

**INTERNALIZATION, NEGOTIATION AND RESISTANCE:  
CHALLENGE OF THE DISCREPANCY BETWEEN INTENTIONAL  
TEACHING AND UNINTENTIONAL EVERYDAY PRACTICE FOR  
RELIGIOUS EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE OF STORYTELLING**

Heejung Kwon  
Ph.D. Candidate, Emory University  
Research Interest Group Presentation

**ABSTRACT**

In the educational practice of storytelling, religious educators can and should recognize discrepancies between what happens in peoples' everyday practices and the ways they describe them. Starting from reflection on the discrepancies in light of Bourdieu's social theory, this essay explores the ways in which the political dynamics people experience in their daily lives and in faith communities influence their acts of storytelling. Learners' practical knowledge or habitus functions as the source of their internalization, negotiation, or resistance against dominant ideological and political structures. Through critical observation of the dynamics around storytelling, religious educators are challenged to expand their notion of practice and to employ a pedagogy of "reflexivity," which will bring a renewed understanding of what students and teachers bring to educational settings.

"Christian education should be rightly understood as a storied process," says Anne Wimberly in *Soul Stories* (38). Christian Religious educators often employ storytelling as an important educational practice out of conviction that it facilitates students' growth as Christians.<sup>1</sup> They believe that teachers and students in faith communities share their realities, hopes, and yearnings as well as God's work in their lives and their relationship with God through the practice of storytelling (Ibid.).<sup>2</sup> Further, Christian religious educators argue that the practice of storytelling transforms people's lives and gives voice to those who have been

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<sup>1</sup> Although I wrote this essay with Christian religious educators in mind due to my religious, social, and cultural location, I believe that it carries general implication for any religious education.

<sup>2</sup> As Susan M. Shaw presents in *Storytelling in Religious Education*, there are several kinds of storytelling that can be employed in classroom. In this essay, I limit my discussion to sharing of personal life stories.

silenced and subordinated in a society (Shaw, 5). Religious education scholars such as Thomas H. Groome and Anne Streaty Wimberly contend that storytelling makes an important contribution to education for liberation (Groome; Wimberly).

Given such an understanding of storytelling, this essay begins by posing a question for religious educators who believe in the power of storytelling: what if we encountered discrepancies or gaps between students' daily practices and their descriptions of the practices in their storytelling in religious educational settings? As will be discussed below, in light of French sociologist and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu's ethnographic observation, I contend that such discrepancies often exist and reveal how people engage with dominant social structures and power in their everyday lives and in their faith communities. I argue that people's political responses to dominant power can be expressed in three aspects: internalization, negotiation, and resistance. The complex integration of these political responses to social structures, which are embedded in people's habitus, impact the ways people engage in storytelling. In a concluding section, I discuss some implications of this recognition for religious educators. I argue that religious educators are challenged to expand and diversify their understanding of practice and to employ a pedagogy of "reflexivity" in their teaching. With critical reflexivity, they will have a renewed understanding of what teachers and students bring to a classroom, including students' knowledge gained from everyday practice as well as their power to deal with dominant structures.

### **BOURDIEU'S INSIGHTS FOR THE POLITICS OF STORYTELLING**

Pierre Bourdieu's theory can be summed up as an attempt to overcome the dichotomies in social science between subjectivism and objectivism because these oppositions prevent intellectuals from developing appropriate theories of practices. Unsatisfied with mechanical understanding of practice that was prevalent in social science, Bourdieu set a goal to develop a sociology that can help one understand the nature of practice better. Bourdieu contends that neither objectivist (particularly structuralist) nor subjectivist (phenomenological) approach to practice should be avoided. According to Bourdieu, objectivism, conceiving social facts as things that can be observed and examined without the involvement of individuals' subjective viewpoints or positions, prevents one from recognizing agents' practical mastery and ability to provide meanings for their behaviors. On the other hand, subjectivism fails to show that practices are constituted in social structures and relation because of its view of society as the sum of subjective interpretations of individuals. Attempting to secure both power of structures

and agency in sociology, Bourdieu contends that objectivist and subjectivist modes of knowledge are in a dialectical relationship, not in opposition. That is, social structures and mental structures are “interlinked by a twofold relationship of mutual constitution and correspondence”(Stones, 220). For him, individual and society are not separate but in relation “as if they are two dimensions of the same social reality.” (Swartz, 223).

