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 REA Toronto 2011
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Introducing reflective practices in schools: what I've learned from the practice of "notebooking"

During the past few years, as a teacher of religion at an Episcopal high school, I have been developing a pedagogical practice to help nurture the spiritual development of my students. The practice is what I refer to as "notebooking." The ultimate benefits of this practice are still in the process of being discovered, but I have had some significant findings that I would like to share with a wider audience.¹ I have found that notebooking, which is inherently a relational practice, can help youth explore and affirm their inner lives. Notebooking can be used as a way to make youth feel that their inner lives are taken seriously, and to sustain a relationship of spiritual accompaniment between a young person and an adult. I believe that the relational nature of notebooking makes it a potentially valuable practice for faith formation in youth, and as such it may be able to serve as an ecological support to religious communities and religious educators.

The practice of notebooking grew out of the practical exigencies of religious education (hereafter RE) formation in my school setting.² Though RE is unquestionably an educational discipline that has much in common with the formative educational practices associated with the Greek educational tradition of *paideia*,³ the social and psychological demands of modern American high school life do not guarantee a formative or internalizing relationship between an adolescent and RE content. I am concerned that the connection between *logos* and *bios*—fundamental in ancient *paideia*⁴--is no longer normative in RE. *Paideia* was genuinely formative of the Christian in antiquity because, according to Werner Jaeger, "the object of learning play[ed] the part of the mold by which the subject [was] shaped."⁵ The object of learning was the Bible. But learning the Bible required much more than simple reading and memorization. Ancient Christian *paideia* also relied on and required a life of virtue, a desire for union with God, and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the learner.⁶ This suggests that the deep energies, longings, and inner life of the student must be rightly interconnected with the objects of learning. But contemporary research suggests, and any teacher is well aware, that the lives of adolescents today are highly compartmentalized—including their learning experiences in school.⁷ Despite being masters of memorization and savvy test takers, students do not necessarily integrate their learning into their life or worldview.⁸ This poses a particular challenge to RE, and requires practitioners such as myself to adapt our practices to this phenomenon.

In the attempt to create learning experiences that would allow my students to make deeper connections between their lives and the RE content, I began to develop a set of educational practices modeled on traditions of spiritual exercises, especially those of the Benedictine and Ignatian traditions. The exercises I chose to guide my students through relied heavily upon the students' imagination, past experience, and memories. For instance, one exercise asked students to identify in their lives a personal form of

dukkha and the corresponding path to liberation, while other exercises had students write a letter to a loved one after imagining themselves in a scene from the Bible, or make an inventory of their most cherished experiences of the five senses. These written exercises were designed to help students make a more satisfying connection to the material we were studying—whether the 4 Noble Truths, the Bible, or the Book of Common Prayer—and in a way that they could apply to their own lives.⁹ More broadly, however, I hoped that the exercises would help my students to understand what it is like to inhabit a religious worldview. I believe that Charles Taylor correctly identified the challenge that secularization poses to the future of our society’s religiosity. As he writes, secularization changes “the whole context in which we experience and search for fullness.”¹⁰ To help my students search their lives for those places of fullness, I guided them through these exercises in the hope that they would discover some of the riches of a mode of consciousness that is neither materialistic nor instrumentalist.¹¹ As I developed these exercises over time, I began to give each of my students a notebook in which to write their spiritual reflections. The result was that these notebooks have become a record of and witness to their inner lives.

