Project Title
Teaching Creative Communication and Instilling the Value of Nonviolent Conflict in the Prison Classroom: Interdisciplinary Strategies for Theological Educators

Framing Question or Problem
A good framing question or problem can help you identify what you do not understand and articulate why you must pursue it. It can also help you identify what strategies and activities can be most helpful and who might collaborate in the work. Ask yourself: What do you want to know? What is the student learning issue at the heart of this project? What classroom practice will this project address? What is the pedagogical issue or problem that this project is seeking to address and why does it matter?

How do interdisciplinary strategies prepare students in prison to communicate creatively and to use communication skills to model and advance nonviolent conflict in ways that positively contribute to personal healing and the learning community?

Creative communication in the midst of conflict is a humanizing practice that contributes to healthy learning communities and effective ministry. Conflict is defined as two or more interdependent parties who interact and perceive irreconcilable differences between them or threats to needs, values, or resources. Yet conflict of any sort is a complicated reality in a maximum security prison, and it is difficult—even in the classroom—to promote nonviolent conflict skills. Most men in maximum security prisons have long or life sentences, and the prison prioritizes security in all of its programs and daily operations. In this context, stressors (ranging from lack of sleep to lack of movement to strict disciplinary measures) easily lead to the escalation of conflict that is violent. Simultaneously, security protocols indirectly restrict nonviolent conflict, in part due to the conflation of conflict and violence and the desire to avoid violence.

This project draws upon courses and faculty from a variety of disciplines related to conflict and communication. It aims to further knowledge about how the seminary classroom can prepare students for “ministry in social worlds enmeshed in conflicted and conflicting realities,” particularly in contexts such as prison where conflict is heightened. Our hypothesis is that learning communities who are cultivated to value nonviolent conflict and students who learn creative communication strategies to address conflict will become more effective ministers. Our project focuses on two marks of ministry preparedness in the context of prison: 1. Students will experience individual healing and 2. Students will be agents of restoration at the interpersonal and community levels.

Some important ancillary questions this project pursues include: What is the role of personal healing and the space to address one’s own trauma in communication skills? What are effective
methods for students in prison to engage conflict in healthy ways that promote the well-being of the learning community? What do different disciplinary approaches add to achieving goals? What negative communication patterns in class need to be changed or reshaped? What are primary points of conflict in prison (e.g., race, age, religious views, gang affiliation)? What are dominant triggers (e.g., living conditions, mental health, outside stressors)? What do various disciplines offer? What does creative, nonviolent communication look like in the prison classroom? How might skills developed in the class community be applied in the larger prison community or in learning communities outside prison?

Project Goals

List the goals for this project. What do you hope to accomplish or learn? What will this grant help you to do that you couldn’t do without funding? At the conclusion of the grant project, what change will have occurred as a consequence of this grant project?

North Park Theological Seminary launched a four-year Master of Arts in Christian Ministry degree at Stateville Correctional Center (SCC) in Fall 2018. The degree program prepares people for ministry in contexts susceptible to violence. The program currently enrolls 37 diverse degree seekers. There is significant diversity in the student body in the areas of race, ethnicity, religious background, and age. There is some diversity in the areas of free/incarcerated, religion, and class.

Given the contextual realities of prison and NPTS’s vision to use theological education to help persons who are incarcerated build meaningful lives while in prison and upon release through formation for ministry, the faculty have added a for-credit Certificate in Restorative Arts (CRA) to the traditional MACM degree. The CRA will be offered for the first time in Fall 2019 and Spring 2020. Without exception, students in prison have experienced trauma and violence, and the CRA curriculum helps students develop concrete practices aimed at the healing and restoration of individuals and communities.

Courses in the CRA include: 1) Conflict Transformation and Nonviolent Communication, 2) Life Together: Building the Beloved Community, 3) Peace, Justice, and Restorative Practices, and 4) Trauma & Healing. The CRA courses approach restoration with the understanding that comprehension of individual brokenness and interpersonal violence in the context of personal and social stressors requires a multidisciplinary approach. Thus, courses are taught by faculty who trained in the fields of conflict transformation studies, community development, racial reconciliation, sociology, and psychology/trauma.

The traditional MACM degree has five Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) that are part of NPTS’s regular assessment plan. Yet the prison context begs the question of whether new outcomes, and possibly new degree processes, would more effectively prepare students for ministry in contexts susceptible to violence. This project would draw upon new CRA courses listed above and pedagogical strategies aimed toward creative communication and nonviolent conflict in order to learn whether new or revised SLOs are needed for the MACM in prison.

