

Name and position today and a short background

Mary Elizabeth Hess

Associate Professor of Educational Leadership

My BA degree is in American Studies from Yale University. I have an MTH degree from Harvard University. My PhD is from Boston College in Religion and Education, where I focused on religious education amidst media cultures. I have been a member of the faculty of Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN since 2000.

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Short CV

I consult widely with theological faculties on issues of digital technology and theological education, and I have worked closely with both the Wabash Center on Teaching Theology and Religion, and the Lexington Seminar. I was a member of the International Study Commission on Media, Religion and Culture, and in that role also served on the board of the International Catholic Fellowships for Research in Media, Religion and Culture program. I was a member of the first AAR/Luce Cohort on comparative theologies and theologies of religious pluralism.

Currently I am the president of the Religious Education Association: An Association of Professors, Practitioners and Researchers of Religious Education. I also hold membership in the American Academy of Religion, the Catholic Theological Society of America, and the College Theology Society.

My work has tended towards two primary foci: (1) religious education in media cultures and (2) reflective practice in theological education

Within religious education I am particularly indebted to the work of Mary Boys. I also work with the adult learning theories of Robert Kegan, Stephen Brookfield and Parker Palmer. Using audience reception (Lynn Clark), and media education (eg. Renee Hobbs) theories I am developing a framework for engaging digital storytelling as a form of faith formation.

In the arena of theological education I am an advocate of participatory and reflective approaches to learning. Here I have written on engaging white privilege as a way of dismantling racism, communicative theologies (particularly as they draw on discursive theories of culture), utilizing media education strategies in higher education, and a variety of issues having to do with teaching in distributed and online formats.

Special contributions to the theory of RE; some notes about your personal intentions, criticism of other positions or approaches, in short what you want to change and develop.

My earliest engagement with the field of religious education came by way of an intense recognition that in the United States context there were few places in which, or means by which, people could resist hegemonic narratives of power and empire. Communities of faith have, in some ways and at some times in US history, been such places. I was eager to discover the roots of that resistance, and to support more resilient engagement. Those questions, in turn, led me to the study of mass media dynamics and the shaping of identity within contexts permeated by commercial narratives. Media literacy education combined with Catholic social thought (and the Trinitarian reflection underlying that thought), led me into participatory action research media projects which seek to lift up voices of resistance and resilience.

I find myself, at this point in my vocation, passionately interested in the mundane ways in which people of faith make sense of themselves and their communities amidst constantly shifting flows of globalization. I am committed to participatory research strategies, many of which draw on feminist and liberation narratives, but which always attend closely to the meaning-making of people in the midst of their daily lives. I teach in a seminary that prepares people for Christian ministries, and I remain committed to Christian narratives and the normative claims of the Christian tradition.

I do so, however, with a clear recognition of the human fallibility of such claims and with a commitment to an epistemological framework that privileges a “community of truth” (cf. Parker Palmer). That commitment has drawn me into engagement across various faith boundaries, and it sustains me as the only Roman Catholic faculty member of an ELCA seminary.

My current research involves teaching people how to engage in social media and how to develop digital stories as a means by which to articulate and critically engage their own faith and faith communities.

1 Keywords to characterize my research profile

Media education, cultural studies, religious education, theological education, critical multiculturalism, interfaith and intercultural studies, distributed learning, digital technologies, digital storytelling

Research and interest fields (short description and publications on each of them)

1 Religious education and media education:

Here I am most interested in understanding “culture” as an ongoing process of creating, circulating, negotiating and resisting meaning. That definition then allows me to ask questions about the ways which we learn within various cultures, particularly media cultures. Select publications include:

Engaging Technology in Theological Education: All That We Can't Leave Behind. Mary E. Hess. New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005.

Belief in Media: Cultural Perspectives on Media and Christianity. Mary Hess, Peter Horsfield, Adán Medrano, editors. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004.

Media literacy and religious education: Engaging popular culture to enhance religious experience. Dissertation written in the PhD program in Religion and Education, Boston College, March 1998. Available via UMI Dissertation Services.

“Responding to the challenges of religious storying in a digital age: Building new opportunities through feautor.org” in Erzählen - Reflexionen im Zeitalter der Digitalisierung / Storytelling – Reflections in the Age of Digitalization, herausgegeben von Yvonne Gächter, Heike Ortner, Claudia Schwarz und Andreas Wiesinger, unter Mitarbeit von Christine Engel, Theo Hug, Stefan Neuhaus und Thomas Schröder. Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press, 2008, pp. 112-126.