As Peter Hodgson points out in *God’s Wisdom*, pedagogies presuppose an anthropology.¹² The anthropological presupposition of my pedagogical practice of notebooking is that adolescents have rich inner lives, and that they are already in deep relationship with God.¹³ When I first began encountering these inner lives in the notebooks of my students, I was overwhelmed by their spiritual beauty, yet wondered if the students themselves grasped their full significance. Could they recognize the profundity of their inner lives? Had any adults witnessed this to them?¹⁴ I recalled the wise words of Daniel Heischman, the executive director of the National Association of Episcopal Schools, who said, while telling the story of a boy whose life was changed by a teacher: “There is no greater experience that any young man could have had than to have his life taken in and interpreted by an adult he respected.”¹⁵

Cautiously, I started offering written feedback to the students in their notebooks, giving them short, affirmative comments and inviting them to further reflect on their own reflections. Over time, I realized that my students were eagerly awaiting my comments, but not in the same way they might look forward to getting back a test they felt confident about. When the students received their notebooks with my feedback, they did not share my comments with their classmates, as they might boast about a good grade. They seemed to sense that this was not a competitive part of the school day, yet they seemed to value it immensely. I began to adopt a more theological voice in my feedback, and I wrote from my own experience and shared relevant joys or struggles. The more feedback I gave the students on their reflections, the more eager they were to engage in the practice of notebooking. Their interest in my theological feedback demonstrated two things to me: the notebook was functioning like a holding environment, and the students had real interest in the kind of spiritual accompaniment that I was offering them.¹⁶

I have been notebooking with my students now for less than two years, but in that time I have come to several realizations that I think could be promising subjects for future research. First, while much research exists and is on-going on the topic of adolescent self-identity construction, I believe that there is a distinctly spiritual aspect of

identity construction that has largely been ignored by psychologists. Furthermore, I believe that the power of this spiritual aspect, at least in most of my students, is woefully untapped. The students' blindness to their spiritual nature is mirrored by the research of adults who are in relationship with them. In her otherwise very thorough research on the factors conditioning an adolescent's feeling of global "self-worth," Susan Harter completely brackets the relevance of the spiritual life or the spiritual nature of self-construction.¹⁷ But the voices of my students consistently point to a powerful connection between their sense of self, feelings of self-worth, and the nurturing of their spiritual lives.¹⁸

My students generally experience plenty of interest and support from adults in relation to many other aspects of their lives that condition self-worth, such as scholastic, social, and athletic competence. Much attention has been paid by researchers and writers to the nature and function of adult/parental support on the identity construction of young people. Carol Dweck, for example, urges adults to use feedback that emphasizes a growth perspective rather than innate capacity.¹⁹ Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman similarly advise adults to help children recognize the hard work involved in exercising and growing the strength of the brain.²⁰ Both of these strategies are valuable, but they are missing something. I believe that youth also need, at a very deep level, an entirely different kind of feedback—feedback not about their accomplishments or efforts, but about their souls. What disturbs me the most about the absence of adult attention to the spiritual nature of youth and its role in the construction of the self is that young people clearly experience the world spiritually. They have rich inner lives and know how to speak about this experience through the language of the soul.²¹ My experience with notebooking indicates that youth are craving recognition of this fact; they desire to explore their inner lives in communication with adults. Adults should respond to this need. Robert Kegan claims that "Who comes into a person's life may be the single greatest factor of influence to what that life becomes. Who comes into a person's life is in part a matter of luck, in part a matter of one's power to recruit others, but in large part a matter of other people's ability to be recruited."²² To be recruitable, though, requires us to listen to the ones who need us.

Notebooking makes me more recruitable. In reading about the workings of the souls of young people in their own words, I find myself called to offer them a new kind of support. This support looks, I believe, something like the type of soul friendship or mentoring relationship outlined by practical theologians such as Kenda Creasy Dean and Dori Baker. "Soul friends," writes Dean, "don't advise as often as they listen and sift through our life experience with us. In this respect, they act as informal spiritual directors who intentionally partner with us in the quest for deeper communion with God."²³ This kind of partnering requires a response from the adult to the adolescent that is different from the kinds of responses that adults normally give. Responding as a spiritual mentor allows me to introduce my students to a new kind of support—one that is simply a listening presence, and a resource to help bear the burdens of their hearts.²⁴ As spiritual mentors, according to Baker, "adults are not trying to fix adolescent problems. Instead, they are willing to open the texts of their lives as potential resources to adolescents."²⁵ It is, I believe, the lack of recruitability on the part of adults that is contributing to the pervasive blindness toward the importance of the spiritual life, the

inner life, of youth in their development of self. Notebooking is an answer to this problem, and I have found it to be an effective way of creating a new kind of a much needed relationship between the adult and the young person.²⁶

