



WABASH CENTER

For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion



What does Writing about Teaching Mean to You?

Emilie M. Townes, *Vanderbilt University/The Divinity School*

Blog Series: Embodied Teaching

August 07, 2023

Tags: embodied teaching | administration | Durham | North Carolina | central

writing about teaching means that i begin with thinking about teaching and why it has always been a part of my life. both of my parents were college professors, and the worlds of books and classrooms were a part of my life for as long as i can remember. some of my earliest tangible memories about teaching are walking from my grade school—fayetteville street elementary—to the biology building at north carolina college at durham for negroes (now north carolina central university) and sitting outside of my mother’s classroom and listening to her biology lectures. she had no idea that i was there until i talked about it in my installation address at union theological seminary when i was in my late 40s. i loved listening to her teach as she was in command of the material and the classroom, and her diction was impeccable. i knew a little about some of the topics she was teaching in those intro biology classes, but not always. and it was the not-always times that caused me to lean in more closely—what i now think of as learning.

writing about teaching means that i put myself *into* the classroom—either an imagined or tangible one—and think about why working with students in a teaching and learning environment is an honor and can be big fun. it’s also a challenge and i find that there are times when the pain or the joy that is being shared is also a time of both spiritual and pastoral prayer. logic and reason take somewhat of a back seat for a while as the humanity of the

person(s) in front of me or seated around the table comes to the fore in visceral ways.

writing about teaching helps me remember why i chose it as a profession and how, although i have been in administration since 2008, i never stopped teaching in its broadest sense as being a dean is, for me, about teaching as we learn together how to be a faculty, how we shape a curriculum, how we engage the worlds around us, how we must be as present as possible to the known and the unexpected, how we work with the churches and communities around us, how we hold ourselves together by tending to our spiritual as well as physical selves. and i am reminded, once again, that teaching is about caring and love.

<https://wabash.center/2023/08/what-does-writing-about-teaching-mean-to-you/>