“Media literacy,” in the Encyclopedia of Religion, Communication and Media, edited by Daniel A. Stout. New York: Routledge, 2006, pp. 245 – 250.

“L'éducation religieuse dans le contexte de la culture médiatique: la pratique de l'imagination,” in Témoigner de sa foi, dans les médias, aujourd'hui, sous la direction de Guy Marchessault, Ottawa: Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 2005, pp. 351-371.

“Growing faithful children in media cultures,” in The Ministry of Children's Education, Professors of Christian Education at the ELCA Seminaries, Fortress Press, 2004, pp 126-150.

2 Religious education and the challenge of pluralism and interfaith/intercultural practices:

Religious education and the challenge of pluralism and interfaith/intercultural practices: Here I find the work of communicative theologians (cf. Scharer and Hilberath) particularly compelling, as well as those educators and theologians who are working at the boundaries of communities of faith (cf. Hill-Fletcher, Thatanamil).

“What difference does my neighbor's faith make for mine?”: How the AAR/Luce Summer Seminars on Theologies of Religious Pluralism and Comparative Theology are Expanding the Scope of Theological Teaching and Scholarship, Panel presentation and discussion, Upper Midwest AAR Regional Meeting, St. Paul, MN, April 1, 2011.

“From ICT to TCI: Communicative theology(ies), pedagogy and web 2.0,” in *Kommunikative Theologie: Zugänge – Auseinandersetzungen – Ausdifferenzierungen*, edited by Matthias Scharer, Bradford E. Hinze, and Bernd Jochen Hilberath. Wien: Lit Verlag GmbH & Co., 2010, pp. 130 – 149.

“The Bible and popular culture: Engaging sacred text in a world of ‘others,’” in *New Paradigms in Bible Study*, edited by Robert Fowler, Trinity Press International, 2004, pp. 207-224.

“Resisting the human need for enemies, or what would Harry Potter do?,” *Word & World*, Vol. 28, No. 1, Winter 2008, pp. 47 – 56.

“Better off for all that we let in: Being Catholic while teaching at a Lutheran Seminary,” *Listening: Journal of Religion and Culture*, Vol. 39, No. 3, Fall 2004, pp. 441-451.

3. Theological education and distributed/digital learning:

Here I am particularly interested in reflective practice and pedagogical innovation that takes cultural studies seriously.

Teaching Reflectively in Theological Contexts: Promises and Contradictions. Mary E. Hess and Stephen D. Brookfield, editors. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing, 2008.

Engaging Technology in Theological Education: All That We Can't Leave Behind. Mary E. Hess. New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005.

“Listening and learning to teach in theological contexts: An appreciative inquiry model,” in *Revitalizing Practice: Collaborative Models for Theological Faculties*, edited by Malcolm Warford. New York: Peter Lang, 2008, pp. 67-97.

“Rich treasure in jars of clay,” in *The Conviction of Things Not Seen: Worship and Ministry in the 21st Century*, edited by Todd E. Johnson. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002, pp. 123-140.

“From Crawfordsville to Saint Paul: Promoting reflections on teaching and learning as part of a seminary’s institutional culture,” with David J. Lose and Matthew L. Skinner, *Teaching Theology and Religion*, Vol. 10, No. 3, July 2007, pp. 178-179.

“What difference does it make? Digital technology in the theological classroom,” *Theological Education*, Vol. 41, No. 1, 2006, pp. 77-91.

“Possible new futures for our journal on the world wide web,” *Religious Education*, Vol. 100, No. 1, Winter 2005, pp. 78-88.

Current projects (short summary)

I have two primary projects that are increasingly converging together. One has to do with engaging issues of systemic racism in US theological education, and the other has to do with helping local religious educators find constructive ways to engage media with their learners. Both streams are converging in a digital storytelling curriculum project that focuses on media and race.

Bibliography

1 Books

Teaching Reflectively in Theological Contexts: Promises and Contradictions. Mary E. Hess and Stephen D. Brookfield, editors. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing, 2008.

Medios y Creencias: Perspectivas Culturales del Cristianismo en el Entorno Mediático. Mary Hess, Peter Horsfield, Adán Medrano y Juan Carlos Henriquéz. Translated by Elivira Maldonado. Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana; Plaza y Valdéz, S. A. de C. V., 2007.

Engaging Technology in Theological Education: All That We Can't Leave Behind. Mary E. Hess. New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005.

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2. Book chapters

“Preface,” in *Common Worship in Theological Education*, edited by Todd E. Johnson and Siobhan Garrigan. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010.