Finally, I believe that the nature of the relationship formed between student and teacher/adult in the practice of notebooking may be a valuable resource for fostering faith development in youth. The reflection exercises of the student assist faith development by helping him/her to see the general frames of meaning that are generated from his/her relation to, in James Fowler's words, "centers of supraordinate value." These written reflections and expressions of "the faith that is in them," are important because "it enables persons to be more responsive and intentional in their own faith growth."²⁷ But beyond this function, notebooking can supply faith formation with a specifically *dialectical* component that practical theologian Don Browning claims is essential to faith development.

Browning, drawing on the work of Heinz Kohut, believes that a concept of faith development must take into account not merely how the centers of supraordinate value and power endow our everyday interpersonal relationships with significance, but the reverse, as well. Browning suggests that our object-relations ("our deeply felt and internalized interpersonal relations") have profound influence on our faith and our sense of the ultimate context of our experience and sense of reality.²⁸ Thus, with notebooking, faith formation is dialectical: the faith of my student is refracted through their cognitive-developmental lens and past experience—which I help them see, name, and appropriate; simultaneously, though, their faith is influenced by the relationship that notebooking sustains, as this relationship implies for them "a broader vision of the ultimate context of experience."²⁹ Simply put, the relationship that notebooking makes possible influences the way the student understands the broader horizons of their experience and sense of ultimacy.³⁰

Many years ago, Fowler wrote a long essay on education and *paideia*. In this essay he urged schools to critically reflect on their practices from an ecological faith formation viewpoint. He suggested that schools adopt a new root metaphor to guide them in critical reflection on their practices: covenant. Covenantal practices would, according to Fowler, create a climate of care and "an ethos where each child can be known and treated with profound regard."³¹ Affirming the inner life of a child requires both a generous attention and a generous vision. To truly know a child requires a safe place for that child's inner life to be held. A notebook holds that interiority, and when it is read, it becomes a countenance. The profound regard toward the child that it elicits from me, helps me to see the child in a godly way. My sense is that notebooking is indeed a covenantal practice. Through the window of the notebook, I can see my students more clearly, and I see things that I never had before. Notebooking, I can testify, is a practice of dialectical faith formation. It is because of notebooking that I now understand a saying that was previously wholly enigmatic: "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs." (Lk 18.16)

¹ This essay is based on my personal experience of introducing the reflective and relational practice of notebooking in my religion classes. The benefits of notebooking that are highlighted here, therefore, are contextual to my environment—my students, my school culture, and myself. In an effort to better understand how my results can be duplicated in other independent school settings, I am currently conducting a collaborative project with other schools that have expressed interest in adopting their own form of the notebooking practice. This is a doctoral thesis project at Virginia Theological Seminary, and the study should be completed in the Spring of 2012.

² The practice of notebooking took root because I asked my students to use a notebook for religion class that was completely independent of their other academic courses. Religion class was, I told them, a different kind of academic subject, and it required a different receptacle for notes and reflections because it operated on a different temporality. Rather than chronological time, we were to operate on kairological time. Their religion reflections, therefore, needed to be set apart from the rest of their daily grind. I began collecting their notebooks at the end of each class session so that their notebooks would not get lost, and I gave them back to them at the beginning of our next class. I realized that their notebooks were a more ideal place to comment on their reflections and give them feedback. Previous to the notebooks, the most substantive feedback that I gave to students was through the teacher comments that I wrote as a part of their quarterly grades. Those comments, while substantive, were also read by their parents, faculty, and administrators, which often influenced me into adopting a less personal or theological voice. When I began to give them written feedback in their notebooks, I realized that I could talk with them without their worry that other—and in their view *judgmental*—eyes see my positive observations about their inner lives. It was then that I began to realize that I had in my hand a valuable tool that I could use as a kind of holding environment for their attention.