Upon completion of the CRA, students will demonstrate personal healing and growth in readiness for ministry activities. The learning community will demonstrate integration of restorative practices both in and outside the classroom. Faculty will demonstrate increased
knowledge of pedagogies that engage conflict in nonviolent ways and that result in creative communication.

Dissemination plans including sharing our findings with ATS and other seminary programs in prisons. Such a project would be beneficial to other Association of Theological Schools who are pioneering such programs. ATS is currently looking for research on program in prison as they continue to revise their assessment and accrediting guidelines for such programs. This project could contribute to this. Additionally, the team will designate a member to submit an article to Teaching Religion and Theology or The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching.

Description of Activities
What is the scope of work envisioned for this grant project? What activities will be planned and carried out? How will these specific activities meet the needs of your context and help those involved with the project explore particular teaching and learning challenges? Include a timeline of activities envisioned.

The scope of this project includes planning, implementing, collaborating, and evaluating communication and conflict strategies to equip faculty in theological education to better prepare students for “ministry in social worlds enmeshed in conflicted and conflicting realities” and to identify appropriate Student Learning Outcomes in the prison context. The Project Team utilizes faculty from a variety of disciplines for the purposes of: 1) Determining the effects of individual healing on creative communication skills and the ability to engage nonviolent conflict and 2) Testing and assessing pedagogical strategies that facilitate restoration at the interpersonal and community level.

The focus question for this project is: How do interdisciplinary strategies prepare students in prison to communicate creatively and to use communication skills to model and advance nonviolent conflict in ways that positively contribute to personal healing and the learning community?

To answer this question, the project will pursue four primary activities based on the following timeline:

1. **Summer 2019, Planning Summit.** The Project Team will meet to discuss pedagogical strategies and course assessments, create an observation rubric to assess pedagogy and the learning community, and detail the metrics and processes for assessing the project. The rubric and metrics will include descriptions and markers of creative communication and nonviolent conflict. The summit will be a key part of the collaborative, interdisciplinary work necessary to ensuring the best outcomes and for learning from each other as the project progresses. The summit will also be a time for the team to learn about each other’s disciplinary approaches by sharing syllabi and offering feedback. Participants will prepare by reading common resources. Meetings, including observation sessions, for the project will also be determined.

2. **Fall 2019/Spring 2020, Course Implementation and Observations.** Two courses (Conflict Transformation/Nonviolent Communication and Life Together: Building Beloved Community) will be offered in the Fall 2019 and the other two courses (Trauma & Healing and Peace, Justice, and Restorative Practices) will be offered in the Spring 2020. During this time, each of the Project Team members will observe the three classes they are not teaching and evaluate each according to the rubric design determined at the
planning summit. Evaluations will be given to faculty, and faculty will adjust pedagogy according to suggestions of evaluators.

3. **January 2020, May 2020, Collaboration Meetings.** A meeting will be scheduled between fall and spring semester to collect data, review fall courses, assess outcomes, catalogue preliminary findings, and determine whether adjustments need to be made. This meeting will provide information for the midway assessment. A second meeting will be scheduled in May 2020 to collect data, review spring courses, assess outcomes, and determine findings. The Project Director will collect, compile, and write up all reports and findings from the project.

**Project Team Participants**

*Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom, PhD (Project Director, faculty)*

Clifton-Soderstrom is Professor of Theology and Ethics at NPTS and the Director of the School of Restorative Arts at Stateville Correctional Center. She has a PhD in Christian Social Ethics, MTS in Theology & Ethics, MA in Theological Studies and is an ordained minister. She has been teaching in prison for four years. She regularly lectures on mass incarceration and the church and has published on crime and punishment in the U.S. She was on the peer review team for the Programs in Prison research for The Association of Theological Schools’ Educational Models and Practices project. She will co-teach Life Together: Building Beloved Community.

*Mary Trujillo, PhD (External Consultant)*

Trujillo is a Conflict Transformation Strategist and Professor Emeritus at North Park University. She has a PhD in Communication Studies from Northwestern, MA in Rehabilitation Counseling, and BA in Interdisciplinary Studies. She has certificates in Mediation, Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience, and Spiritual Direction. She consults on social justice writing, practitioner-researcher collaborations, ethnographic methodologies, intercultural conflict, conflict transformation processes, trauma informed interventions, and spiritual formation in communities.

