formation in students during their field education experience and as a set of perspectives and skills needed for life-long learning. It is a method that suits well the generalist nature of their teaching. A reflection process based on a specific issue or experience from ministerial practice allows the teacher to invite students to consider how their Christology, ecclesiology, hermeneutics, sense of church history, personal and social ethics, philosophy of religious education, and other theological perspectives inform their ministry decisions. That same reflection guides the students’ discovery of ways in which their ministry experiences energize their course work.

The field site: teaching in the synapse. On-site supervisors provide some of the teaching that occurs in field education. The consultation offered an excellent opportunity to explore ways that teaching in the field education site differs from teaching in other field education contexts, such as classroom and reflection group.

The consultants visited Bob Coleman, pastor of the Edge Hill United Methodist Church in Nashville, who supervises ministry students for Vanderbilt University Divinity School. They asked him to describe the pedagogies he uses to facilitate student learning from the community context. Coleman has supervised ministry students for ten years. He understands education to be a process of growing and developing mentally, morally, and ethically. In his words:

When *the what* [Scripture and tradition] and *the how* [preaching, teaching, counseling] crash into *the who* [the parishioners], that is where education happens. On the site in field education we are between the mind and the hands, in the synapse. We are aligned among and between estranged vocabularies, folkways, nuances, and practices. We create opportunities for students to experience the estrangement, to translate classroom knowledge and experience and to critically reflect. Focusing on *the how* is not enough (to baptize, to preach, to teach, etc.). The site supervisor has to usher the student into a place of tension where academic knowledge meets the community. This grants the student and the academy an opportunity for affirmation.

The Edge Hill congregation with its distinctive character and context is itself a teaching partner. Begun in 1966 during the civil rights movement to bring African Americans and European Americans together, which it has done successfully, Edge Hill’s primary concern today is the increasing need for gender and sexual inclusivity. The congregation believes that the unity of God’s love can come only through the diversity of God’s creation. This is a justice church with outstanding ministries: prison, homeless, hunger, tutoring,

mentoring, etc. It is more concerned with building sustainable relations with its neighbors than growing in size and buying up surrounding properties. There is a minimal level of pretense at Edge Hill. There are no taboo subjects.

Coleman gave a narrative response to the question about how he teaches. He recounted his experience with two different seminary students. The first was a third-year female seminarian seeking ordination. Ministry at Edge Hill introduced her to tutoring and mentoring low-income children. Early in her time there, she developed a drama ministry and, in a weekend retreat, guided the kids to design skits that would express life through their eyes. Working with the children transformed her sense of call. She concluded, "I don't want to be a pastor. I want to be an elementary school teacher in a low-income neighborhood." Coleman tailored the remainder of her internship to that end. He guided her reading of books on poverty and children in poverty. Coleman believes that the supervisor is not trying to get the student from point A to point B, but rather, is allowing the context to reveal something of value to the student.

The second student was a third-year male seminarian in his second field education placement. His first placement had been a justice ministry setting, addressing needs of the homeless. When he arrived at Edge Hill he wore jewelry and had "wild" hair. He was soft-spoken, poetic. He wanted to work with liturgy and worship. His experience with the Edge Hill congregation facilitated an important shift. Before the year was over, he cut his hair and began to dress and relate in more conventional ways. He also decided to return to his Southern Baptist roots to seek ordination. Working in that context taught each student something of value that they did not expect to find.

Coleman views field education as much more than offering a "how-to" course for student ministers. It involves the risk of placing students in a spot of tension and helping them to understand themselves. Coleman is motivated to be a supervisor (and thus to help Edge Hill become a teaching congregation) by his love of the intellectual challenge, by his hope that some interns may be inspired by the experience to do ministry similar to Edge Hill's in other places, by his enjoyment of the teaching and learning process, by his desire for the personal growth that comes from supervising, and by the challenge and satisfaction of crafting each internship around the student's interests. Coleman spends one and a half hours a week in supervisory conference with each intern. Through an intentional relationship with students, he aims to nurture in them "the art of living creatively and effectively in ambiguity."

After visiting Edge Hill, the consultants reflected on the distinctive contribution the supervisor, the ministry site, and the field educator each make to the student's learning. Here are some of their observations:

The supervisor

- “The pastor/mentor/supervisor is often the crucial person. A supervisor who can ask the right questions and provide support and critique based on observation offers something central to theological education that I can’t do in the classroom.”
- “Traits to look for in a supervisor: not too big an ego; doesn’t need to have the student copy her/his style; can affirm a student who chooses a different kind of ministry as her/his vocational direction; cares about theological reflection, not just skill training.”

The ministry site

- “The relative ‘messiness’ of life in the ministry site ushers students into an important new dimension of theological learning. It is distressing for some because they are just getting used to the relative orderliness of learning in the classroom and library spaces of the theological institution. With good supervision this transition can help students prepare for life-long learning.”
- “Developing the mindset and skills to recognize, respect, and learn from the context is a great asset for a lifetime of ministry.”
- “Congregations that are committed to being teaching parishes are exciting places to learn.”
- “A site can engage the student in pioneering, missional ministry, not just learning the skills to be chaplain to the status quo.”

The field education director

- “It is a challenge for the director to take full advantage of the unique gifts that each supervisor and site bring while pursuing some outcomes that meet basic requirements of the field education program.”
- “By training supervisors and those who facilitate reflection groups, I am able to invite students to reflect on how their understanding of theology, Bible, and history informs their practice of ministry, but I am limited in my ability to pursue the learning back in the other direction. Is there a place within the field education program to ask the students how ministry experiences in their site are influencing their study of theology, history, Bible, etc? Should we field educators encourage and offer resources/training for faculty who teach in other disciplines so that they regularly invite field education students to explore those rich learning opportunities?”

Pastoral Theological Reflection: Problems, possibilities, and requirements. The consultants focused on the following questions: If Pastoral Theological Reflection (PTR) is the central method of field education, how is it taught? How does the teacher, supervisor, or group facilitator determine when the student has gained genuine insight? How is PTR related to the rest of the

theological curriculum? They began to answer them by viewing experience and tradition as two sources of learning ministry on a continuum:

Ministry
Experience-----Tradition

The student on the site is much closer to the direct experience of ministry. The field educator's role is to stand with the students at each end and help them bring experience and tradition together. The field educator as teacher helps students theologically integrate learning from both sources.

In theological reflection it becomes apparent that tradition and experience are complementary, engage in dialogue, and neither is superior to the other. Methodologically, learning to reflect theologically requires that the student pay attention to experience and tradition, and hold them in silence and contemplation, resisting the temptation to rush to apply theory/tradition to experience or vice versa. The goal is integration, a synthetic approach that is the wellspring of *praxis*—practice consciously informed with theory. Within conventional theological education, students tend to begin with tradition and then encounter experience. In contextual education, students begin with their experience in the ministry site and then create space there and in themselves for a life-giving dialogue with tradition (itself built from experience of past generations).

These specific skills are required for pastoral theological reflection: clarifying direction, illuminating pastoral concerns, focusing the theological issues, and balancing a student's ministerial skills and personal feelings. This means having both a pastoral concern for the student and a theological concern for those to whom the student ministers. It is important to be clear about the distinction between pastoral theological reflection groups and pastoral counseling and care. The focus in pastoral theological reflection is on vocation and work; the leadership responsibility is to address their various relevant issues. Pastoral counseling uses a variety of therapeutic methods to help persons handle their personal problems, life destiny, and their relationship with God. The major functions of pastoral care and counseling are healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling.

Field educators are not the only ones in theological education who use reflection as a teaching method, but they are unique in using it in the immediate relationship of theological content to the context of ministerial practice. The student's engagement in ministerial experience is the base from which field educators work. Because the student engages in the ministry experience as a whole person, theological reflection done well also attends to the student's emotions, personal history, spirituality, contextual observations, and relational competencies as well as her or his intellect. Learning to weave together the worlds of the academy, the ministry context, and the person of the student/

minister may be the most demanding intellectual work a theological student ever does.

After a role-playing seminar reflecting on a pastoral event, the consultants agreed on these summary observations. As generalists, field educators need to be prepared in Scripture, theology, ethics, history, liturgy, and so on. They must also be able to draw on personal experience. They need skill to identify the impact of various factors on the reflection process, such as the background of the group leader, their own agenda, and discernment of the social location of the pastoral event. They must resist the temptation to act as a therapist.

Naming the method. How important is the terminology used to designate this central method of field education? The consultants’ efforts to answer this question raised differing assumptions and perspectives, and revealed their lack of consensus about the details of action/reflection learning in field education. Clearly, further exploration is needed. Participants began to explore whether there is, beneath the unresolved terminology question, a common dimension of practice around which cohere the distinctive ways of articulating these methodologies.¹²

The term Pastoral Theological Reflection helps to convey that the intern (i.e., the minister) is responsible for his or her own reflective learning, and that learning is done best in the context of pastoral relationships and community. The teaching process stresses the communal nature of good theological reflection lest students gravitate toward overly individualistic practices that are isolating and inherently unsatisfactory. PTR brings together the three components required for *praxis*. One participant wondered whether “pastoral” modifies “theological” or “reflection.” How does Pastoral Theological Reflection differ from theological reflection in and for other contexts?

While there was no resolution on the questions of methodology and terminology, participants recognized the need to continue to analyze their practice and efforts to articulate what they are doing. There is much to be learned from educators in other fields (such as medicine) who, like field educators, are concerned with the formation and education of the whole person. Holism, whether in an approach to education or in the practice of ministry, is embodied: it must reside in the persons of those who teach, administer, and serve in other ways. Those who possess or are possessed by a holistic perspective on ministerial formation will devise, name, and use methodologies and structures that serve it well. In turn, they and their students will be continually formed by those structures and practices. Vision, methodologies, structures, and terminology are interdependent in field education’s efforts to prepare persons for ministry.

Context: Field education's role in the community of theological education

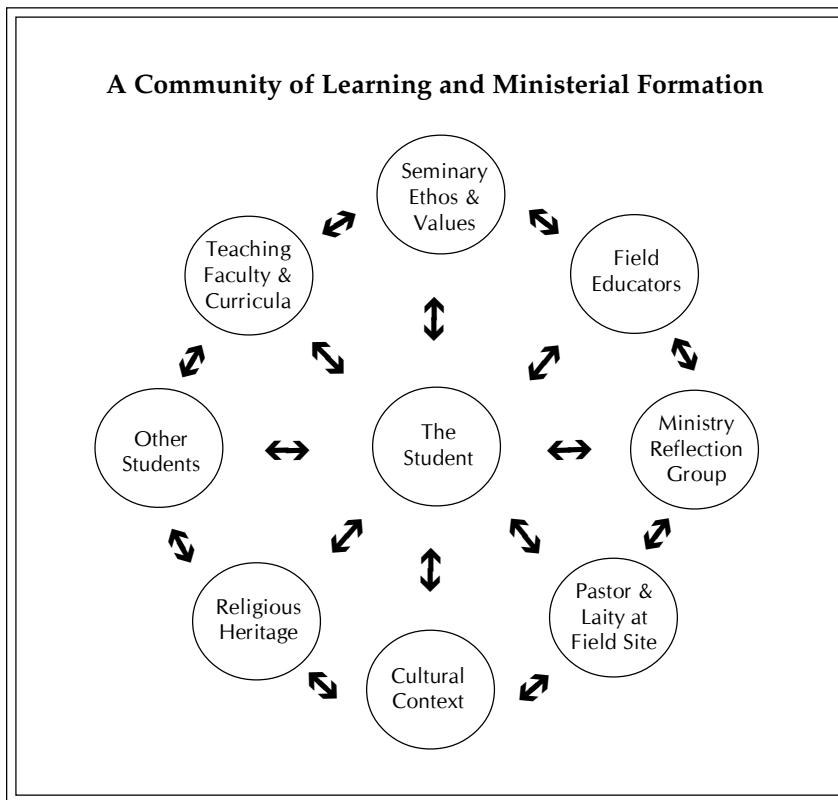
An important aim of the January 2000 consultation was to enable participants to seek a better understanding of their vocation in the context of the broader enterprise of theological education. They were to ask, to what extent do the aims of field education match those of the whole? Are the contextual concerns of field education widely owned by the school? What, if anything, is the "hub" of the theological education process? What do field educators and their faculty colleagues need to learn from one another regarding their goals, students, contexts, and pedagogies? What modes of collaboration should field educators and their colleagues devise in order to advance contextualization in the schools' approach to theological education? How fundamental is contextual education to theological education? Several learning activities enriched conversations around those questions.