³ On *paideia* and its relevance to Christian religious education see Richard Robert Osmer, *A Teachable Spirit: Recovering the Teaching Office in the Church* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 15-17.

⁴ See Werner Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1961), 130, note 10.

⁵ Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*, 91.

⁶ *Ibid*, 86-102.

⁷ On the role of compartmentalization on adolescent identity construction see Susan Harter, *The Construction of the Self: A Developmental Perspective* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1999). On the compartmentalization of educational practices see Nel

Noddings, "Rethinking the Benefits of The College-Bound Curriculum," *The Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 78, No. 4 (Dec. 1996), 288.

⁸ On the pervasive lack of integration of a student's learning into his/her belief system see Clark A. Chinn and Ala Samarapungavan, "Distinguishing Between Understanding and Belief," *Theory into Practice*, Vol. 40, No. 4, (Autumn, 2001), 235-241.

⁹ Some typical reflection exercises are the following. In a New Testament class, at the beginning of Advent, I had the students write a list of what they wanted for Christmas. We talked a bit about gift giving on Christmas and what makes gift giving meaningful. We read the story of the 3 magi coming to Jesus and offering gifts (Mt. 2). I reread to them the last few verses of the story, where they reach Jesus and open their chests to him. We talked a bit about what these verses might mean symbolically... opening one's chest to God. I then asked them to put themselves in the shoes of the wise men. "Imagine yourself reaching Jesus, or standing before God. What would you offer to him? What could you give him?" These are some of their responses: "I would give to God the things that matter most to me. My necklace that I have had since I was born, my blanket that I was wrapped in when I was little, and other valuable things in my life." "A blanket to keep the baby warm and to provide safety and security. A few candles to provide light, warmth, and some fragrance." "I would give him my loyalty and faith, because truly that is all I have to offer to him that I believe will be of help and significance." "I would give my soul." "I would offer to God a picture of the manger with baby Jesus to commemorate the day and to show that I will always follow because with a picture you can never forget." One student said of notebooking: "it was a personal, and unique way to reflect on each topic we covered in this class."

¹⁰ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007), 14.

¹¹ For instance, in a World Religions class I had students read randomly assigned chapters from the *I Ching* and attempt to personally appropriate its content. I asked them to imagine that they were consulting the *I Ching* for the sake of appropriating its cosmic wisdom, and try to figure out how the wisdom of the text could speak to their particular life-situation. In a Sophomore Ethics class we spent some time discussing how our environments often shape who we are. We discussed the different contexts and environments of their lives and they identified them in the notebooks. They identified both the positive and negative aspects of each environment, and wrote sentences or phrases to represent a voice of influence on them from each environment. For instance, one student identified school, drama practice, home, and social spaces. Some of the phrases representing these influences were: *I met a new person today. I want to be an actress. I love you. BFFs. We are tight for money. I want to light up, you? I feel like I must be perfect. I'm in better shape than you.* We viewed some scenes from *Into Great Silence*, about the monks at Chartreuse, and discussed how their lives are organized by praying, chanting, and meditating on Scripture. I showed them a micrographic picture that a friend made for me. Her drawing is of a monk seated, engaged in *lectio divina*. The drawn lines, which compose the figure of the monk, however, are not lines but rather sentences from the Bible. We discussed how the monk in the picture is an incarnation of Scripture. I then had the students draw pictures of themselves and use the words and

sentences from their various environments as the outline for their self-portraits. This was an exercise that we did early in our semester, and it was to help them to consider the notebook as a way to see themselves more clearly.

¹² Peter C. Hodgson, *God's Wisdom: Toward a Theology of Education* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 114.

¹³ This anthropological assumption pervades much RE and youth ministry literature. See Jerome W. Berryman, *Godly Play: An Imaginative Approach to Religious Education* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1991), chapter 7, and Mark Yaconelli, *Contemplative Youth Ministry: Practicing the Presence of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), chapter 11.