*Elizabeth Pierre, PhD (Faculty)*

Pierre is Assistant Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling Psychology at NPTS and the School of Professional Studies at North Park University. She has a PhD in Pastoral Theology/Clinical Track, MA in Counseling Psychology, and MA in Christian Education. She has served as a pastor and her research focuses on trauma and sexual violence. She has developed curriculum on trauma and healing with emphases on race, culture, and self-care. She will teach Trauma and Healing.

*Pam Smith, MA (Faculty)*

Smith is a Certified Kingian Nonviolence Trainer and has adjunct experience teaching courses in U.S. and world history. She works in the area of oppression and racial reconciliation and has facilitated racial dialogues with student and community groups. She has facilitated board retreats and strategic planning sessions for many organizations and served as senior press aide for Barack Obama. Smith has an MA in History and BS in Communications. She will co-teach Conflict Transformation and Nonviolent Communication.

*Dominique DuBois Gilliard, MDiv (Faculty)*

Gilliard is the director of Racial Righteousness for the Evangelical Covenant church and adjunct professor at NPTS. He is author of the award-winning book *Rethinking Incarceration:*
Advocating for Justice that Restores. He is an ordained minister and has serve in Atlanta, Chicago, and Oakland. He has an MDiv, an MA in History, and an undergraduate degree in African American Studies and History. Gilliard will co-teach Life Together: Building Beloved Community.

Michelle Dodson, PhD (Faculty)
Dodson is an adjunct professor at NPTS and an associate pastor at New Community Covenant Church in Bronzeville. She has a PhD in Sociology and an MDiv. She has received grants, has published, and lectured in the area of faith, race, justice, and diversity in the church. She has received awards for diversifying higher education faculty, women in leadership, and servant leadership. Dodson will teach the course Peace, Justice, and Restorative Practices.

Kim Schiller, MS (Faculty)
Schiller is an instructor and the Title IX Administrator at North Park University. She has a MS in Human Service Counseling, a Certification in Addiction Treatment, and is a Certified Mediator. She has done post graduate study in trauma and conflict. She has trained groups and consulted in conflict mediation, peer support, and crisis management. Schiller has trained licensed therapists to work with clients who have both process and substance addictions. She has lectured on wellness, mental health, and addition, and has worked with survivors of sexual assault. Schiller will co-teach Conflict Transformation/Nonviolent Communication.

Administrative support: This person will plan meetings, take meeting notes, collect and organize data, and assist with accounting and disbursement of funds.

Supportive Literature
Briefly, describe what others have done when working with the pedagogical issues or question that you want to pursue. What literature have you consulted and how will that literature inform your project?

The literature consulted includes sources that deal directly with nonviolent communication, conflict transformation, and the religious studies classroom. It also includes sources on effective ministry and on education in the context of prison—both liberal arts generally and theological education specifically. One study is the result of an external assessment on one of the longest standing seminary programs in prison (Angola). Another is a critique of faith-based prison ministry programs. Finally, sources on pedagogy for theological educators are included along with sources on trauma-informed education.


**Assessment, Evaluation, and Response**

_How, when, and who will provide the midway assessment? How will you know if the grant activities are effective or whether the project should be revised? When the project is complete, how will you know that your objectives have been met? Who will be assessing what was learned? Who will be responding to what was learned, and how will they get this information? What connection will be made to a larger, public audience (if applicable)?_

Our hypothesis is that learning communities who are cultivated to value nonviolent conflict and students who learn creative communication strategies to address conflict will: 1. Experience individual healing and 2. Facilitate restoration at the interpersonal and community levels toward the end of being effective ministers. Matt Bloom, who leads the Wellbeing at Work program at Notre Dame, argues that effective ministers who flourish in their work are, among other things, self-aware, emotionally healthy, and have developed conflict resolution skills. Faculty will employ pedagogy designed to support the above student learning outcomes and work from the definition of communication as a symbolic process in which humans collectively create and
regulate social reality. Examples of creative, nonviolent communication include such skills as distinguishing between observations and evaluations, feelings and causes of feelings, or needs and demands. These will factor into course assessments and rubrics for evaluating learning communities.