Teaching as connectedness. A videotaped presentation by Parker Palmer to the faculty at Vanderbilt University entitled "Teaching as Connectedness: Knowing, Teaching, and Learning as Communal Activities"¹³ offered a starting point for the consultants to revisit the basic paradigms that govern theological education today. Palmer recounts the story of a curriculum revision undertaken in the medical school of McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario.¹⁴ The dean and a group of faculty became concerned that they might be guilty of "educational malpractice." Many students were graduating with less compassion than when they entered, their ethical behavior was in steady decline, and they were failing to learn how to learn in order to keep abreast of a rapidly changing field. Rethinking curricular and pedagogical assumptions was overdue.

A prominent difference in the new approach they devised was that learning began with a living patient at the center of a small group of a professor and students. From that first day on through the end of their medical school, the patient was the subject of the curriculum, the hub around which and from which the students branched out to learn the various facts, theories, systems, and contexts that influence health and illness. This involved a pedagogical shift from having an expert teach disembodied data (an approach that too easily views patients as objects) to teaching via collaborative inquiry in small groups focused on a person who is a patient in their midst. Students still went to lecture halls, labs, skill-training seminars, and independent studies, yet always returned to the hub of that wheel, the patient-centered small group.

This model views teaching as informed connectedness. The teacher connects, or engages, self with students and subject in a personal and meaningful way. Palmer describes community as the capacity for connectedness to self, others, the cosmos, history, and scholarly discourse, and understands the concerns of community to be inseparable from the educational process.

A central feature of the ferment within theological education over the late twentieth century has been distress over the inherited tendency toward fragmented (and perhaps fragmenting) learning. From a systemic perspective, it could be said that during this time of distress, theological education has generated internally, in the emerging practices that have become field education, its own corrective to fragmentation—the embryo of a more communal approach to the whole process of theological education. Field education is inherently a connecting educational practice. Relationships are the primary medium within which formation for ministry occurs. The holism of this kind of learning extends beyond the whole person (body, mind, spirit, emotions) to the person in community. The structures of many field education programs reflect and require the relational nature of experiential theological learning. The model below reflects a field educator’s perspective on the network of relationships within which theological learning and formation occur. Whether structured and intentionally focused on learning (e.g., in the field education program), or functioning coincidentally, all of these are formative *relational* contributors to the educational process.



Several field educators in the consultation reported that they continue to face ambivalence or even resistance within their schools to the notion that experiential, contextual, and relational learning are as substantive or as crucial to theological education as formal classroom learning. Some consider it too “soft.” This ambivalence may well be the natural response of a system to disruption of its homeostasis, or a challenge to its most basic assumptions and settled convictions. If field education is a significant contributor to the embryonic development of new forms of theological education, some resistance is to be expected. The ability of field educators to help construct a web of collaborative learning relationships within their own schools (and more broadly among theological schools) will both test the applicability of relational learning to educational institutions and will embody the communal, contextual, and reflective learning that field educators believe to be the heart of theological learning. The movement of modern theological education has never passed this way before. We are making it up as we go along. To the extent that field educators and other theological educators are able to nurture this embryonic collaboratively, the cause of theological education will mature.

Palmer’s video presentation sparked energetic discussion and raised several important questions. Field educators may attempt an answer to some of the questions, but other answers can only emerge from conversation with the larger community of theological education.

- What is the subject in our divinity studies? What is the hub from which we start and to which we return? Is the hub a method, content, or ultimate outcome? Is pastoral/practical theological reflection a methodological hub? Is “the capacity for connectedness” itself the hub? Is the person of the student the hub, i.e., embodying an inherent unity of intellect, emotions, history, personality, will, faith, relationships, skills, vocation? Or is it the community of theological education? These questions seem pregnant with opportunity and require conversation across the larger theological education community.
- How does the primary methodology of field education (Pastoral Theological Reflection) help to counter pernicious disconnectedness?
- What are the reflective methods already in use within the respective theological disciplines (ethics, Scripture, theology, religious education, preaching, etc.)? What others are appropriate to them?
- How do we collaborate with our colleagues across these disciplines in discovering and developing more connective, collaborative approaches to theological education?

The field educator and the curriculum revision process. To help focus the consultants’ attention on the collaborative dimensions of this topic, Lynn Rhodes of Pacific School of Religion (PSR) presented the case “Collaborative

Curriculum Revision.” The case featured the multiyear effort of the PSR faculty to collaborate across disciplines in reshaping their curriculum. The field education faculty member was chair of the MDiv revision committee for much of the time. The last major curriculum revision at PSR had been twenty years earlier. In previous years the field education faculty member had been coordinator of a nine-year experimental program that involved many faculty members teaching in a ministry setting where students were in field education placements. Every week the class was held at a different field education site. A study of the results of that experiment showed that changing the teaching from the seminary classroom to ministry sites shifted both student and faculty perceptions and orientation to the material whether it was Bible study, ethics, worship, or church history. Those faculty who participated in the experiment acknowledged that it was an important experience of faculty development. The faculty as a whole never adopted the experiment, but elements of it have been critical in guiding the leadership given by the field education faculty member as the faculty has developed the MDiv revision. The experiment showed that faculty development is key to curriculum revision and that changing the site of the classroom to the field can be a critical element in changing faculty teaching and inculcating a sense of accountability.

Before and during their curricular revision, the PSR faculty have also been experimenting with different forms of teaching. They learned from the past experiment how important it was to have a praxis base for the curricular revision process itself. The Hebrew Bible professor, for example, developed a course in which every student taught a six-week Bible class in their local church field education sites. He visited those classes wanting to learn first-hand what was happening in local Bible study groups and whether that reflected what he was teaching. He asked himself and the students: What is our community of accountability? What issues emerge in local congregations that can inform the content, context, and critical thinking of these groups? Why does there seem to be such a divide between what is taught in seminary and what happens in Bible study in local congregations and communities? This professor’s attention to the students’ ministry and the students’ ethical formation illustrates an integrative approach to theological education. It also demonstrates a healthy flow of interaction between classroom and field education site where both are changed by their encounter.

Members of the PSR faculty also have begun to collaborate in research projects. An ethics professor has co-authored a book with a professor of spirituality. Individual faculty ask faculty in other disciplines to read their work-in-progress to receive other perspectives. Many of the faculty co-teach across disciplines and seek out faculty in disciplines other than their own as they do their own research. One of the most satisfying research projects for several of the faculty was done collectively over four years by a group including the field education faculty member, an ethics professor, a theology

professor, and several church leaders. One result of their work together is that they have developed authentic relationships with one another that include enjoyable work, appreciation of other disciplines, and laughter. It also served to help them keep a healthy balance in their loyalties to their guilds, students, community, and ministry.

The MDiv revision process was begun more than five years ago. As a result, the faculty devoted a full semester to weekly faculty seminars. They had come to the conclusion that revision is an ongoing process and is not complete once a set of curricular changes is made. It takes energy, time, and administrative and financial commitment to make any significant progress in faculty development. Reward systems must reflect those commitments. Rhodes's case reinforced the consultants' awareness that only a concerted effort can overcome several barriers to integrative approaches to theological education.

Most theological educators agree that the traditional disciplines make little sense as isolated subjects, and they express a desire for healthier ways to make them interact, and find that established values and structures get in the way. Ironically, the values that guide faculty selection in some schools contain built-in resistance against high levels of collaborative research, teaching, and attention to the comprehensive curriculum. Research is highly valued and an essential ingredient in the tenure process. Many who are excellent researchers prefer working alone. They find that they pay a high price in emotional energy and time when they engage in the kinds of relationships required for collaborative research and teaching. In addition, most schools have reward systems that encourage individual rather than collaborative work in scholarship, teaching, and professional service. It is unrealistic for faculty to add much-needed collaborative work on top of their other commitments. Lasting change will come when the values and structures of our schools support it.

Just *how* field educators can and should foster increased collaboration in their schools' broader program of theological education is another matter. Consultants shared several suggestions and perspectives. They reiterated the need (noted above) for field educators to be credible and appropriately confident conversation partners with their faculty colleagues. Additionally, they suggested the following:

- Field educators could offer to guide faculty learning experiences that embody contextualized theological learning. One participant found that some who teach in the classical disciplines at her school were very apprehensive about leading reflective seminars because they had little experience in the area. They needed training and coaching. This can only happen if the school creates space for it.
- Participate in and initiate, if necessary, collaborative teaching, research, and other ministries. This includes the vulnerability of subjecting personal perspectives, objectives, and processes to collegial influence.

- Highlight and publicly celebrate the ways that faculty are already teaching in context-sensitive and integrative ways.¹⁵
- Consciously avoid dichotomous language that reflects a polarizing view of intellectual and practical work and learning.
- The dean in one theological school asked the field educator to serve as a consultant to other faculty helping “audit” their syllabi and teaching practices to improve contextual and integrative dimensions of their teaching.
- Continue to define and develop, i.e., further “discipline,” the integrative work of field education. Because field education is constitutionally cross- or multidisciplinary, it will benefit all disciplines if field educators work to further define what they do.
- On the other hand, one consultant suggested that field educators bring to the formation process a healthy “un-discipline.” Their primary focus on contexts of ministry means that they bring an abiding affection for the chaos and conflict often found among the people of God and in the contexts they inhabit, and a firm conviction that revelation takes place there.
- Field educators should continually invite faculty to focus on the students’ learning rather than on fields of teaching.
- Attempt to gain the administration and faculty’s support for a vision of a more clearly contextualized and integrative practice of theological education. Help identify needed adjustments in the school’s system of rewards.
- Engage other faculty (as many as possible) in theological reflection/practicum groups within the field education process. Provide the orientation, guidance, and support they need to do this kind of work confidently and well.
- With faculty colleagues, keep reflecting theologically on theological education. Patiently ask the theological questions that pertain to intended outcomes and the congruence of our decisions and practices with those outcomes.
- Invite into our midst those who can critique our assumptions and practices, e.g., non-Western scholars and ministers.
- Ask questions of candidates for faculty positions (to the extent that local hiring processes allow) to learn their perspectives on and experience of contextual and integrative approaches to theological education.
- Participate with other faculty in research on teaching and learning to identify the methodologies that actually achieve the core learning objectives of the school and its teachers, then critique and modify ways of teaching in light of those findings.

There was consensus among those who gathered in Nashville in January 2000 that field education is not just a program in the seminary. It is a way of understanding theological education and ministerial formation. Field

education's efforts cannot be fruitful without effective collaboration and wise engagement with the broader school community in learning, discerning, and transforming its shared work. Success in this also requires a cultivated, active trust in God and in the process of collaborative learning and leading. One consultant raised an important cautionary note:

The contextualization of curriculum is a heady concept. We need to proceed carefully. I know of no colleague who does not understand her/his discipline as being at the "hub" of the theological education wheel. They wouldn't be good teachers if they didn't consider their discipline this way. We need to be in dialogue not simply to press our agenda but also to listen, to learn how and where scripture and tradition form context and community.

Curricular reform should not be the starting point in an effort to influence a school toward increased contextualization in its work. One person commented that a new curriculum is of little value if you have the same old mindsets in the faculty. A revised curriculum will be the fruit of change in the perspectives, beliefs, and practices of the faculty. Field educators are wise to recognize and ally themselves with those among their faculty colleagues who share that vision, and work patiently and openly toward productive change. The content, tone, and pedagogies of the curriculum, as well as the structures that support them need regular, perhaps continuous, review to ensure that they reflect the commitments and heart of the community of learning.