¹⁴ The need for a trustworthy mirror is pronounced clearly in their assessment of the value of notebooking. As one of my seniors wrote, *“the notebook was an interesting tool because it was very much like a mirror. Having to make my thoughts concrete was a useful exercise because then I really had to think thoroughly about the topic. And the comments and feedback are an integral part of the equation. We can talk endlessly about ourselves but what we really need is someone to hold that mirror up to us.”*

¹⁵ Daniel R. Heischman, *Good Influence: Teaching the Wisdom of Adulthood* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2009), 125.

¹⁶ The following example is typical of the type of feedback I would give to a Sophomore Ethics student. My framing questions are in brackets, the student voice is in italics, and my feedback is in bold face.

Z.'s partial reflections on our school community:

[In what ways is our community a good influence on you?]

This community is extremely caring—we are a family—and it shows me that no matter what, someone always has my back. I should have other people's backs as well. I'm glad you add this last thought. Most people stop at the one before it.

[In what way do you make our community a better place?]

*I make our community a better place because I am not afraid to express myself and show my true colors, showing other people it's okay to be who they are. **We need more people like this in our school.** I show good character by always being nice, never excluding anyone, and always being a friend no matter what. **I wish that I could say that about myself! I think I make mistakes in my relationships with students and faculty everyday!***

Z.'s partial reflections on the topic of adulthood:

[When do you feel like an adult?] *I feel like a grown-up when I am allowed to make my own choices. When I have mature conversations I feel like a grown-up. When people older than I treat me as a “fellow,” I feel like a grown-up. **I'm glad you get to experience this. You are a good person for an adult to talk to. “Fellow” rather than “fella,” I presume ☺***

[How do teens try to make themselves feel like adults?] *They rebel against parents, drink, do drugs, throw parties. In a way, by acting very immature and foolish (in the eyes of real adults) they think they are acting like adults. I'm so glad you see that! It's amazing! We try to feel grown-up by being immature! So sad.*

[The students imagined themselves being old and nearing the time of death. They then reflected on their imagined life experiences. This spiritual exercise was based on "A Testament" by Anthony de Mello, in *Hearts on Fire*, edited by Michael Harter (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1993) 18-19.]

[Z.'s partial reflections to the statement: "These things I have loved in life"]: *I have loved my family, my friends, my life partner, my children, good food, new exotic food, a beautiful face, grandchildren, nature, feeling of happiness, acting, singing, dancing, a good education, being well 'flavored' of the world, being able to love, peace, music, technology, fashion, the ability to create, raw emotion, sunsets, cultures, our earth, imagination, individuality, joy. Sounds like a full life!*

["These experiences I have cherished"]: *knowing amazing people, having my first child, following my dreams, laughing, crying, relating to someone I love this!, childhood, teenhood, adulthood.*

["These risks I took:"] *Lying, loving, revealing myself, being vulnerable This is a great risk—I wrote the same thing when I did this exercise.*

["These things I regret about my life:"] *Lying, cheating, stealing, hurting someone emotionally, saying 'hate'. Most people don't consider these kinds of things when they think of having regrets. I do.*

Z.'s partial reflections on the Roberto Benigni film, "Life is Beautiful."

[Q: In what way does this movie help you realize why life is beautiful?] *It reminds me that no matter what is happening in life, joy and laughter, and love is beautiful, and we only truly know for a fact that we only have right now. That no matter what, if you live for now and love and laugh, and forgive now, life will forever be beautiful and shine even in the darkest of hours. This is a beautiful thought. It says a lot about your intuitive experience of the goodness of life.*

[Q: Have you ever experienced something that was an affirmation of life, even in the form of something bad?] *Yes, my grandmother died of cancer this year and while she was slowly dying there was yet an affirmation of life for me. This affirmation was that I was blessed by God for every second I got to spend with her. I never saw her physical changes because her spirit was so uplifting and full of life. I only saw her laugh and love and cherish family, even in the midst of her death. That is beauty. That is an amazing story! I'm so glad that you have had an experience of peace and joy in death. It can truly be a beautiful experience for people. I learned that again this past summer when a friend died. She was at peace, and brought everyone together in her dying.*

