

- **Colloquium Title:** Pedagogies of Nonviolent Communication in the Online Classroom

- **Introduction:**

At a time when higher education is increasingly delivered through computer mediated instruction, it is crucial to raise awareness of online pedagogies that nurture non-violent interactions among students. Communication within an online classroom is very different from communication in a face-to-face classroom, primarily because dialogue is text-based rather than spoken. This colloquium demonstrates the need to address nonviolent communication as a pedagogical challenge rather than as a technological challenge. The goal of the research is to offer a rubric to guide pedagogies of nonviolent communication in online forums. Not only will pedagogies of nonviolent communication reduce the potential for hurtful language among peers, a rubric for online dialogue will also increase a depth of relationship among participants and enhance the richness of learning in the online community.

- **Communication Styles:**

- a. Online versus face-to-face**

I will briefly present the unique features of online communication that present pedagogical challenges that are different from a face-to-face context. There are times when students underestimate the violence conveyed in their written critiques or expressions of disagreement and this can cause a breakdown in the activity system of the class so that the online course ceases to function effectively. The instructor's role in facilitating nonviolent communication is not always as complex as negotiating students' prejudicial or inappropriate comments. Less complex, but equally as crucial to maintaining a sustainable learning community are those pedagogies that promote collaboration, social presence, and critical thinking.

- b. Sources grounding the presentation**

A professor I interviewed in the course of my qualitative research suggested that "the Internet is one of the most violent places on the planet." Her pedagogical response was to begin her online courses with a discussion of Marshal Rosenberg's "Living Nonviolent Communication: Practical Tools to Connect and Communicate Skillfully in Every Situation." Although some critics argue that authentic communication cannot be successfully delivered through virtual education, there is a growing body of research to indicate that the online learning community can provide a rich environment to practice nonviolent mediation and conflict resolution. I bring my own research into conversation with Rosenberg's to build a rubric for guiding online discussion.

- **Spiritual Questions:**

The teacher's challenge in online learning is to discover a way to maximize the sense of community and formation of relationships when communication is taking place in a text-based learning environment. How can the online teacher minimize the students' sense of isolation? How can computer-mediated communication connect teachers with class participants while at the same time connecting participants to each other and to the material being studied?

In my research I approach these questions of community-building as spiritual questions. I did a qualitative study, collecting data from interviews with faculty teaching online courses in theological education and asked how they align online pedagogies with learning goals for students' spiritual formation. I compare the results of my research with the spiritual learning

goals of other educators such as Maria Harris, Arthur Chickering, and Parker Palmer. Then I present a comparison of these spiritual learning goals to the learning outcomes Marshal Rosenberg proposes in his model for non-violent communication. My key point in highlighting these parallels is that our common concern for student's well-being is best achieved through intentional course design and planning. If we want students to grow beyond mere knowledge of course content, there are a number of pedagogical strategies that can assist in designing a course that may also impact the students' sense of meaning, purpose, authenticity, and spiritual growth.

- **Providing a Non-Violent Communication Rubric for Online Discussion Boards:**

The colloquium concludes with a rubric I designed for use in guiding students' online discussions. The rubric provide a model of nonviolent communication. Non-violent communication is one among many pedagogical tools that hold potential for nurturing students' spiritual formation. The rubric is especially crucial in discussion of controversial topics, but more importantly, the rubric raises the students' awareness that a language of peace is an essential life skill that extends beyond the online classroom.

- **Bibliography**

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