Conclusion

The significance of this Wabash/ATFE Consultation was not in creating new knowledge or insights. The consultation did bring into clearer focus, however, that field education has reached an important crossroads. It seems significant that the values and concerns of this coming-of-age discipline of field education correspond so directly to several values and needs that are prominent in theological education at this time. Whether the two choose to nurture a more intentional partnership that leads to the creation of something new, more faithful, and fruitful may depend on several factors beyond the individual efforts of either party.

Field education will be unprepared for that partnership unless we continue to clarify and then confidently honor and live out of our unique identity and its inseparable vocation. We must continue to refine our distinctive methodologies and bring new discipline to our craft without surrendering that identity, which refuses to be bound by the sometimes limited scope of "the academies" as we have traditionally understood them. If, in God's grace, field educators are able to appropriately lead and/or follow, and walk with their seminary

colleagues, they may together participate in a rebirth of the enterprise of theological education, and thereby contribute to the preparation of those persons called to church and community leadership that serves God’s healing transformation of the world.

The possibility of such a rebirth is also dependent on the larger system of theological education. Field education at best has some helpful perspectives and practices. Unless they are refined through interaction with the perspectives and practices of other partners in theological education, they will, like the seed that fell along the roadside, fail to germinate and bear fruit. Neither soil nor seed alone bears fruit, nor feeds the hungry of the world.

In the remaining sections, we will move to more thorough investigation of the issues of identity, method, and context that emerged during the consultation.

Section Two

The Identity of the Field Educator: Teacher/Director

The conversations about vocational identity during the Nashville consultation hinged on the field educators' self-perceptions and the perceptions of their colleagues. This is indeed the way identity is ascribed. We establish our identity by engaging the questions: How do we see ourselves, and how do the stakeholders in theological education see us? Stakeholders include colleagues, students, administrators and boards, the church in general, including denominational executives, pastors, and parishioners. As noted by the consultants, this essentially is the question of vocation—the conjunction of our gifts and the needs of those with whom we associate.

The consultation had posed the concern of identity as a choice between *teacher or director, faculty or staff*. As the consultants faced this formulation, key values emerged. On the side of teacher or faculty a key value is the field educator's *core place in the decision-making about the curriculum* of the school. The concern here is not personal power. Some of the consultants had been at their schools long enough as field educators that they had gained much respect and personal power in curriculum decision-making. The concern was more the status of the enterprise of field education as a "theological discipline" with a strong voice in theological education. To what extent and in what ways is field education central to the curriculum?

In this section, we will point to the underlying issues that influence the identity of field education and its centrality in the curriculum.

The imperialism of theory over practice

Traditional models of the theological curriculum inherited from the eighteenth century grew out of a world view built on the mind/body split, with the mind the work of the school and the body best trained on the field. "One learns *what* to preach in school; one learns *how* to preach in church." This model of educating ministers suggests that the purpose of the school is to produce knowledge of why and what ministry is; that is, to focus on theory. The *field*, i.e., church, is seen as the locus for the application (practice) of that knowledge. Such a perspective envisions the minister as a problem-solver, an applier of the right theory. The operating assumption is that the job of academics is to derive theory out of experience, whereas the job of practitioners is to learn those theories in school and then go into ministry and apply them.

The legacy of this educational approach is twofold. It produces a minister who does not claim the authority for the meaning of what he or she is doing and/or a minister who feels that theory is simply irrelevant, hardly a "pastor-scholar."

This mind/body split has one conceive of the universe in terms of “ups and downs.”¹⁶ More value is given to things near the top and less to what is near the base. There is a “chain of being”: God over humanity, humanity over animals, animals over plants, plants over rocks, rocks over atoms, and atoms over particles. Religious language and religious habits in our culture assume, and then reify, a similar hierarchy that dominates theological ministerial education. Faculties, courses, programs, and scholarly work in the academic fields—the biblical and theological disciplines—are held to be of greater value than those in the arts or practice of ministry.

One of the chief theological problems with teaching ministers in schools is that academic sources are not the primary sources to which ministers must attend. The primary sources are the experiences and practices of those in the community in which the minister serves. This is the model of the Bible, which, for the most part, is taken in churches as being a record of primary experience and practice. Theology or religious theory, in such communities, is typically considered to be second-stage reflection on these primary sources. Mistaking one for the other creates confused expectations and priorities. Working against such confusion in theological education are certain current “contextual” theologies such as liberation theologies, black theology, and feminist and womanist theologies. Section Four devotes much attention to them. Field education’s task in the curriculum is to articulate people’s primary experiences as they tell them, before introducing any reflective theology or theory.

To consider learning from human experience to be inferior to the work of the research disciplines is very likely to betray both. Human experience is, at its heart, religious: that is, it is disclosed to and disclosive of the limits of existence and the horizons of human living.¹⁷ Field education moves the student to engage theological research not just as a product, but also as a process, so that theological learning can happen in encounters with the present lived experiences of communities of faith.

Field education stands Janus-faced at the portal between communities of faith and the academy. In one direction, the students join the larger community engaging the religious experiences of life. In the other, at the seminary, they join teachers and colleagues reflecting on several communities’ practices in light of the religious traditions that have shaped them. During this exchange students learn to generatively practice reflection and to reflectively practice. They learn to become “ministers,” ambassadors to the community.

About fifty percent of ATS accredited schools regard field education as a teaching or faculty position—as an integral theological activity of the curriculum—not as administration. This forward-looking position rejects images of field education as limited to giving students “work experience” while they are studying, or only providing the context in which they practice skills learned elsewhere. Regarding field education as a teaching activity recognizes that it is critical for exercising and gaining the theological knowledge essential for

ministry. Field education becomes a theological exercise whose benefit is greater than fieldwork.

The identification of field educators as guild members in theological education

The attractiveness of the “director” identity may involve a wary view of the relationship of field education to the theological guilds. Those who attended the January 2000 Wabash/ATFE Consultation were not all convinced that field educators should abandon the identity of “director.” As a director, the field educator is able to bring a *counter-cultural voice to the academy-oriented community of theological education*.

An underlying issue directing the identity of field education and its role in the curriculum is the relationship of field educators to the theological guilds. Do the guilds control the theological curriculum? Should they? Should field education be identified as being part of or as one of the guilds? Field educators are not so sure. Inherent in the term “guild” is the image of production. Clearly in the American Academy of Religion and Society of Biblical Literature, the guilds control the standards for research and production. They have set the requirements captured in the phrase “publish or perish.”

A recent survey of theological field educators revealed that fewer than fifty percent have produced any publications.¹⁸ Among the reasons for this lack of publication are the nature and time demands of the field education role. Indeed, the field education site supervisors, whom the field educator recruits, trains, and supervises, constitute a faculty of mentors larger than the typical school’s residential faculty. Thus, staff oversight and other administrative responsibilities tend to limit the publication output of field educators as they do for deans and other administrators. Rarely do they reach the production level of more typical faculty members.

However, a school’s decision to make field education a faculty position carries the expectation that the field educator will contribute to theological research. This low volume of publications suggests that field education has not yet developed either modes of research appropriate to the enterprise or structures to support research as a priority. Section Five addresses this concern in depth.

Research was only one of the problematic identity-related concerns raised by the field educators at the consultation. They also questioned the idea that in order to satisfy guild expectations, all field educators should hold a PhD. They fear that this requirement might block the creativity of the field educator. “One of the gifts of field educators,” a consultant said, “might be to bring intellectual excitement formed by places other than graduate schools. Graduate schools have limitations in developing good teachers.” This is indeed a radical suggestion.¹⁹

During the consultation, there was much conversation about the inadequacy of having to choose between the terms “teacher” and “director,” which led to the thought that “teaching” is not a univocal term. If the context is the teacher, the field educator has the task of working with that context—a much more unwieldy task than working with a text. One consultant said, as we have noted: “. . . my administrative functions are in service of learning objectives . . . in all that I do I am teaching—visioning, recruiting, evaluating, etc. . . .” Juxtaposing “teaching” and “directing” overlooks the common ground in field education. Teaching in classical areas and in field education is very different. The first is focused on subject matter outside the student; the second attends to the student and the student’s experience as “text” and is highly process-centered. This means the classroom component of field education is designed differently and is on a different timeline than a book-text course. To process the direct student experience demands different teaching skills. This happens in a considerable amount of one-on-one work with students, site cultivation and visitations, as well as classroom and small-group facilitation whose prime mode is practical theological reflection. Again, comparison of field education teachers with deans, who, while faculty members, take on teaching functions that are beyond the traditional classroom ones, is most appropriate.

The Belgian/Brazilian biblical scholar Carlos Mesters offers helpful concepts of teaching through his reflections on the three words: *text*, *context*, and *pretext*.²⁰ In the Bible, for example, he asks, just where is the word of God? Is it the “text”—the written words contained in the canonical writings of the Bible? Does it already exist in the “pretext”—the motivations, the assumptions, the lived experiences that one brings to a reading of the text? Or is it in the “context”—the world in which we live where we experience love and hate, joy and sorrow, poverty and plenty? He claims the word of God is not in any one of these places, but that it happens when all three are in a dynamic communion. When the “pretext,” our *present* experiences correlate with the experiences and practices of the *past* (the “text”), and we are moved to act out new experiences and practices in the *future* (our context), Mesters says, the word of God happens.

Perhaps one of the most poignant comments of the consultation was, “This discussion has revealed our ego struggles with being guild members, with the need to assert ourselves aggressively—qualities that pay off in academia. But in drawing attention to ourselves we draw it away from the context that is the teacher.” In field education, the context is a primary teacher. Perhaps the same can be said about the more traditional academic setting—it is the text that is the teacher. As at the “great books schools,” the teacher is actually a “tutor” of the text—a guide to the text, and the text does the teaching. What is key is the student’s ability to deal with reality—the “text,” versus an ability to deal with a particular person—the “teacher.”

Consensus? With all these issues, there was no consensus regarding the identity of the field educator. Ambivalence prevailed, but not by default. It was

a thoughtful, chosen ambivalence. Ambivalence and some ambiguity are vital to field education's contribution to the community of theological education. One of the consultants observed: "If my identity is faculty, I may lose my sense of being on the border of the institution . . . it is healthy to have some 'unease' with the institution." "Border and margin" comprise a major theme in religious ministry. Much biblical work places Jesus at the margin of society—with a concern for the marginalized and a disdain for those who seek to control and live at the center.

The consultants in Nashville did not rush to embrace the identity of "teacher" versus "director," though in a forced choice, "teacher" more accurately characterizes how field educators tend to see themselves. There was, however a greater desire to redefine or reinterpret these terms. There was a call to theological field educators to "let the imagination roam freely."

The issue of identity was the overriding issue of this consultation and it comes back to shape and direct the following sections of this article: method, research, and career.

Section Three

Teaching Method and Methods in Field Education

Method and identity are intertwined in theological field education. Both are shaped by their service of the overarching aim of field education: the holistic formation of men and women for ministerial praxis that is faithful to tradition and appropriate to its context. To the extent that the concerns of field education influence the ongoing transformation of theological education, these issues of teaching method in field education become vitally important in the future of theological education. In this section, we draw on the insights of several known scholars as we explore further the methodological dimensions of context and theological reflection in theological education.

The context is the teacher on the site.

The site visit to Nashville’s Edge Hill United Methodist Church during the Wabash/ATFE consultation illustrated vividly for the participating field educators the fact that, on the site, it is the context that teaches. The actual encounter of the student with the needs of the people and the exigencies of the situation produce the events and experiences that provoke the student’s responses. In the classroom the student responds to the text—a second- or third-level reflection of events. The mode of teaching on site is more like that of coaching. Direct supervision, i.e., facilitation of learning, can happen during a “time out,” that is, either during the student’s scheduled supervisory conferences with the on-site supervisor or informally as the two interact in ministry. The coach and the player are guided by a game plan (a theologically informed strategy), which both responds to new data from “the floor” and is changed by those data. As coach, the supervisor is able to test the student, “placing students in a spot of tension and helping them understand themselves,” as Pastor Bob Coleman of Edge Hill Church says. This approach requires supervisors “who can ask the right questions, and provide support and critique based on observation,” as one of the consultants put it.