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“Responding to the challenges of religious storytelling in a digital age: Building new opportunities through feautor.org” in *Erzählen - Reflexionen im Zeitalter der Digitalisierung / Storytelling – Reflections in the Age of Digitalization*, herausgegeben von Yvonne Gächter, Heike Ortner, Claudia Schwarz und Andreas Wiesinger, unter Mitarbeit von Christine Engel, Theo Hug, Stefan Neuhaus und Thomas Schröder. Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press, 2008, pp. 112-126.

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“Go and make learners! Supporting transformation in education and evangelism,” in *Christian Education as Evangelism*, edited by Norma Cook Everist. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007, pp. 101-111.

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“Rich treasure in jars of clay,” in *The Conviction of Things Not Seen: Worship and Ministry in the 21st Century*, edited by Todd E. Johnson. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002, pp. 123-140.

“Media literacy as a support for the development of a responsible imagination in religious community,” in *Religion and Popular Culture: Studies on the Interaction of Worldviews*, edited by Daniel Stout and Judith Buddenbaum. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 2001, pp. 289-311.

3 Articles in journals

“Learning religion and religiously learning: Musings on a theme,” *Religious Education*, Vol. 105, No. 3, May-June 2010, pp. 234-237.

“What difference does it make? E-learning and faith community,” *Word & World*, Vol. 30, No. 3, Summer 2010, pp. 281 – 290.

“Resisting the human need for enemies, or what would Harry Potter do?,” *Word & World*, Vol. 28, No. 1, Winter 2008, pp. 47 – 56.

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- “All that we can’t leave behind: Pedagogy and theology in cyberspace,” *Teaching Theology and Religion*. Vol. 5, No. 1, February 2002, pp. 30-38.
- “Collaborating with people to study ‘the popular’: Implementing participatory action research strategies in religious education,” *Religious Education*, Vol. 96, No. 3, Summer 2001, pp. 271-293.
- “A place for reflection, a chance to be honest in our location: Popular culture, media literacy and theological reflection in the years to come,” in *Theological Explorations*, Vol. One, January 2000, the Duquesne University online journal in theology and ministry (<http://www.duq.edu/liberalarts/gradtheology/volume1.html>).
- “From trucks carrying messages to ritualized identities: Implications of the postmodern paradigm shift in media studies for religious educators,” *Religious Education*, Vol. 94, No. 3, Summer 1999, pp. 273-288.
- “A current snapshot of media literacy in relation to religious education,” *Connections: The Newsletter of the Association for Communication in Theological Education*, Vol. 6, #2, Spring 1999.
- “White religious educators and unlearning racism: can we find a way?” *Religious Education*, Vol. 93, No. 1, Winter 1998, pp. 114-129.
- “The social construction of knowledge, media culture, and the creation of border communities in religious education.” *Religion & Education*, Vol. 23, No. 1, Spring 1996.

4 Book reviews

- Journal Keeping: How to Use Reflective Writing for Learning, Teaching, Professional Insight and Positive Change, Dannelle D. Stevens and Joanne E. Cooper, Stylus Publishing, 2009. Reviewed in *Teaching Theology and Religion*, Vol. 13, #4, October 2010, pp. 384-385.
- Media Violence and Christian Ethics, Jolyon Mitchell. Cambridge University Press, 2007. Reviewed in *The Expository Times*, Vol. 120, #9, 2009, pp. 441-442.
- Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World’s Religious Traditions, edited by Karen Marie Yust, Aostre N. Johnson, Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain. Reviewed in *Interpretation*, Vol. 61, #3, July 2007, pp. 328-330.
- The Mediated Spirit, Peter Horsfield. Melbourne, Australia: The Uniting Church in Australia, 2002. Reviewed in *Religious Education*, Vol. 99, #2, Spring 2004, 206-207.
- How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work, Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001. Reviewed in *Journal of Religious Leadership*, Vol. 1, #1, Spring 2002.
- Web Teaching Guide: A Practical Approach to Creating Course Web Sites, Sarah Horton. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000. Reviewed in *Teaching Theology and Religion*, Vol. 5, No. 1, February 2002, p. 63.
- The Child in Christian Thought, edited by Marcia Bunge. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001. Reviewed in *Word & World*, Fall 2001, p. 440-442.
- Camínemos con Jesús: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995. Reviewed in *Religious Education*, Fall 1999, 472-473.

Other information

Web projects include:

Feautor

www.feautor.org: an open source, religious resource sharing site

Tensegrities

<http://www.religioused.org/tensegrities/>: a weblog on issues of interest in media, religious education, Catholic theology and global political challenges