

Curriculum as Theological Text in an Age of Isolation

I have been thinking a lot about the class discussions of Slattery's postmodern vision of curriculum as theological text (Slattery 2005, ch 4). I felt that a deeper understanding of the meaning of theological text - that being a proleptic process in creating a syncretical moment (Pinar and Grumet, 1976) - might have been lost on some participants due to ideological views based on the structure of religion rather than of spirituality. Because of the nature of this paper, I should point out that I am personally not *very* religious, however, am undoubtedly influenced by my experiences of attending the United Church on a regular basis while growing up in rural Ontario. I usually call myself a Christian, but I couldn't tell you all that much about the bible. My personal views regarding the spiritual stem from basic concepts of morality and faith that are common to many theological perspectives. Because of significant benefits I have received from the practice of yoga and literary texts such as Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha* (1922), I guess one could say I am also influenced by Buddhism. As a scholar, there are of course times in which I

question the existence of any larger being, acknowledging our instinctive desire for meaning, purpose, and connection within a contemporary world. It is this desire for connection, or rather the modern experience of isolation which Slattery writes about (pp. 105-107), that I will respond to in this paper.



iBelieve lanyard for iPod Shuffle, 2005
designed by Scott Wilson (American, b. 1969)

As we discussed theology and curriculum, I was struck by something Steven said regarding the replacement of churches by malls in North American society - the absence of religion causing people to congregate in places besides churches in response to feelings of isolation. Coincidentally, the night before that group discussion I taught a course in which we discussed a short reading and a separate design (see image to left) that both related the handheld iPod to the Church. In 'ipod' (2006) Michael Bull describes the iPod as the cultural equivalent to the 1950s Citroen DS car that Roland Barthes wrote about; Barthes compared this car to the great Gothic cathedrals in describing them both as "magical objects" to consume. Bull states that what distinguishes the car from the cathedral as an icon, is the way in which one can privately inhabit the car. Bull

further discusses connections between the mobile privatized sound that envelops the individual in an "auditory bubble" and how this experience evolved from occurring within a vehicle to that of the portable Sony Walkman in the 1980s. When describing the current popularity of the iPod, he argues that "the illusion of a fully private sonic envelope is the paradoxical price of an even more intensely populated public space." The iPod is just one example of the individual's escape from and within a materialistic society. As Slattery argues for a curriculum development theory rooted in theological self-reflection, he states that "modernity has encouraged the isolation of the individual...unable to establish personal relationships, unable to remember past experiences, and incapable of affecting the future course of global events" (p. 106).

I see the theological text as a process within a larger postmodern aesthetic curriculum that could be used to increase a sense of connection and deepen understanding amongst participants. Reflecting on the class discussions, it seems that to create this kind of understanding the participants must be "committed to staying 'with' each other, constantly listening" (Smith quoted in Slattery, p. 244). Slattery describes the essence of this conversation well as "a spirit of self-forgetfulness...to discover oneself in relation to the entire community experience." (p. 244)

References outside of class:

Bull, Michael. "ipod" from *Sensorium: Embodied Experience, Technology, and Contemporary Art* (2006).
Jones, Caroline A. (Ed.) *The MIT Press*.