Reflection on how and what learning takes place on the site indeed helps field educators to see that their role in the classroom is that of mediator of practices revealed in the recorded tradition (the students’ texts from their academic and practical courses) and practices students bring from the section of church in which they are placed (captured in their ministry event reports). With the image of teacher as mediator, the field educator needs a methodology that holds both sets of practices, the contemporary and the historical, in a balance of respect. The field educator as mediator has several key teaching tasks:

1. The *descriptive* task: helping the student to read a “text,” present-day or ancient,
2. The *historical* task: cultivating the student’s ability to analyze the influence (and judge the value of that influence) of biblical/historical/theological/ethical/or psychological material for ministerial practice in an immediate, specific context,
3. The *systematic* or constructive task: helping the student reframe present-day practices in light of the resources (scriptural, historical, theological, etc.) and,
4. The *strategic* task: guiding the student in the choice of a new or a reformed practice (ministry) to address the needs he or she encounters in the events of the site.

Reflections on “theological reflection”

One consultant’s comment, “We need to do a lot more work on what we mean and what words really describe our method . . . this is the area that surfaces our educational differences,” prompted some historical and theological reflection on “theological reflection” itself. We identified above some teaching tasks that effective in-context learning (field education) requires, we look at those tasks from the point of foundational “method” or theory.

To enter the world of “theological reflection” is to walk onto a vast plain upon which are individuals who practice daily spiritual meditation, lay groups of Christians who gather to reflect upon a social justice action or need, liberation theologians who speak of a *praxis* paradigm for theology (over against a classical paradigm), and theological educators who, as Pastor Bob Coleman said, facilitate the learning that occurs “when *the what* and *the how* crash into *the who*.”

Theological education today is at a crossroads of “faithfulness to the ancient and honorable paths of the *fathers*” and mothers, and the knowledge required for daily religious living.²¹ The church and the world demand accountability from the theology school for knowledge that is both authentic and “usable”; a knowledge to help people draw on, explain, and respond to their religious experiences.

One force pulls theological education toward a deeper and more critical study of the “traditions” and their disciplines. In merely a generation the various “guilds” of theological education have significantly developed and come of age. More has been learned about Scripture, for example, in the last generation than in all the preceding years of its existence. Today, more than ever, professors are challenging students in theological education to encounter and master the guilds’ disciplines and methods.

There is a counter force that pulls theological education toward the “context.” Here the point of departure for theological education is not the

reflections of scholars and their mastery of methods of inquiry but the daily living of persons negotiating relationships with birth, death, hunger, plenty, restlessness. These relationships are lived out in the city, the suburbs, and in rural areas, in situations of poverty and wealth, disease and health, with the young and the old.

Theological reflection as used in theological education by field educators and in other fields is a product of what Catholics call “pastoral theology” and Protestants call “practical theology.” Efforts in pastoral or practical theology are a late twentieth-century phenomenon in theological education that are attempting to overcome the limitations of “objectivistic” approaches. It begins by focusing on people and their actions on their terms: who they are, where they are, and how they are (i.e., *the subjects*). Meaningful action is the “text” with which such focusing begins.

Practical or pastoral theology represents an epistemological breakthrough in doing theology. It adds *experience* to classical theology’s norms of Scripture and tradition. Experience becomes not only the point of departure but also the point of return for practical/pastoral theology. Practical/pastoral theology, then, points to a new touchstone, indeed an initial canon for doing its work—experience in the present context. Like a font of water coming from the ground ever new, the practices of the community are the source of theology, its very nature. The processes of understanding and interpretation that it teaches move one toward action. Individuals, social groups, and communities change and are changed through the agency of God’s creative and redemptive spirit.

Practical or pastoral theology cultivates capacities to be present to the situation and its environment, and develops learning skills to hear and describe what is happening and to interpret the situation. It opens the student to new, previously disenfranchised voices (especially those of people of color and women) that may not be represented in the reflections of the scholars. Practical/pastoral theology is essential for exercising and gaining the knowledge for ministerial studies.

Barbara J. Fleischer writes: “The concern for ‘method’ . . . has, in many respects, taken center stage in our post-modern religious world. . . . (T)he major methodological shift that has occurred in this century is toward theological inquiry that grounds itself in the human experience of the persons and communities doing theology, a development rooted in the ‘turn to the subject’ initiated by theologians like Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan.”²²

Bernard Lee helps us with the word “practical”: “Unlike the older meaning attached to ‘practical theology’ as the ‘applied discipline’ flowing from the theory found in the classical theological specialties, practical theology as a new approach to doing theology calls upon communities to reflect upon interpretations of their cultural realities in conversation with interpretations of the Christian tradition (texts, symbols, story and vision), with a focal attention on the question of what kind of world we should be creating together as agents in history.”²³

Fleischer, in her paper cited above, roots practical theological method in the works of the theologians David Tracy and Bernard Lonergan. Her paper focuses on the method Lonergan elaborates. Practical/pastoral theology, Fleischer writes, calls upon communities to reflect on their experiences in light of the Christian tradition, with the question: "what kind of world should we be creating together as agents in history?" Underlying this approach is David Tracy's premise that the Christian tradition and human experience are equal conversation partners in the theological enterprise; one does not dominate the other.

Bernard Lonergan in *Method in Theology*, Fleischer points out, proposes that theology must proceed through the same phases that all human learning follows: experience, initial understanding, judging (or critical reflection), and decision. This is a break with Aristotle's deductive system of beginning with unquestioned "truths" and then proceeding logically to a final conclusion. Lonergan begins by outlining four operations or levels of consciousness through which we move to decisions about the meaning of events and about how we respond. These four movements are: experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding.²⁴ Lonergan elaborates on how we attend to our experiences, articulating our initial understandings and testing them by reflecting upon them in the critical light of other information to come to decisions.

The shift from a deductive to an experiential method in theology highlights the centrality of conversion. Focusing in the abstract, the universal, the unchanging, and the static qualities of God takes attention away from conversion. A change in one's observations opens one to new values and brings a change in oneself, how one relates to others and how one relates to God. As Lonergan puts it, conversion is "at once personal, communal, and historical."²⁵ Continual conversation and reflection on experience and on the ultimate questions that arise from our experience lead to an ever-expanding horizon and self-transcendence.

As field educators we can indeed claim a "method" in theology that represents our particular place and role in theological education. It maintains the primacy of context. It begins and ends in present experience. It draws on the tradition and reshapes its interpretation, and it is holistic. It is about conversion to the revelation coming from present experience.

In the next section we extend this conversation to look at just how theological field educators see themselves in relation to the entire curriculum of theological education and just how they relate as theological colleagues with other faculty in the school.

Section Four

Contextualization, Colleagues, and Curriculum: The Field Educator’s Role in Advancing Contextualization in Theological Education

Context, Curriculum and Connection

In its June 2000 Biennial Meeting in Toronto, ATS approved a mission statement “. . . to promote the improvement and enhancement of theological schools to the benefit of communities of faith and the broader public.” In a workshop session at that meeting, entitled “Mission: Leading Schools to Fulfill the Educational Mission,” Brian McDermott, SJ, then president of Weston Jesuit School of Theology, and David Tiede, president of Luther Seminary, presented case studies that cited changes in the missions of their schools and the effect these had on constructing a new curriculum and pedagogy. Tiede set the tone by referring to the ATS mission statement that was approved in a plenary session earlier in the day. What is key in this new statement, he pointed out, is the focus on “communities of faith” rather than on theological disciplines or on ministerial leadership. The quality of the theological school’s work is measured by its contribution to the lives of congregations and their neighborhoods—the school’s context. Those contexts are not only recipients of the school’s services; their voices must be heard as the seminary defines its purposes, curricula, structures, and pedagogies. In the ATS mission statement, clearly, it seems to us, “context” is the emphasis.²⁶

The question posed at this ATS workshop was “what is the unit of analysis” by which we determine what our curriculum and pedagogy should be? McDermott began by looking at the shifting student body at Weston. He pointed out that forty-two percent of the student body was comprised of laypersons, and he went on to describe the school’s new three-year curriculum.

Tiede of Luther Seminary did not focus on the changing student body as the “unit of analysis” but on the communities of faith the school serves. He demonstrated what a radical shift this was for a denomination that is so pastor-centered. The watchwords for the reform McDermott and Tiede advocated were: “Stop preparing graduates for a church that hardly exists.”

Both presenters acknowledged that while they lacked answers, they believed deeply in the necessity of struggling with this type of question. Workshop participants identified several possible “units of analysis”:

- the kinds of students we have,
- the view of leader (pastor) we have,
- the faculty perspectives,

- the disciplines (traditions),
- the communities we serve, and
- the public communities of our society.

Rethinking theological curricula and pedagogies through the lens of heightened attention to and concern for these and other relevant units of analysis will ground the schools in today's realities and enhance their missional faithfulness.

ATS has clearly pointed to the communities we serve as appropriate starting points in discussions about curriculum and teaching. As schools consider the ways that movement toward more contextualized approaches to theological education will affect pedagogy and curriculum, the work of field educators should be helpful. Attention to context has always been at the heart of their work. How to help students learn contextually is the question they live with daily.

Unfortunately, little is known in the academy about the work of field educators beyond the practical "nuts and bolts" of providing field placements. Field educators have not created an adequate body of scholarship that would help their colleagues in the wider academy understand field education more clearly. We need to raise the question of how the field educator can be a more helpful and valued resource in the endeavor of faculty from the various "traditions" and disciplines to teach more contextually.

Contextual Theology—A Brief History

The unfathomable destruction of human life and spirit in the two great wars of this century had the sobering effect of focusing theologians on the problems of present-day societies, rather than on speculation detached from present lived experience. After the midpoint in that century, theologians, particularly in Europe, began to talk of a theology of "present realities" or contextual theology.²⁷ In our discussion of methodology in field education, we noted the epistemological shift that reincorporated experience with Scripture and tradition as a norm in doing theology. Field education embodies a focus on experience as the point of departure and the point of return for contextual theology. Contextual theology affirms experience in the present context as an initial canon for doing its work.

Jon Sobrino, in *The True Church and the Poor*, suggests these elements of contextual theology:²⁸

1. The *starting point* of contextual theology is the present, not the past. It begins from the everyday experience of people. Contextual theologians have their highest concern in doing theology in the social situation in which it takes place, looking ultimately to social consequences. Contextual theology thus has an ethical and practical character.

2. Contextual theology is *particular*. It does not see itself as emanating from an idealized geopolitical world center (northwestern Europe) abstracted from the real worlds of particular living like the streets and neighborhoods in our cities. It is thus more closely related to the social sciences for the purpose of analysis and action, whereas classical theology is more related to philosophy and the world of ideas.
3. Contextual theology is directed to a *transformation* of the social context. To transform does not mean to construct an intellectual model to understand experience; it means, rather, bringing about structures for new experiences in society.
4. Contextual theology is the *common reflection* of and for a community—not the theology of an individual working alone in a library.
5. Contextual theology restores *method* to its original meaning—as a way of traveling—not in thought, but in reality. The move from abstract concepts to concrete practice is not via the history of thoughts, but by means of action. It is action by faith that makes the abstract understandable, not thought. Classical theology’s emphasis on theory rather than action comes from the accumulation of theological tradition over centuries—a “deposit” of truths to transmit, explain, interpret, and make meaningful. This “burden” of knowledge, as a given, is classical theology’s starting place.

Contextual theology influenced one of the major documents emerging from Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, which altered the Catholic Church’s theological method.²⁹ Traditionally, the church had theologized deductively—that is, beginning with rational principles or articles of faith and then applying these to present situations. In contrast, *Gaudium et Spes* carried out theology inductively, starting with “the signs of the times” or the “here and now” of experience and then engaging theological principles in a synthesis of tradition and present fact before acting. From this base of present experience, the council exercised a new mode of theology.

When the teaching church engages in contextual theology it is no longer distant from the people but becomes intimate with their experience. People view their experience in religious terms. The dualisms between religion and church, and between faith and life, cease to exist.

