

## Pedagogic Intentions and Activities

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I am interested in hermeneutics and in making students aware, getting them excited about interpretation of texts. I try to make them realize that interpretation depends on (a) one's position, and (b) how one views the world. I struggle with delight in both these issues.

With respect to (a), I encourage students to put on different 'hats' when interpreting a text ('take a position that you don't necessarily admire - e.g., Mary Daly's form of feminism - then interpret this text, this ritual, this tradition through it.') I have often played with feminist approaches in this way, because they are so charged, and most students have little sense of how varied their own views can be.

With respect to (b), I emphasize close readings (in the original languages where I can - French or German for some students, in Greek and Coptic for others). I point out the difference it makes to put a body, a voice, and/or a face to the words. Here's where videoconferencing has been very exciting for me. I love having my students struggle with a text, stumbling over words, forming impressions of what they might mean, and what the author behind them might be like. I then have students encountering the authors to discover that they've understood some of it as the author wanted and understood some of it differently (we then get into discussions of whether that makes our reading better and how). I do this by having real, live people come into class. I have also videotaped our class discussions of an author's work and then sent it to them to view for feedback. I then pass this back to the class. I have used this technique five times over the last two years. The technology is sufficiently new to be attractive to students, and it creates enough distance to allow students to feel comfortable 'taking on' authors. Yet it puts someone directly in front of us. The results have been fantastic. And it has led to long, post-class discussions in the Student's Union, where the first time some students begin to understand some of these hermeneutical issues.

I enjoy creating assignments that ask students to transfer their "book" knowledge to another medium. These assignments allow students the opportunity to work together, to make themselves vulnerable and to value someone's work. I have written elsewhere, for example, about the quilting project, which I have tried four times, each time with great success. The scholar who receives the quilt is humbled and overwhelmed, and students are stretched in ways that they rarely are.

In my Apocalypticism class, I immerse students in ancient texts and ideology. As a closing assignment, I have them construct a modern version that fits our period - 'Write a poem, or a short story, or children's story, paint something, create a video or a song ... that will bring together the ancient apocalyptic world view in a way that can be 'real' for people today.' I have done this five times now over the years, and each time students have thrown themselves into it with all their heart. What I find particularly valuable includes the application of knowledge—from ancient to modern times—which allow students with different skills a chance to shine. The marking scheme also adds to this: I have three students plus myself evaluate each project in writing, giving students the chance to see what it's like to be on the other side of the evaluation scheme.

The following are some of the characteristics I associate with my courses:

- Students are given a very clear, concise and well-organized exposition of the purpose of the course, from its intellectual objectives through its clear assignments to its pursuit of skill development;
- Students are offered joint ownership of the course;
- Students are given exceptionally clear guidelines and explanations of course work and assignments;
- Students are challenged to be scholarly, curious, artistic, eclectic, and serious;
- Students are offered a wide variety of resources, learning methods, sources of material, and learning styles.