In his ethnographic research about the marriage practices of the Kabyle people in Algeria, Bourdieu discovered that the people, responding to anthropologists’ questions, often delivered “distorted” or “insufficient” accounts as they described their social practices.<sup>3</sup> In the process of “representing” their groups, says Bourdieu, people engaged “official” or “quasi-theoretical” discourses, in which they employed the rules and principles set by society. In such a process of accounting for their own practices, people did not fully describe what was really going on, which were more fluid and complex than their depictions.<sup>4</sup>

According to Bourdieu, the reason why such discrepancy happens is because people are not often conscious of the logic of their practice (Bourdieu 1977, 37). Bourdieu calls this “learned ignorance” (19). He suggests that people’s practice is similar to playing games. A player is not always conscious of rules and principles of the game but develops strategies to play the game well. The players develop “the embodied sensibility that makes possible structured improvisation” (Calhoun et al., 302). Bourdieu calls this “feel for the game” habitus. According to Bourdieu, people’s everyday practice is built by habitus, which Bourdieu means in-built systems of dispositions that agents acquire in the process of socialization. Social structures not only produce “strategy-generating principles” with which agents deal with diverse situations in coherent manners but also get embedded in their bodies (Bourdieu 1977, 72, 95). Habitus is therefore a bodily knowledge. Habitus is also “constituted

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<sup>3</sup> In Bourdieu, we find two meanings of practice. First, practices mean “interwoven activities in a given social domain such as agriculture, cooking, the economy, and politics.” By the second one, Bourdieu means “performing an action or carrying out a practice of the first sort” (Schatzki, 2). This essay focuses on the latter.

<sup>4</sup> This interest of mine in the discrepancy between “officialized” discourse and everyday practice began with my research about Korean-American Christian women. As I interviewed some women, I realized that the women were engaging with a kind of officialized discourse on their lives. I also noticed that the ways in which they shared their life stories in the classrooms led by church leaders could be quite different from the ways in which they engaged with storytelling among their close neighbors or friends. Depending on their perception of the other parties’ social position in society and relationship with them, the ways in which the women spoke varied. For instance, even though the women that I interviewed did not explicitly recognize the existence of a patriarchal structure in their faith communities, they certainly were involved in dealing with it differentiating ways of sharing their stories in conscious or unconscious consideration of their locations of speaking. I suspected that a similar kind of dynamics might occur in the religious educational practice of storytelling.

in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions”(53). People construct practices and symbols in their lives without making rules or principles explicit to themselves.

Habitus cannot be acquired without a field. Different societies consist of several fields, which are relational networks that constitute “relatively autonomous social microcosm” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 97). In social relations, people constantly struggle to possess, improve or preserve their positions and power. Bourdieu says that the coherence and stability that one can see from a field is constructed out of “conflict and competition, not of some kind of immanent self-development of the structure” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 103-104). But a field goes through the processes of formation, growth, transformation, and even destruction over time. There are always struggles between those who try to uphold the identity in the dominant positions and those who are subordinated and challenge the dominant rules.

Another important concept for Bourdieu’s view of social relations is capital—i.e. capital is source of power and access to dominant positions in a field. How much capital one is given determines one’s system of dispositions and position in a society. With economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital, people exert influence on how the relations of domination get produced and reproduced in a field. According to Bourdieu,

It(capital) confers a power over the field, over the materialized or embodied instruments of production or reproduction whose distribution constitutes the very structure of the field, and over the regularities and the rules which define the ordinary functioning of the field, and thereby over the profits engendered in it (Bourdieu and Waquant, 101).