The Reconstruction of Academic Theology: Practical/Pastoral Theology Comes of Age

David Tracy, concerned because theology tends not to address the religious in the contemporary human struggle, recasts the categories of theology to activate a “critical correlation between an interpretation of the Christian fact and the contemporary situation,” i.e., between theological abstraction and life.³⁰

Tracy’s first work phenomenologically establishes that fundamental theology’s task is to show that human experience is, at its heart, religious.³¹ His

second work describes constructive or systematic theology as an attempt to express this human religious experience in terms of the classic Christian texts or traditions.³² Systematic theology's mode, then, is that of literary analysis. Thus, Tracy calls for an "analogical imagination." He proposed a third book to develop the position that the work of contextual theology is to construct a model or vision of human transformation—what people "live" when they operate from the Christian tradition.³³ This *vision* is a synthesis of fundamental theology's *assertion* of human experience's religious nature (thesis) and systematic theology's *expression* of this experience in Christian terms [religious analogy] (antithesis). A synthesis, according to Hegel, whom Tracy cites, "preserves, uplifts, and transforms" thesis and antithesis simultaneously into a new third thing. Thus, Tracy's construction of the relationship of ways of thinking theologically about religious experience is threefold: *intuitive*—common to human experience, *narrative*—as analogy in religious texts, and *expressive*—as vision in action. For Tracy there can be no one-way or handmaid relationship among the categories of theology or the categories of theologians. The pastoral agent—the "contextual theologian"—for Tracy is the one who calls forth the living vision of human transformation that comes by *living* ethically in the world. Her or his activity participates in the theological task by its struggle to formulate the *telos* or vision of the human religious experience, what Tracy calls the ethical ideal.

A problem with the technical-rational epistemology, as mentioned in Section Two, is that the intellectuals' sources are not primary sources, experiences are. This is the epistemological model of the Bible, a record of primary sources. Theology or religious theory is secondary reflection on these primary sources. We have confused secondary sources with primary sources and have forgotten that knowing is in action. Dominated by the technical-rational model, the world of knowledge is built upon a vision of control and a desire for efficiency in action. Now, however, scholars are more aware of the importance and value of complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and conflicts of value. These conditions that exist in the pastoral field are not to be abstracted and dealt with in the theological "ivory tower," but are the loci of knowing in their own contexts. Central to the pastoral agent are not theory and its principles of how to solve a problem, but reflective action.

The old epistemology of action was shaped by a concern with problem solving. The new epistemology of reflective action is not. It is concerned with problem *setting*. Where technical rationality cannot tolerate uncertainty, reflective action is secure in dealing with uncertainty; where technical rationality operates only scientifically, reflective action operates artistically; and where technical rationality is restricted to a single discipline, reflective action chooses from among competing professional paradigms.

The pastoral agent, then, is the theological actor who has the power to decide on her or his feet. It is only on the hard high ground that one can follow

research-based theory and technique; in the swamps it is too messy. Yet it is in the swamps where the problems of greatest human need exist. It is precisely this concern about religion’s relevance to human problems that has caused Tracy to revise theology.

Theological education needs to see theological research and learning not just as a product, but also as a process, something in which to engage. The operative epistemology here is that *knowing is in action*. Action needs to be seen as embodied thinking. Knowing happens in action, sometimes in a split-second, intuitive-feeling interface of the actor’s awareness of self, tradition, context, and mission.³⁴ At other times, knowing happens in a far more conscious and sometimes collaboratively reflective process of deliberate action.

In *A Fundamental Practical Theology*,³⁵ Don Browning elaborated a reframing of theological education that lives out the theological *habitus* as a *rhythm of theologizing*. This rhythm flows from action to theory and back to action through four movements: *describing* the community’s action, *analyzing* the action historically, *systematically relating* life themes in the action to the religious tradition, and *establishing the norms and strategies* of pastoral response to the action. Thus Browning sees “practical theology” (or contextual theology) not as a discipline but as an overview of theology itself, the indication that theology arises out of the lived experience of the community. Theological field education is contextual theological education’s primary teaching *methodology*. Field education is a *theological* teaching exercise whose content is a rhythm that tracks through Browning’s four movements noted above: describing, analyzing, systematically relating, and establishing norms and strategies of pastoral response to the action.

Field education plays a major role in orchestrating students’ theological education, an activity through which they generate data for theological construction and reconstruction. Field educators not only exercise their teaching directly in the classroom with students but also are called to be leaders in contextualizing the theological school. What field educators seek to add is not simply intuition, but adaptability, in integrating embodied thinking into practical action.

Conclusion

In the first four sections of this work, we have addressed two related concerns. First, we have reflected on three central issues in theological field education that emerged from the January 2000 Wabash/ATFE consultation: identity, method, and context. We have also called attention to the timely correspondence between theological education’s pressing for more holistic, integrative, and contextual approaches to theological education, and the nature and strengths of field education. Field education is a “member of the body” of theological education and exists in service of the vocation of theologi-

cal education. This is true functionally within each theological school as it is in the ongoing historical evolution of theological education. Field education is both dependent upon and a contributor to theological education. Every weakness, strength, uncertainty, or triumph of field education sends ripples of its burden or blessing out into the larger system. Our concern for the well-being of both realms calls us to continue to nurture their unity.

In the coming section, we challenge field educators to expand the knowledge base of theological education through more disciplined and extensive research in the practices of field education. We believe that such research will enrich the efforts of all theological educators to help prepare women and men for faithful and appropriate practice of ministry.

Section Five

Building a Knowledge Base from Practice: Research in Theological Field Education

Theological field educators often find themselves in a dilemma. They are members of a faculty at an institution that is involved with theological education, and they direct a significant component of its curriculum. Their work is noted in the ATS accreditation standards as essential to the curriculum of theological education.³⁶ However, the work that they do, located as it is outside the school, in the “field,” is often not viewed as significant and essential by their colleagues. As we noted earlier, some field educators are not in faculty positions, and some who are in faculty positions are not on tenure track. We also described in earlier sections our sense that some faculty colleagues are unaware, or perhaps unconvinced, that field education contributes to the intellectual life of students and our schools. Field educators, some think, simply help the students prepare for the practical dimensions of ministry.

As theological field educators, we are often in complicity with this understanding of our work and ourselves. For the most part, there is more attention to the issues of practice than research among field educators, even at our professional meetings. Some of this stems from an institutional structure that often places field education as one responsibility among many in a job description, while some of the problem is a practical issue of time that the field education endeavor requires. Its roots, however, lie in a deeper problem of identity of self as teacher and scholar, as well as our own lack of confidence in the particular epistemological understanding we bring to the academy.

Furthermore, because field education is an integrative discipline of theology, education, sociology, ethics, and Bible, field educators have to keep abreast of the research and literature in all these areas as participants in the student’s ministerial formation.

This section seeks to show that research is a fundamental and essential component of the work of field education for at least the following two reasons:

- It builds a knowledge base of practical action and theoretical reflection about the field of ministry.
- It allows us to bring field-based perspectives into the research base of traditional disciplines in the theological academy.

Thus, research in field education contributes to theological education both a content knowledge about ministry and a research method capable of bringing insight to the work of other disciplines.

Research Obstacles: Why Don't We Do More Research?

Understanding the role of research in field education must take into account at least three structural problems that have to do with “nesting” field education in effective ways within the administrative and academic structures of the theological school. First, the epistemological inclination of the academy weighs heavily toward theory and its application in practical settings. Its epistemology is primarily theoretical. Second, as a practice-oriented process, the work of field education poses specific challenges of articulation. It seeks to effect a balance between thinking and feeling, hard facts and intuitive sense. It requires an integration of the whole person. This is not always a comfortable fit in an intellectual environment that prefers abstract conceptualization, logic, and theoretical critical thinking. And third, the work of field education necessarily demands administrative components that must be attended to for effective learning to occur. This often creates a perception of field educators as being administrators. Practical reality compounds this situation in that administrative tasks can become so time-consuming that there is little energy or space left in the schedule for reflective thinking. While administration has its educative components, it requires a very different energy from the broad theoretical and practical reflection involved in asking deeper questions of the discipline.

Each of these points about research in field education could constitute individual sections of this article. For the purposes of this section, however, I will discuss each briefly as a way of contextualizing some of the issues facing field educators and their attempts to engage in research.

Traditionally, the academy has been dominated by a particular way of knowing that is highly theoretical and involves rigorous critical thinking. In this model, engaging texts and colleagues in critical dialogue alone creates new knowledge. Students are expected to take these ideas and apply them in practical situations. This theory-application model has dominated higher education and learning.

The last twenty years have brought some change in this view with some thinkers resisting theorizing divorced from practical application in a context of community. Scholars such as Freire, Schön, and Groome advocate an action-reflection process as a way of integrating community needs and theoretical rigor.³⁷ Scholars who are influenced by gender and culture-based critiques seek to understand how practical knowledge can have an impact on theoretical knowledge in ways that make that theoretical knowledge more accurate to the lived reality of communities.³⁸ Many, if not most, academic models, however, still rely heavily on theoretical thinking and find it difficult to engage in a genuinely integrative action-reflection process.

In contrast, field education (as well as many areas in the arts of ministry) relies on a more praxis-oriented method. This method begins in experience and, through an action-reflection process, seeks a theory that makes practical

sense, as well as a practice that is theoretically consistent. Many scholars who work in the area of theologies of liberation and ethics are kindred spirits with field educators in this work of praxis thinking. But the explicitly community-based location of field education forces an attention to practical detail that does not always fit into traditional research methods. The knowledge created in field education is an integrative, often intuitive product that poses its own difficulties of articulation. This creates difficulties in research because we often have to work with research material (that is, the complexities of ministerial practice) that can be difficult to subject to theoretical categorization.

It might be instructive to consider as an example some of the issues that field educators face in teaching that are directly related to the problems they face in doing research. Field educators often attempt to articulate the process of ministerial formation in spiritual realities or character development that have an ephemeral quality that is not easily expressed in words. While it is possible to articulate some aspects of the learning that a student has achieved during a field site experience, such as skill development or growth in pastoral confidence, it is more difficult to articulate accurately, for example, the maturation in ministerial identity that occurs.

Often, the knowledge that the student gains through a field education experience is difficult to standardize and to evaluate. How does one measure the development of leadership skills, for example? How does one create a standard for personal and professional maturity? The instructor could develop a standard in terms of traditional ways of stating course objectives, i.e., observable evidences of personal and professional maturity, but would it reflect adequately the student’s growth in these areas?

More to the point of the issues of this section, how does one begin to articulate research questions that approximate some of the concerns that are part of studying these subject contents?³⁹ As field educators we help students think about vocation, but we spend less time thinking about the methods we actually use to help students discern their call. This topic would be an interesting one for research, in spite of some aspects of it that are difficult to articulate.

The nature of the work in field education is another factor that can impede research. For every field educator, administration is a necessary function, but for most, this also becomes an all-encompassing reality. The infrastructures of many schools place field education in the unusual position of having to attend to both learning and administrative concerns.

Schools have many administrative services that support learning and are often invisible to most of the faculty. An admissions director, for example, recruits students for the incoming class. A director of financial aid makes certain that students’ funds are in place. A dean of students cares for the students’ personal concerns and any trauma that might be triggered by or developed from the school experience. When learning moves outside of the

seminary context, however, someone has to recreate those administrative services for students. When the learning site is off-campus, someone needs to recruit placements, deal with financial concerns, and help students through any emotional issues that arise. The needs of students do not fundamentally change, but they move to a different venue. Thus the field education program, in many ways, has to reproduce the administrative support of learning for the off-campus context.

The field education professional has to attend to these administrative concerns because they are immediate and pressing. Students cannot learn easily or effectively if they are in the wrong placement or have financial pressures or have emotional issues getting in the way at the field site. On a purely infrastructure level, the school must provide someone to attend to these administrative details. The fact that many do not observe the educational component of field education is part of the epistemological reason, spoken about earlier in this section, why field educators are viewed primarily as administrators and not as teachers. When administrators, as well as field educators, understand education as a praxis of action/reflection, they are able to see the pedagogical component that completes field education as educational process. The administration of the program serves the learning and is secondary to the teaching function.