This project will be evaluated on four levels:

1. **Individual students** will be evaluated by faculty, the Project Team, and themselves. Each of the four courses will include assessments related to communication and conflict. Additionally, courses will include one or both of the two project outcomes: 1. Experience individual healing making them more effective ministers, as evidenced by such things as self-awareness and the ability to reflect on one’s own trauma and 2. Be agents of restoration at the interpersonal and community levels, as evidenced by such things as the ability of the learning community to listen to diverse ideas, to engage conflict in a sustained way, and value the voice of peers. While this assessment is part of regular evaluative processes for individual faculty, the Project Team will conduct a more detailed examination of these assessments together. Students will be asked to complete a pre and post year self-evaluation that includes questions around personal healing as it relates to their communication skills. Students will reflect on what they would like to see in themselves and what they think they need to learn as communication skills.

2. **Faculty members** will be evaluated by the Project Team and themselves. Faculty will each write up a mid-semester evaluation of one’s pedagogy utilizing observation feedback of the Project Team, co-instructor feedback (some courses are team taught), consultation with External Consultant, and student evaluations based on initial desired outcomes as stated in the syllabus. Mid-semester evaluations will include two goals for improvement. Assessment of these goals will be included in final course evaluation. Questions the team will pursue include: What are effective methods for students in prison to engage conflict in healthy ways that promote the well-being of the learning community? What do different disciplinary approaches add to achieving goals?

3. **The Learning Community** will be evaluated by the Project Team, faculty, and themselves. The metrics for evaluation will be determined during the planning summit and evidence of outcomes will include group narratives of success or failure, positive class interactions, and inclusive participation. Metrics will be informed by student’s early reflections on how they need to grow and develop. The students and faculty will also determine a working definition of violence that may grow and evolve over the year. Questions the team will pursue include: What negative communication patterns in class need to be changed or reshaped? What are primary points of conflict in prison (e.g., race, age, religious views, gang affiliation)? What are dominant triggers (e.g., living conditions, mental health, outside stressors)?

4. **The Certificate in Restorative Arts** curriculum will be evaluated by the Project Team. Questions they will pursue include: What do various disciplines offer? What does creative, nonviolent communication look like in the prison classroom? How might skills developed in the class community be applied in the larger prison community or in learning communities outside prison?

The Grant Project will be evaluated by the Project Team midway through the grant cycle and at the end. During these meetings, the team will discuss, interpret, and evaluate information. The Project Director will write up midway assessment and final review.
Line Item Budget and Budget Narrative

In consultation with your institution’s financial officer, build a budget to support the activities projected, delineating yearly estimates if requesting a multi-year grant. Provide a brief narrative in support of each line item expense. Make sure the budget is congruent with how expenses can be allocated at your institution.

Line Item Budget

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Budget Narrative

The primary costs allocated in the budget are for collaborative work of the project including planning, meetings, observations, and evaluation of the project as well as travel costs associated with this. Minor budget allocations are for resources and administrative support.

a. Travel: Travel costs include airfare for the External Consultant (3 trips for meetings and observations @$600=$1800), meeting mileage for external colleagues (160 miles x $.58/mile = $92.80), and mileage for classroom observations (90 mi x 8 observation trips x $.58/mile = $417.60).

b. Meals: Meals are calculated for planning summit and meetings (3 meetings for 8 people @$40/person/day = $960).

c. Faculty: These are stipends for meetings and classroom observations (Faculty (5) for 3 days of meetings and 3 days each of classroom observations @$300/day = $9000). Meetings and observations will be full days with travel to the facility. Additionally, all will lead aspects of the discussion and bring expertise in their areas.

d. External Consultant: Costs are calculated for planning summit, two meeting days (one call in/one in person), two classroom observations (3 full days @ $1000/day and two half
days @ $500/day = $4000), and one half-day for additional consulting with faculty ($500).

e. Project Director: Costs are calculated at $3500 per semester for overload and some summer work. Project Director oversees all activities related to the grant, works with the External Consultant to determine agenda for meetings, collects and compiles materials for evaluation and assessment of the project, communicates with external parties (including Wabash Center, prison staff, and other administrators), and attends Wabash meetings. Project Director is not compensated additionally for any meetings or observations.

f. Direct Administrative Support: This stipend is for assistance directly supporting activities including coordinating and planning all meetings and observations, note taking at meetings, arranging travel/lodging, and coordinating gate passes at Stateville Correctional Center (50 planning hours, 24 meeting hours, and 10 follow up hours @ $20/hour = $1680).

g. Books, Resources, and Printing: These costs include purchasing two books for each Project Team member, printing three articles, and other minor printing costs (7 people @ $60/person and $230 printing = $650).

h. Indirect Costs: North Park’s policy is to budget 10 percent of total grant for indirect costs for the institution hosting the grant. This includes executive salaries, use of North Park facilities for all meetings, and other institutional support.