Practice is constituted by people’ struggles to maintain or modify their social location in the fields, and the dynamic of internalization, negotiation, and resistance, constitute their political responses to dominant structures. According to Bourdieu, people acquire habitus by internalizing certain social conditions (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 18, 105). The concept of habitus is a way of explaining how people willingly accept dominant ideologies and social conditions. People comply to the dominant social structures as they are inscribed in their bodies as habitus. Without conscious willingness, people take submissive positions to domination. One of the most well known aspects of Bourdieu’s theory is his notion of reproduction through schooling. He argues that education is an effective means by which the dominant social values and structures are internalized by agents and thus reproduced.

Although Bourdieu strongly presents the power of reproduction and stability of habitus based on his empirical researches, he does not, however, argue that agents are just passive beings subservient to domination (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 24). Again, a field is “a space of play” (19). People in a field maintain or modify the nature of the field by going through constant negotiation with power structures. Bourdieu says,

There is action, and history, and conservation or transformation of structures only because there are agents, but agents who are acting and efficacious only because they are not reduced to what is ordinarily put under the notion of individual and who, as socialized organisms, are endowed with an ensemble of dispositions which imply both the propensity and the ability to get into and to play the game (Bourdieu 1989, 59; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 19).

Despite the criticisms that claim that one cannot find a notion of resistance in his theoretical scheme, Bourdieu does discuss the possibility of resistance. He says that those who are dominant in a field have to constantly struggle with possible resistance of the dominated (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 102). A reason why those who read Bourdieu may have a hard time finding a concept of resistance is that submission and resistance are not neatly distinguished, in the ways we generally think, in Bourdieu’s view of the relation between agency and structures.<sup>5</sup> For him, the concept of resistance does not go beyond the power of structures. But he holds the notion of “structures that make room for the organized improvisation of agents.” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 19). For the critiques that define resistance in terms of modern notion of individual agency, his notion of resistance seems to fail. However, his redefining of resistance is similar to some feminists’ discussion on women’s resistance. For example, Postcolonial feminist Rakeswari Sunder Rajan says, “Resistance is not always a positivity; it may be no more than a negative agency, an absence of acquiescence in one’s oppression” (Rajan, 12). She says her definition of resistance is an attempt to “redefine individual resistance itself in terms of its social function rather than its performative intentionality” (Ibid.). Similarly, in accordance with his endeavor to overcome the dualism between agency and structure, Bourdieu’s notion of resistance should be understood beyond the paradigm of individual agency and intentionality based on modern notion of autonomy.

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<sup>5</sup> Bourdieu disagrees to the critiques that argue that a concept of resistance cannot be found in this theory. He says that what he is saying is only that his empirical studies show the stability of domination. For him, one of the tasks of sociologists is to find “under what conditions these dispositions (dispositions of resistance) are socially constituted, effectively triggered, and rendered politically efficient. He says that sometimes, restructuring some aspects of the habitus seems possible, at least under specific circumstances” (Krais, 170).

Although internalization, negotiation, and resistance are found in Bourdieu's view of practice, he does not contend that they are separate operations. For him, the traditional division between submission and resistance hinders our proper understanding of practice (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 23-24). The true nature of practice dismisses the dualistic frameworks such as objectivity and subjectivity, submission and resistance, agency and structure.

From this understanding of practice, he developed a "reflexive" sociology. As mentioned above, he argues for the need for sociologists to pay attention to the discrepancies between people's everyday practice and their representation. Bourdieu is also concerned that sociologists are likely to develop mechanical views of practice with their intellectualism, tendency to force representation onto people, and tendency for "totalizing apprehension" (Bourdieu 1977, 1, 2, and 5). He argues that sociologists need to use reflexivity toward their own "presuppositions" resulting from their positions and motivations as well as about people's practice as representation (2).