Although there are many obstacles to doing research as a field educator, in reality, we are constructing new knowledge all the time in the work that we do. For example, helping students to discern their calling links them in an immediate and personal way to a larger academic discussion about the theological understanding of vocation and call. Helping a student sort out a pastoral call that entails difficult boundary negotiations can help to create new knowledge in professional ethics. If we are able to ask questions of critical analysis and the connection of the issue to broader theories, we can use these practical details as research material.

So, what obstructs the vision of field education as a legitimate area of research? As stated above, one factor is an inability to view action-reflection work epistemologically as the creation of knowledge. A deeper and more present issue, however, involves our own sense of identity as field educators. On some days, we bring only our identities as pastors and administrators to the work and hold less consciously our roles as teachers and "scholar-pastors." We often see the work we do as an extension of our pastoral skills or our administrative skills, rather than as teachers trying to understand a method of reasoning that helps people to learn to do ministry better and creating a knowledge base in the discipline.

Some field education programs are conducted as extensions of church bureaucracies. Schools support this way of operating because many of them see their mission primarily as forming persons for work in their denomination's churches. In this way, church, bureaucracy, and seminary all become partners

in leadership development. There is logic to this arrangement, but it either ignores the academy or lives in strong tension with its requirements. A legitimate and necessary struggle occurs between the educational interests of the church and the demands of the academy. For the most part, these are two different worlds with very different missions. Seminaries are unique in higher education for the way in which they must negotiate the demands of the two worlds of the academy and the church. Field education programs are “ground zero” in this sometimes tense domain between church and academy. We have to engage responsibly both the pastoral and academic aspects of our identity. We can help students to see themselves as “scholar-pastors” who serve communities of faith with both intellectual rigor and pastoral effectiveness. Modeling research that is responsive to communities and is academically rigorous assists this work of developing leaders who can exist comfortably in both worlds.

Research Possibilities: Examining Field Education Practices

A structural reality of field education as a guild involves the fact that a majority of its practitioners are trained in an area different from field education itself. As noted earlier, some come into the field by chance, some do the work for several years as a stepping stone to a faculty position, and some do the work as a transition from the pastorate and may lack academic or research interests. It is rare that a person is trained specifically for this work. Most enter field education through work in another area. Therefore, people bring to this work the interests of the disciplines in which they were trained, often doing research in those fields, rather than in field education itself.

This diversity of paths leading to work in field education makes it difficult to locate exactly what constitutes research in this area. Initial efforts to chronicle the range of research undertaken in field education⁴⁰ show such areas as ethics, theology, pastoral care, and ministerial supervision. No specific area dominates the research efforts of field educators.

As a way of thinking more deeply about the issue of research, I want to use my experience as a field educator and faculty member to explicate two essential questions at the heart of understanding field education and its research possibilities. I offer my practice as a way of understanding how we might think about research.⁴¹

How do I understand what I am doing in the work of field education? I begin with this question as I reflect upon my practice. A basic answer for me is the following: *I am teaching people how to function ministerially in a community.* Let me break this down into component parts for analysis.

First of all, I am *teaching*. I do not assume that students necessarily know how to function as ministers. I also do not assume—and this is a fundamental assumption—that they will learn how to be ministers entirely at the site. I have

seen that students need a combination of content from academic disciplines, as well as content from the site itself to learn the art and craft of ministry. Students need both the knowledge of theological traditions and the knowledge of its lived reality in community to be well formed as ministers. Therefore, I understand that I need to provide content in such areas as vocation, social analysis, ministerial professional ethics, and theologies of ministry to give a framework to the experience as well as supplement it. Colleagues in the ministerial areas of church and society, religious education, pastoral care, preaching, and worship provide courses that cover other important ministerial components. I also need to provide reflection processes in the seminars to help students integrate the work of the curriculum of theological education with the work of their field site. These two content areas cannot remain as parallel lines; rather they must intertwine into a more integrative experience.

Secondly, it is the expectation of field education that a student *function* in the congregation. That is to say, students are not there to observe as much as they are there to do a job. In doing that job and reflecting upon it, they will learn. Therefore, I have to teach and help students gain initial experience in that action-reflection process in order for them to get the most learning from the field experience. Some teachers have a misguided notion that if you place students into a field experience and then bring them together to talk about it, they will be able to do the integration necessary for deeper understanding. Students are empowered, in part, by pedagogical strategies that help them learn how to integrate the knowledge that they bring *to* a site with the knowledge that they gain *at* a site. They are able to function better when they are learning how to think in an action-reflection way, which allows them to think on their feet and use all the resources of self and knowledge that they bring to the context.

Thirdly, I am teaching people how to function *ministerially*. I have to be aware of the different backgrounds (personal and professional) and understanding about ministry that students bring into their seminary experience and help them form their understanding of ministry appropriately. This involves initially forming people in a specific professional role that is not only social worker, teacher, counselor, preacher, or liturgist, but some unique combination of categories consistent with both the community's model of a pastoral or worship leader and the student's awareness of her or his own gifts and call. For students who see themselves functioning in ministry from a less confessional point of view, the basic stance is one of a leader who is grounded in a set of religious and spiritual values. Many students are comfortable acting in the capacity of helping professional, but they need to learn how that work of helping is done specifically as a ministry. This means that I have to help them understand the ways in which the work of service becomes ministerial when undertaken in the name of God and of a community of faith.

Culture constitutes a significant awareness in my attempts to teach students how to function ministerially in a community. Each student comes from a different religious tradition that understands ministry in a particular way. This factor must become part of the learning process. Even within a particular theological tradition, various groups have their own specific expression or emphasis. For example, students in the Episcopal tradition need to understand the nuances of theologies of ministry in African, African American, or Afro-Caribbean contexts that are different from the dominant white traditions. Students must learn that in order to function effectively in a leadership capacity, they must see the particularity of ministry as it is defined and lived from specific theological and practical traditions.

Some students come with no theological tradition in their history, and they have to be formed in the tradition and learn ways to function as a professional within it. The denominational shifting and movement that is part of contemporary society creates a situation where many students bring a variety of religious experiences to seminary. What does it mean to educate for ministerial leadership in a specific community in this context?

Finally, I am teaching people how to function ministerially *in a community*. Students often make the mistake of assuming that they know the community and the context of their site, when in fact they have not done the rigorous work of social analysis to understand well the community and its needs. The variety of communities that theological education comes into contact with demands that students understand the distinctiveness of each community and the particular ministries that are appropriate to the context. Korean American Presbyterians have a very different set of needs than Hispanic or Anglo Presbyterians. Students need to learn the skills of social analysis and multicultural awareness in order to function with any ministerial effectiveness. I seek to teach students mental and pastoral agility in working with the complexities of diverse communities and contexts.

This first question of understanding what I do in my field education work focuses my research agenda in the areas of scholarship that support it. Given my understanding of my work in field education, a second research question is the following: *What do I make certain that I learn so that I can prepare people to minister effectively in communities?* First, I study teaching strategies to help students learn in praxis-oriented ways. This includes reading in areas of educational theory from the perspective of critical social theory and feminist and liberationist viewpoints. Second, I study theologies of ministry and specific issues about ministries, including denominational statements about ministry as well as a variety of works on the topic of ministry. I also read about ministerial issues such as leadership training and domestic violence prevention. And third, I study communities and how one learns from them. This includes constructive theologies from various cultural expressions, as well as sociological works describing a community and its concerns.

Thus, because I see field education as teaching students how to function ministerially in a community, I prepare by doing research in these areas: education, theology, ethics, Bible, and sociology. Acknowledging that it is impossible to know all of the research in all of these areas, they remain key areas for my own research as a teacher of field education.

When I do research I often feel that I am a generalist in an academic climate of specialists. In order to do my work effectively, I must know something about many areas of theological education. For more in-depth thinking on particular topics, I rely on my colleagues who are specialists in those areas.

Our research contributions as field educators are significant and necessary to the work of the theological academy. An important aspect of our research is our unique perspective on the nature of theological education itself. As field educators, we are in the position to see the enterprise of theological education in its entirety vis-à-vis text and communities. We are able to understand how theology is lived out in communities and how communities affect theology.

As a final point in this discussion of field education and research, I want to highlight two ideas connected to my own research and to suggest ways of thinking about research possibilities.

One research project, now completed, involved drawing connections between the work of theological reflection and spiritual formation for ministry. In "Finding God Experientially in the Tradition: Theological Reflection as Spiritual Formation,"⁴² I reflected on the use of the process of theological reflection and its importance as a tool for spiritual formation in ministry. This work came directly out of a combination of my own teaching and a pastoral experience that served as a case study in the article. Reflecting on both the experience of teaching field education seminars and pastoral practice, I was able to articulate a larger ministerial issue that was important for thinking about ministerial formation in general and theological education in particular.

A second area of research possibility for me emerges out of my attempts to understand how students are best prepared for leadership in communities. There are many skills, experiences, and values involved in leadership formation for ministry, but one important ability to gain from seminary experience is how to approach a ministerial problem with both analysis and compassion. Students need to develop a way of thinking that is both critically reflective and empathetically grounded. In order to function effectively in a community, students must have the capacity to put themselves in the place of community members and understand their issues and concerns. At the same time, students must be able to step back with some emotional distance to critique the issues of the community from a more dispassionate stance.

I find it useful to employ the language of "separate and connected knowing" to articulate this dynamic of analytic critique and empathetic understanding. I refer here to the work on feminist epistemology published in *Women's Ways of Knowing* and *Knowledge, Difference and Power*.⁴³ Briefly, these two types of thinking can be described in the following ways:

In separate knowing one takes an adversarial stance toward new ideas, even when the ideas seem intuitively appealing; the typical mode of discourse is argument. In contrast, in connected knowing one tries to embrace new ideas, looking for what is “right” even in positions that seem initially wrong-headed or even abhorrent.⁴⁴

These categories hold potential for articulating the various types of thinking skills that students must have for effective ministry and are important for further research. For example, students must employ separate knowing procedures in order to do a social analysis of the field site or analyze a professional ethics conflict. At the same time, they need to employ connected knowing skills in order to understand better the interpersonal relationships among community members at the field site. Research in this area may provide a useful articulation of an essential teaching function for ministerial development.

Research in field education can arise from our practical concerns,⁴⁵ from our pedagogical concerns,⁴⁶ or from the larger issues of ministry that we engage daily.⁴⁷ Most importantly, as we emphasized in the Introduction and in Section One, we need to own the fact that as field educators we offer important issues that theological education needs to engage. There are also crucial areas of research and reflection that require collaboration among field educators, faculty in the classical disciplines, and administrators in theological education.

Exercises: A way into thinking about one’s research

The exercises and questions in this last section are designed to help field educators examine their work and identify ways in which they are engaged in the creation of new knowledge. The relevance of this work for all of theological education requires that this work not be done in isolation. We offer issues and questions that suggest new cross-disciplinary research in theological learning.

- Regarding the organizational structure of your institution, draw a diagram of where you are as a field educator in that system. In what ways are you empowered in that system? In what ways are you marginalized?
- In what ways do you define what you are doing in the work of field education? What assumptions do you bring to the work?
- If you were to cite three disciplines that you integrate regularly in your field education program, what would they be?
- What connection do these areas have to the other parts of the curriculum of theological education?
- What are the most consistent administrative concerns you face in a week? As you think about those concerns, what larger ministerial issues are they related to? (e.g., confidentiality, role boundaries, power relationships, budget management?)

- If you were to share these ideas with colleagues, both those who are in field education and those who are not, how would you describe your thoughts in writing? What would an outline of these thoughts look like?

We have stated our conviction that field education has much to offer as a conversation partner within the community of theological education. In the sense intended by Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline*,⁴⁸ theological education is a responsive, "learning" system. Field education can be seen as an adaptive movement within theological education, that is, a conceptual and programmatic response of theological education to its growing awareness that good theological education must be integrative and must attend to the education and formation of the whole person, in community, and for ministry that fits the contexts of the faith community. Field education, on the one hand, exists for the benefit of theological education. In a symbiotic way, it is dependent on the good will and resources of the larger enterprise. Only when nurtured, respected, included, and resourced can it make the contribution needed by the whole.