Excerpts from some of the longer feedback reflections that I gave to Z.: **Z.—wow. I'm amazed and overwhelmed a bit. It is rare for me to read thoughts like these. You have an incredible ability to absorb life and to be attentive to yourself and your experience of life... You feel things deeply and store the meaning and sense of your**

experience in your mind and heart. Lots of people go through life on the surface of things, and they are afraid to let life permeate their depths. This, I think, is not how you live.

You write about following your dreams. I find myself wondering about that, what it means to you. For many people the dream is a big house, a nice car, and a trophy husband/wife. I don't get that sense from you. It seems to me that your dream has something to do with being in touch with what makes you feel alive. Is it acting? Singing? Thinking? Loving? I'm not sure, but I do think that there is clearly a resource that you are drawing on and which inspires you to work hard, be inviting to others, and look to find the best in people and situations. Your heart is teeming with this energy and power. What do we call it? Spirit? The Holy? Who knows. What matters is that you are finding yourself anchored in your deep loves—hopes for family and friends, and to spend you life in perpetual touch with its source of meaning. It is a beautiful thing to see, and I can say from experience, it is even more beautiful to let that love and life sustain you for all time.

¹⁷ Harter investigated feelings of self-worth in relation to physical appearance, scholastic competence, social acceptance, behavioral conduct, and athletic competence. See Susan Harter, *The Construction of the Self: A Developmental Perspective* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1999), 158.

¹⁸ For example: “writing in the notebooks allowed me to discover things about myself that I may have already known, but didn't really know. I was able to discover where I put my priorities, even when I don't realize it... having feedback about stuff I've written in my notebook is reassuring in a way because it lets you know that someone else has the same thoughts as you.” “The experience of the notebooks kept me open-minded. Not only could I share my opinions with you, I tried to speak it. I was talking with God. Your feedback was reassuring and helpful.” “I enjoyed hearing what you had to say about me. Having someone look at you and tell you what they see shows you who you really are. I think I knew what I believed, but these journals and your comments showed me who I really am. This journal really shows who I am right now, and I appreciate another view on the type of person I am.” “It was nice to be able to reflect on my thoughts and even share them without being criticized. I appreciated Mr. Geiger's comments because they weren't like the normal comments from my other teachers. Teacher's comments normally tell me that I'm wrong or I need to do this. All of Mr. Geiger's comments were positive.” “The notebooks made you think about the things we discussed in class, and it was fun being able to openly discuss your opinion. I also really liked reading your comments, Mr. Geiger. They made me feel like I wasn't alone, and an adult perspective on my views and goals was nice, because it wasn't condescending... the notebook idea is a cool one.” “[Notebooks] helped me reflect on the things that are a part of my life. I believe being in this class at this time in my life helped me grow. What I was writing helped me realize what was becoming important to me. Overall, I think this class has helped me become more aware of myself.” “I really enjoyed having the notebooks. Before this point (of reflection) no one has really asked me about what my spiritual thoughts were, or if they did I wouldn't like to answer because I didn't want others to

judge my beliefs or tell me that there was a wrong or a right way. I liked getting feedback. It showed me my ideas were important.” “It let me say what I thought about religion and my beliefs, not what my family does and thinks. Also, I could say whatever I wanted without being judged. I really liked your comments because it showed and told me more about myself.”

¹⁹ See Carol S. Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (New York: Ballantine, 2006).

²⁰ Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman, *NurtureShock: New Thinking About Children* (New York: Twelve, 2009), 11-26.

²¹ See Patricia Lyons, *The Soul of Adolescence: In Their Own Words* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2010).

²² Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 19.

²³ Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster, *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998), 130.