As we have seen so far from Bourdieu's theory, Bourdieu's view of society is relational and political. People's accounts and representation of reality are revelation of complex political relations and dynamic and their political relation to the structures. The dynamics around storytelling in an educational setting is similar to people's representation of their practices. The processes of internalization, negotiation, and resistance go on simultaneously in their reaction to dominant structures and ideologies both in their daily lives, in faith communities, and in classrooms.

### **IMPLICATION FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

Bourdieu compared the relation between anthropologists and informants to a pedagogical situation (Bourdieu 1977, 18-19). While Bourdieu mentions only the teachers having to make the logic of their practical mastery explicit in their teaching, the practice of storytelling makes students also go through the process of making their everyday practice conscious to themselves. When students are invited to share their life stories in religious educational settings, they also tend to employ "official language." While religious educators, usually coming from the same culture as the learners, may not always have to deal with difference of culture and language in the same ways as anthropologists do encountering the people from another culture, they are also challenged to understand and interpret students'

discourse on their practices despite the difference of social positions and power between them and students. The religious educators engaging in storytelling in classrooms could benefit from the following implications of Bourdieu's main theoretical concepts.

Religious educators will lead the practice of storytelling more effectively by remembering the different aspects of practice. While recognizing the value of storytelling as an educational practice, religious educators should pay attention to the ways in which the students engage in the act of storytelling. They need to remember that students bring to the educational practice in a classroom their everyday practices in the society and in faith communities. In order to observe how students' daily practice influences the educational practice of storytelling, religious educators need to keep in mind the multiple meanings of practice. In the field of religious education, two concepts of practice have been emphasized: the Marxist notion of praxis and Alisdair MacIntyre's concept of practice.<sup>6</sup> Inspired by Bourdieu, Michael Warren argues that, in addition to the two notions of practice, religious educators need to pay attention to practice as the "activities that tend to be at the margins of our awareness" (Warren, 128) as it affects more intentional practice by shaping "our attitudes and spirits." (Ibid.). He alerts religious educators to the truth that our everyday practices may hold more formative power than what we teach and learn intentionally. Since one's meaning is always located in relational networks, storytelling, which is an act of meaning making, is a way of building relations and a revelation of existing relations. One's relations in everyday life and in faith communities are politically constituted and one's meaning-making is always influenced by his/her social location and power. Thus storytelling is a political act of relating to others and to social structures. The political dynamics and relational networks embedded in students' everyday practices may exert profound influence on the educational practice of storytelling in a classroom. Therefore, religious educators need to recognize the multiple concepts of practice and how different aspects of practice interact in educational activities.

To remember the different concepts of practice, however, does not mean that the different aspects of practice can be easily perceived as differentiated. Also borrowing the neo-Marxist (including Bourdieu's) notion of practice, Kathryn Tanner points out that the church's practices are often very much mixed with or constituted by everyday practices, thus resulting in "ambiguities, inconsistencies, and open-endedness" (Tanner, 230, 232). The church's

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<sup>6</sup> In Warren's words, Marxists view practice as "a self-creating and world-creating activity tied to theoretical considerations," and MacIntyre's notion of practice is "a complex form of human activity that has evolved by means of common effort aimed at not only doing well the activity the practice represents but improving it consistently and strenuously by efforts to achieve and even go beyond the standards of good practice, thus enlarging and refining these standards" (Warren, 128).

educational practice, including storytelling, is not an exception. The intentional aspects of educational practice are deeply intertwined with unintentional aspects. Storytelling happens as an integration of intentional practice with the unconscious things people do in their everyday lives and in the life of faith communities. As thoroughly as teachers may plan for their classes, a significant part of classroom dynamics may consist of much improvisation and unexpectedness, which are influenced by the different participants' habitus and their political responses to the dominant structures of the society and faith communities.