As field educators approach the research-related exercises and questions above, it is important to remain alert to field education's location within and in-between the community of theological education and the churches. In what ways does each research question we consider interface with concerns of the broader community of theological education and with the concerns of the churches and the neighborhoods in which students serve? Which colleagues in our school (and from our churches) should we call upon to help refine our *questions* and join us as research partners and/or consultants? How can we nurture the willingness of our teaching colleagues to join us as research partners? Through which media can we most effectively share with our partners in church and education communities our questions, processes, and findings?

It is likely obvious that we tend to see ourselves as people on a mission, people with a calling. In our final section, we turn to the matter of the vocation of the field educator. Why do we do this work?

Section Six

Finding Our Way: Field Education as a Vocation in Theological Education

Several years ago, at dinner during an interdisciplinary gathering of scholars, I was asked by several people what I liked about doing field education. I thought seriously about the question and found myself saying some things I was not expecting to say. One was that I find field education satisfying because it is holistic and action-reflection work that is not always typical in an academic setting. It allows me to think about my students as full human beings with intellect, feelings, personal and social histories, as well as anxieties and skills. Academic work does not always allow that kind of holistic approach to teaching. A second reason I gave was that I enjoy having one foot in the academy and one foot in the community. It satisfies my needs for both intellectual rigor and community-based relevance. Finally, I was surprised to hear myself say that I enjoy most the mentoring aspect of the work, and that I literally get to see people “grow up” in ministry. It is enormously satisfying to have an academic career that is so deeply rooted in an intellectual and spiritual formation experience for students.

As I think about these ways in which I describe my own work, I am struck by how my descriptions are somewhat out of step with traditional academic thinking. My passion does not fit customary academic categories. It is a discipline that has interesting and intellectually challenging ideas, and yet it is deeply practical. It is work that attempts to understand a body of academic knowledge and yet is deeply involved with ministerial training and character formation. Because of these particularities of the work, I find myself more comfortable talking about field education in vocational language. In my field education vocation, I am able to help educate and form people for important community-based service that is connected to a faith tradition.

Viewing field education as a vocation involves some conflicting realities. On the one hand, many field educators do not explicitly feel a call to enter into this work. While many enter this work through any number of practical and circumstantial reasons, after they are engaged in the work, they begin to use the pastoral language of call and commitment. It is almost as if one experiences field education as a calling only in the process of doing it. This makes a great deal of sense given the field-based nature of the work. The calling to be a field educator may be something that emerges in reflecting upon the work itself.

The skill of discernment must be a significant aspect of the vocation of the field educator. It is somehow appropriate to an action-reflection learning process that field educators deal with their own discernment of vocation while teaching students to discern their vocational direction. This means that to be an effective field educator one must develop a discerning lifestyle, specifically: (1)

one that can perceive the movement of the Spirit in daily life, (2) in order to understand a situation and its demands, and (3) to take appropriate action.⁴⁹ In other words, a field educator must possess an ability to see beyond what is evident on the surface and to see the deeper meaning emerging from practical experience. One must be able to make sense of the work beyond the apparent practical realities of making field site experiences operate smoothly. Field education, as an integrative scholarly enterprise, demands discernment skills that help field educators integrate the intellectual and practical movements of their work into a larger sense of ministerial understanding.

Much of the work of field education entails assisting students in their attempts to make sense of the problems and successes of their field site experiences. Students bring a variety of problems and possibilities to the field education consultations, which include supervisory conferences, reflection groups, and classroom work. Teaching and mentoring in this educational context demands seeing beyond the concrete issue that the student is presenting to the larger ministerial issue at hand. For example, when a student youth minister brings a case to class asking for help in disciplining students, there are several practical problems to be addressed. One problem involves developing basic skills necessary for effective group management. Another issue is that of role boundaries. What is the authority appropriate to the role the student has in that ministry setting? But there is often a deeper issue of the student's reluctance to embrace the authority of that role and act out of that inner authority. Just as field educators must discern the larger ministerial issues present in practical issues, so we must help our students to perceive the deeper issues present in the concerns they bring for reflection. We do this through assisting the students in developing skills of ministerial theological reflection.

Thus, part of the vocation of field education involves the ability to discern the deeper issues present for the student beyond what appears on the surface to be a practical problem in need of immediate attention. Similarly, field educators need to discern the deeper ministerial and theoretical issues at play in the practical problems that they see every day in their own work. The many administrative details involved in terminating a problematic site, for example, can completely preoccupy a field educator's time. The larger issue in many field site terminations, however, has to do with underlying communication problems between the supervisor and the student, or with personal and/or structural limitations in either the student or the site personnel or the site itself, that cannot be overcome to create a stable working environment. Developing a lifestyle of discernment involves attentiveness to interpersonal dynamics. It involves an openness to see and hear God's Spirit in the ups and downs of daily life in ministry. It involves attentiveness to the spiritual movements in oneself and a commitment to living a reflective life. Given the need for this type of discerning lifestyle as a basis for vocation in field education, what might be some motivations, character inclinations, knowledge base, and experiences

that would incline someone toward field education and allow them to succeed at it? An initial question to ask is why someone would want to become involved in this work. One reason is that the work of field education allows one to engage in the action-reflection educational process in an academic setting. The boundaries of traditional, theoretical academic work can restrict academics inclined toward a more practice-oriented way of thinking. Those who work in field education need to be able to work in an action-reflection process that brings together, in the same space, both practical community need and theoretical thinking

Care about the formation of leaders in religious communities is another motivation for doing the work of field education. For a person with a strong commitment to the health and vitality of the local church and the quality of ministers who work in it, field education is very satisfying. It is a way to serve religious communities in very practical ways.

Another motivation to do field education involves a commitment to see spiritual and religious values influence the work of community-based social service groups. Secular-based service work, such as law, medicine, or social work can be used in the work of building a just society from a spiritual value orientation. This is becoming more apparent as an increasing number of second- or third-career people come to seminary either to enter into a church-based ministry or to find ways to do their existing work in a more spiritually aligned way. A lawyer, for example, may choose a seminary education to clarify values that influence her or his practice of law. A therapist or a social worker may study theology in order to better understand religiously oriented clients and their needs. Appropriate sites need to be created for these students who will do creative things in a secular setting. Field educators are a primary agent in helping these students to choose the correct placement for their learning and to develop their vocational vision.

Another motivation to work in field education is a desire to work with students holistically, nurturing them in their personal growth, ministerial formation, and vocational and professional goals. Some students come to seminary with a vague sense of God’s calling. Field educators often help students discern their vocation so that they can serve communities effectively.

Some are also drawn to the vocation of field education by their awareness of the “bridging” role of field education. No other position in the school connects as intentionally and consistently with the congregations, denominations, and neighborhoods that our students are being educated to serve. Field educators are in a position to nurture a continuous two-way flow of understanding between the school and its contexts. This offers to the school a unique opportunity to hear directly from congregations, judicatories, and neighborhoods, and to allow their voices to influence mission, curricula, pedagogies, program, and staff. When the seminary’s values, structures, and ethos permit, the role of field education can be rewarding to the school, to the field educator,

and to the congregations, neighborhoods, and institutions that will be blessed by them.

Motivation is an important factor in the vocation of field educator, but it also helps to consider specific skills needed to do this work. What type of knowledge, background, or training is helpful? Facilitating relationships between students, field sites, and seminary requires strong people skills and emotional intelligence. The ability to handle conflict and negotiate it is especially important. Very often, field education officers must negotiate conflicts between supervisor and student, and between seminary and service institution, and must be able to do so well.

Another useful competence to bring to the work of field education is the ability to see the big picture of the entire curriculum. Field educators are in the unique position of helping students integrate their learning from the entire curriculum with their understanding of themselves, their religious heritage, and their understanding of the contexts of ministry. This vantage point allows field educators to provide an important critique of the effectiveness of the curriculum. They are uniquely positioned to help analyze how effective seminary education is for specific communities. In reflection seminars, for example, a field educator might hear reports from students about the way in which their study of Isaiah was or was not relevant in a church Bible study. This information may be discussed with the Bible department as a way of assessing the effectiveness of the Bible instruction at the seminary and also with the students in considering how the church Bible study might be encouraged to understand what the classroom teaches and why.

Useful background experiences for field education work can be found in many areas. Ministerial work, whether in a church, educational, or service context, gives some knowledge of the context in which some field education students will learn. Another area is pedagogical work. As has been previously discussed, field educators need to know how to teach via an action-reflection process, which requires some practice and skill to do effectively. Finally, academic training in theology, Bible, and the arts of ministry helps to prepare the field educator for her or his primary integrative work.

In addition to personal motivations, character, training, and knowledge, it is important to note that nurturing a vocation in field education depends upon certain institutional structures. Issues such as the lack of full faculty status, lack of tenure, and the multiple roles of teaching and administration increase the likelihood of high turnover in personnel. Often, such institutional issues mitigate against lengthy careers in this work.

By way of conclusion, we return to a question that is at the heart of the vocation of field education: What is its role in the broader enterprise of theological education? Seminaries need field educators to help keep their curricula accountable to communities of faith. Because of its direct interface with these communities, field education is positioned to assist in evaluation of

the curriculum as a whole. This is both a practical task and an intellectual one. It is a practical task insofar as it ascertains whether students are learning the skills they need to function effectively as leaders in church or secular communities. It is an intellectual task insofar as it challenges the academy to research and teach from a standpoint of social relevance and transformation.

Thus, the vocation of field educator involves a call to two-way accountability: to communities where ministry will be practiced and to intellectual centers where the logic of curriculum is designed, implemented, and evaluated. It is a call to live faithfully and rigorously “in the middle” of two worlds that have distinctive needs and requirements, but are intrinsically dependent upon one another. It is a call to honor the work of action-reflection, both as a method of individual inquiry and as an institutional process and commitment. The work of the field educator helps to keep seminaries in balance, and in doing so to serve God and communities faithfully.

Conclusion

In these sections, it has been our aim to address both field educators and their administrative and faculty colleagues in theological education. The participants in the Wabash/ATFE consultation in January 2000 believe that the issues of identity, method, and context that are central to the work of field education have become critically important for the entire community of theological education. Field educators must pursue new levels of discipline and competence, and must do so in adaptive and collegial collaboration with administrators and faculty. Field educators’ location within theological schools means that they cannot succeed without the support of the school. It is our hope that through local efforts and experiments, and regional and national consultations, we can continue to explore the promising potential that our partnerships can offer.

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Appendix

Participants in the January 2000 Consultation
on Teaching in Theological Field Education

Sponsored by the Association for Theological Field Education and
The Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion

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ENDNOTES

1. See Donald E. Miller’s *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

2. See especially Robert Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999); Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992); Don Browning, ed., *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church and World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983) and *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991); Rebecca S. Chopp, *Saving Work: Feminist Practices of Theological Education* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995); The Cornwall Collective, *Your Daughters Shall Prophesy: Feminist Alternatives in Theological Education* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1980); Orlando Costas, “Theological Education and Mission,” in C. Rene Padilla, ed., *New Alternatives in Theological Education* (Oxford: Regnum,

1986); Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983) and *The Fragility of Knowledge: Theological Education in the Church and University* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988); Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, “Thinking Theologically about Theological Education,” *Theological Education* 24: Supplement 2 (1988); Joseph C. Hough, Jr. and John B. Cobb, Jr., *Christian Identity and Theological Education* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985); Joseph C. Hough, Jr. and Barbara Wheeler, *Beyond Clericalism: The Congregation as a Focus for Theological Education* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988); Philip S. Keane and Melanie A. May, “What Is the Character of Teaching, Learning, and the Scholarly Task in the Good Theological School?” *Theological Education* 30:2, 1994; David Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993); Loren Mead, *The Once and Future Church: Reinventing the Congregation for a New Mission Frontier* (Washington: The Alban Institute, 1991); The Mud Flower Collective, *God’s Fierce Whimsy: Christian Feminism and Theological Education* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1985); Lewis S. Mudge and James N. Poling, eds., *Formation and Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989); Max L. Stackhouse, *Apologia: Contextualization, Globalization, and Mission in Theological Education* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988); Lynn N. Rhodes and Nancy D. Richardson, *Mending Severed Connections: Theological Education for Communal Transformation* (San Francisco: San Francisco Network Ministries, 1991); Eldin Villafañe, “Elements for Effective Seminary-Based Urban Theological Education,” in Rodney L. Petersen, ed., *Christianity and Civil Society: Theological Education for Public Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis/Cambridge, 1995); Barbara G. Wheeler and Edward Farley, eds., *Shifting Boundaries: Contextual Approaches to the Structure of Theological Education* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991); Charles M. Wood, *Vision and Discernment: An Orientation in Theological Study* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985); and many other issues and supplements of *Theological Education*.