²⁴ The following is representative of comments I might offer a student at the end of our semester. This particular student’s notebook was filled with thoughts of equality, justice, love, and God: “Q.—I feel incredibly lucky to have read these reflections—there is a depth and beauty to them that is very touching. It’s funny, you know. I think that it might be touching to me because I really felt some similar things when I was a spring semester sophomore. I had these deep longings to love people and to connect with them, but there just weren’t many people that I could love or connect with because they were either immature, or I was shy. It was both a hard and a beautiful time. As I’m sure it is for you. You know the parts of it that are crummy: hurtful words, racist remarks, insensitive glances. Some students made fun of me because I didn’t do the things that others were doing. But it was who I wanted to be. But, man, it hurt. I read in these pages an incredibly strong sense of self. It is not that it is a self that has set certain goals, or has specific plans, or a has a life-chart. It is a depth dimension that I’m talking about. It is the you, the “Q.”, that knows that each person in her life is infinitely special, precious, and that we are all meant to be together under the watchful eye of the universe, or God. I will say this—even though you may go through a day and think that so-and-so is not appreciating you—others are. And the great number of people in your future to be able to encounter such a caring soul that is a support for this aching world—well, that’s just a great gift for them.”

²⁵ Dori Grinenko Baker, *Doing Girlfriend Theology: God-talk With Young Women* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), 168.

²⁶ My students express their view of the accompanying relationship: “*This method of using the notebook was a great idea. It helps you express your opinion, without having to express all of it to the class. It also gives you something of a diary, where you could write your own thoughts and ideas, and gives your teacher a little insight on your views and perceptions of things. Like having a conversation with an adult or life coach which is only there to help and give you good thoughts and ideas. This method should continue*

to be used because by the end of the class the student will be able to see their personal progress and growth as a young man or woman.” “It gave me a feeling that I can write about anything I feel, think, or do without any judgment. It is also good because it can give you a second opinion on ideas that you normally wouldn’t feel comfortable asking for an opinion on.” “Using the notebooks is nice, because you are recording growth. By recording growth you see yourself in ways you would never think. By reading the comments I was shown a route I should take or continue on. It lightens my journey and opens my eyes; “[Notebooks] allows the teacher to take much more time than is possible in class to interact with the student. I thought it provided an interesting connection between teacher and student that goes beyond that of a normal class.”

²⁷ James W. Fowler, “Faith and the Structuring of Meaning,” in *Faith Development and Fowler*, edited by Craig Dykstra and Sharon Parks (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1986), 38.

²⁸ Don S. Browning and K. Brynolf Lyon, “Faith Development and the Requirements of Care,” in *ibid*, 214.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 215.

³⁰ As the student voices testify: *“The notebook, while writing in it, was sort of a pain. But after looking back at what I wrote, I was very interested in rereading the opinions and thoughts that I had written down. And even things that I had written down that I hadn’t thought of as interesting or deep, but Mr. Geiger’s comments helped me look back and really analyze what I had said, and it has really given me a new perspective on the way that I look at myself and my mind.” “Being able to express some personal thoughts which I treasure improved my spirit a great deal. I could forget about daily stress and focus on the beliefs that define who I am. I always felt renewed in hope and optimism, ready to face the next obstacle with full effort. As for the commentaries, I deeply appreciated Mr. Geiger’s perspective on my expressions. Each one added a greater context to my thoughts, especially in the spiritual sense which I hold dear. I now have some “changed” perspectives—my beliefs have been strengthened with his beliefs and I look forward to practicing them all in my life.” “At first, I did not like the idea of the notebook, b/c I didn’t want someone reading my thoughts and personal beliefs... But I appreciate them now. Answering these questions was hard, it made me really think about what I believe. I do not think any one has ever really cared. I think this class helped me get priorities straight and such, it helped me to straighten out my beliefs. This class helped me think about the environment that I live in. I am just a fish in the water. This class helped me to think outside of that.”*

³¹ James W. Fowler, “Pluralism, Particularity, and Paideia,” *Journal of Law and Religion*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1984), 306.