3. “The History of ATFE—a Living Document,” (revised 1995), in *Report of Proceedings, 23rd Biennial Consultation of ATFE, 1995*, 200-208. For a fuller exploration see Maureen Egan, “The History of the Association for Theological Field Education and its Contribution to Theological Education in the United States, 1946-1979” (PhD dissertation, St. Louis University, 1987).

4. H. Richard Niebuhr, Daniel Day Williams, and James M. Gustafson, *The Advancement of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 209.

5. Charles R. Feilding, *Education for Ministry* (Dayton: American Association of Theological Schools, 1966), 29, 31.

6. In the ATS Standards, in addition to the requirement for “opportunities for education through supervised experiences in ministry” (A.3.1.4.3), there is clear acknowledgment of the contextual nature of the broader work of theological education in section 4.2.1 “Basic programs oriented toward ministerial leadership,” as follows, in *Bulletin 44, Part 1, 2000: Procedures, Standards, and Criteria for Membership* (Pittsburgh: The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada), 62.

4.2.1.1 Curricula for programs oriented toward ministerial leadership have certain closely integrated, common features. *First*, they provide a structured opportunity to develop a thorough, discriminating understanding and personal appropriation of the heritage of the community of faith (e.g., its Scripture, tradition, doctrines, and practices) in its historical and contemporary expressions. *Second*, they assist students in understanding the cultural realities and social settings within which religious communities live and carry out their missions, as well as the institutional life of those communities them-

selves. The insights of cognate disciplines such as the social sciences, the natural sciences, philosophy, and the arts enable a knowledge and appreciation of the broader context of the religious tradition, including cross-cultural and global aspects. *Third*, they provide opportunities for formational experiences through which students may grow in those personal qualities essential for the practice of ministry, namely, emotional maturity, personal faith, moral integrity, and social concern. *Fourth*, they assist students to gain the capacities for entry into and growth in the practice of the particular form of ministry to which the program is oriented. Instruction in these various areas of theological study should be so conducted as to demonstrate their interdependence, their theological character, and their common orientation toward the goals of the degree program. The educational program in all its dimensions should be designed and carried out in such a way as to enable students to function constructively as ministerial leaders in the particular communities in which they intend to work, and to foster an awareness of the need for continuing education.

Similar expectations regarding the practice of theological education are stated elsewhere within the ATS Standards. See sections 3.1.1.2, 3.1.1.3, 4.1, 4.1.2, 4.2.3.1, 4.2.4.1, A.2.0, A.3.1.2, A.3.1.3, A.3.1.4.

7. See Appendix for the list of participants.

8. The authors are indebted to notes taken at the consultation and supplied by Michael Smith (then at Christian Theological Seminary), Mickey Corso (Boston College), and Marilyn Nelson (Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond). Michael Smith also served as an editor of these sections and in so doing made substantial contributions to the manuscript. The authors especially want to express gratitude to the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion that provided the initial grant for the consultation as well as a follow-up grant for the writing of this manuscript.

9. Most theological schools identify preparing persons for the practice of ministry as a core or ultimate objective. Students often find that in their supervised ministerial experience every facet of their theological education begins to converge: understanding of self and vocation; comprehension of Scripture, history, tradition, and their relevance in the current contexts; and competencies in ministerial practice. In a way that is unique within their theological education, students begin to face, in field education, the multidimensional, multilayered realities of "readiness for ministry." Thus, field education is, within the scope of the institutional purpose of most schools, a bottom-line experience. The holistic, integrative concerns of readiness for ministry constitute the focus of the daily work of field educators.

10. Lynn Rhodes, "Opening Address," in the *Report of the Proceedings of the Nineteenth Biennial Consultation of the Association for Theological Field Education*, January 14-17, 1987, Louisville, KY, 4.

11. Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), chaps. 3 and 4.

12. Further study on method and terminology will include attention to Bernard Lonergan, SJ, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972).

13. Chancellor's Lecture Series, Vanderbilt University, 1998.

14. A story told in his *Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 125.

15. Lynn Rhodes of Pacific School of Religion noted four principles that are guiding PSR's work on curriculum design: "Education must be understood contextually. The

term ‘contextual’ indicates that all knowledge, and thus all learning, is contextual: that is, historically, socially and culturally conditioned and situated. Also contextual means a sustained conversation about and an engagement with the pressing social-ethical issues of our time. Theological education that is contextual requires a vital, scholarly and critical engagement with the wider social context with all its attendant complexities.”

16. Suzanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, third ed., 1957).

17. David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1975), 104-6.

18. See Charlotte McDaniel, “Publications by Members of the Association for Theological Field Education: Survey Results” in this issue (*Theological Education* 37:2, 2001).

19. In this regard it is interesting to observe our contemporary culture’s treatment of “production” versus “reproduction.” This culture seems, unfortunately, to value production but not reproduction. *Producing* jobs, such as in business, technology, research, etc., are highly paid. *Reproducing* work, such as childcare, teaching, farming, and nursing, are not. However, rampant production without reproduction erodes the resources for further production. Much of our ecological crisis is seen as related to this imbalance in reproduction and production.

In education, when “publish or perish” rules, we experience the value of production (research) over reproduction (teaching) and the formation/transformation it nourishes. This puts the academic world, and indeed all our world in jeopardy in not attending to future producers and reproducers (failing to emphasize teaching). See Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

20. “The Use of the Bible in the Christian Communities of the Common People” in Norman K. Gottwald (ed.), *The Bible and Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983).

21. James Gustafson quoted in Donald Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 81.

22. Barbara J. Fleischer, “A Theological Method for Adult Education Rooted in the Works of Tracy and Lonergan.” Paper Given at the Association for Researchers and Professors in Religious Education, New Orleans, November 1996, 1.

23. Bernard J. Lee, SM, “Praxis Theology: A Talking Paper” delivered at the AAR/SBL session on Practical Theology, November 1996, New Orleans, 1.

24. Bernard Lonergan, SJ, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), 14.

25. Bernard Lonergan, SJ, “Theology in Its New Context” in *Theology of Renewal* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968). Reprinted in W. E. Conn, ed., *Conversion*, 1978, 3-21, (New York: Alba House), 14.

26. ATS leaders seem to concur with the attention several prominent contributors to educational literature over the past decade gave to context. The title of bell hooks’s work *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994) links education to context. The author recognizes that understanding current context is the beginning point of teaching. Of her early school experiences, she writes, “My teachers were on a mission. To fulfill that mission, [they] made sure they ‘knew’ us. They knew our parents, our economic status, where we worshiped, what our homes were like, how we were treated in the family.” Ira Shor emphasized the impact of context when he titled his book, *Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992). His thesis is that empowering education is a “critical democratic pedagogy for self and social change. It is a student-centered program for multicultural democracy in school and society.” (p. 15) Stephen Brookfield

boldly opens the first chapter of *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995) with, "We teach to change the world." Theological education that fails to learn from and contribute to the well-being of its contexts is irresponsible.

27. F. Houtart, (1985) "La Contribution de l'Université Catholique de Louvain au Développement de la Sociologie de la Religion en Amérique Latine." April 4, 1985. A mimeograph of Centre de Recherches Socio-Religieuses, Section: Religion et Développement, Université Catholique de Louvain, 1348 - Ottignies - Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium.

28. Jon Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1984).

29. In the English-speaking world, this document was called *The Church in the Modern World*; in the Spanish-speaking world, *The Church in the World Today*, or more literally, *The Church in the Here and Now*; cf. McGrath, 1985. At the council, Latin American bishops chose identification with the poor, rather than accommodation with modernity chosen by the English speakers.

30. See David Tracy, "The Foundations of Practical Theology" in Don S. Browning, *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church, and World* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 61.

31. David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1975).

32. David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad Books, 1981).

33. David Tracy's *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987) is the closest he has come to date toward the third dimension of theology.

34. The purposes of these reflections do not allow extensive elaboration, but it is important to note that action also often embodies non-thinking influences. Psychiatrist and leadership writer, Ronald Heifetz, states, "I believe that many adaptive and communicative processes are unconscious, and I learn about them by inference. People do not always say what they 'really think' or understand why they do what they do. Moreover, many difficulties with making headway on problems arise from poorly orchestrated and unresolved conflicts—internal contradictions in values, beliefs, and habit." *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 5. The task of theological education and ministerial formation nevertheless requires explicit efforts to help students recognize, interpret, and address the full spectrum of factors that influence their actions. Field education routinely engages the whole person in this sense.

35. Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1996).

36. See endnote 6.

37. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970, 1993); Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); Donald A. Schön, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner: Toward a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987); Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: The Way of Shared Praxis* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991).

38. I am referring here to the vast literature in the areas of feminist and womanist theologies, as well as culturally contextual theologies that have emerged since the 1970s. See for example, Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Devaney, eds., *Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition, and Norms* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997); Catherine M. LaCugna, ed., *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist*

Perspective (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993); Kwok Pui-lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2000); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical, Feminist Ekklesia-logy of Liberation* (New York: Crossroad, 1993); Katie Geneva Cannon, *Katie’s Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum, 1995); Roberto Goizueta, *Caminemos Con Jesus: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995); Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996); Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); Emilie M. Townes, *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope, Salvation and Transformation* (New York: Continuum, 1997); Dwight Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999); Cain Hope Felder, ed., *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

39. The very nature of field education as a learning process situated in various communities and cultures resists standardization of evaluation, and perhaps of research. Different contexts and cultures require different skill development. Success in ministry in an African American Baptist church might look different than success in a Euro-American Baptist church. The skills needed in a secular, community-based setting are different from those required in a church community. Standardization implies a universal norm, whereas situation and context are the reality for field education assessment.

40. See Charlotte McDaniel, “Publications by Members of the Association for Theological Field Education: Survey Results” in this issue (*Theological Education* 37:2, 2001).

41. It is important to note that I use my experience only as example, and I am not suggesting that all field educators need to think about research in this way. The best thing for the guild is the development of many voices on the topic of research and the ways in which we do it. I add my voice as one in the conversation.

42. Kathleen T. Talvacchia, “Finding God Experientially in the Tradition: Theological Reflection as Spiritual Formation,” *New Theology Review*, Volume 11, Number 4, November 1998.

43. Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule, *Women’s Ways of Knowing* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); Nancy Goldberger, Jill Tarule, Blythe Clinchy, and Mary Belenky, *Knowledge, Difference and Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

44. Blythe McVicker Clinchy, “Connected and Separate Knowing: Toward a Marriage of Two Minds,” in *Knowledge, Difference and Power*, 207.

45. See, for example, Susan E. Fox and Judith Trott Guy, *A Handbook on Legal Issues in Theological Field Education* (Richmond: Presbyterian Theological Field Educators, 2000).

46. See, for example, Jeffrey H. Mahan, Barbara B. Troxell, and Carol J. Allen, *Shared Wisdom: A Guide to Case Study Reflection in Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991).

47. See, for example, Lynn N. Rhodes, *Co-Creating: A Feminist Vision of Ministry* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987).

48. Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday/Currency, 1990).

49. This understanding of a discerning life comes from an Ignatian understanding. For further discussion, see Joan Mueller, *Faithful Listening: Discernment in Everyday Life* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1996) and Frank Rogers Jr., “Discernment” in *Practicing Our Faith*, Dorothy C. Bass, ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997).