This recognition of the dynamics around the educational practice of storytelling demands teachers' reflexivity. Tanner argues that the complex mixture of everyday practice with church practices is exactly what justifies the value of theological reflection for Christian lives. Regarding this aspect of church practice, Tanner says,

In order to figure out how to go on, one must, with some measure of reflective exertion, figure out the meaning of what one has been doing, why one does it, and what it implies—in particular, how it hangs together (or fails to hang together) with the rest of what one believes and does (232).

She claims that the need of theological reflexivity emerges from the complex dynamics of church practice. For the same reason, religious educators also need to develop reflexivity in their pursuit of excellence in religious educational practices. With reflexivity, religious educators need to closely observe the ways in which the political dynamics and struggles experienced by people (internalization, negotiation, and resistance), which are embodied in the intentional and unconscious aspects of people's everyday practices, are carried into the dynamics of an educational practice. Teachers also should examine the ways in which their own social positions and power in faith communities, including their theological stance, may affect classroom dynamics and students' delivery of stories. Among the many lessons that they will gain from a pedagogy of reflexivity, religious educators will learn the following ones:

From reflexive pedagogy, religious educators will learn that their students carry degrees of marginalization and domination depending on their social positions. As we saw above, Bourdieu refuses to accept the view of society simply divided into the dominant and the dominated. As Graham Ward points out, Bourdieu's theory offers an important correction to standpoint epistemology in that "it recognizes a whole range of positions that compose the spectrum between the marginalized and the privileged" (Ward, 74). His theory shows the

complexity of the faces of dominant groups and the oppressed. This means that students from different positions in a field may develop different ways of engaging practices and interpreting their experiences. Therefore, religious educators are encouraged to be careful not to take the assumptions that “learners are a homogenous group, innocent, free in some way of conflict, and that there is consensus, within and among group participants, who are united in their opposition to “power,” which is named as “out there,” “external,” “coercive” (capitalists, the military, and so on) (Rockhill, 336).

Religious educators, employing pedagogical reflexivity, will also note that learners constantly engage in the complex interaction of agency and social structure. People engage in internalization, negotiation, and resistance against dominant power structures without conscious or pre-given rules. Even when they internalize dominant value systems, people somehow develop the ability to weave through and negotiate different ideological influences, including the specific religious messages that they are taught. This means that, in the educational practice of storytelling, students often go through complex processes of negotiation and resistance consciously or unconsciously. Therefore, religious educators need to develop ways of viewing both the power of dominant structures and learners’ ability for meaning-making and political responses to the ideologies and teachings. Teachers are encouraged to overcome dualistic divisions “between the external and the internal, the conscious and the unconscious, the bodily and the discursive” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 19). They have to remember that students bring into the classroom “the intentionality without intention, the knowledge without cognitive intent, the prereflective, infraconscious mastery that agents acquire of their social world by way of durable immersion within it.” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 19). Religious educators, especially those who endeavor for students’ liberation, need to remember that their work cannot be simply perceived as helping the oppressed to get to liberation by resisting dominant structures.

By employing a pedagogy of reflexivity, religious educators are also expected to gain a valuable epistemological perspective on how to approach storytelling as an educational practice for critical consciousness. That is, they are encouraged to remind themselves of two kinds of knowledge that the students carry with them. Uma Narayan distinguishes two kinds of knowledge: “between (1) knowledge gained through causal and structural analysis of oppression, and (2) immediate knowledge of everyday life under oppression” (Narayan, 36). She says,

They (the oppressed) know first-hand the detailed and concrete ways in

which oppression defines the spaces in which they live and how it affects their lives. Moreover, the insider (the oppressed) knows these in an emotionally embedded way, as a “truth” which the outsider may seek to understand but can never fully know in the same way.

Although Narayan fails to recognize the existence of the different social locations taken by the oppressed, Kathleen Rockhill, valuing this distinction, argues that education for critical consciousness needs to connect the two kinds of knowledge (355). Storytelling can be a valuable educational practice in that it gives the participants opportunities to be awakened to their everyday knowledge of domination/oppression and to link it to knowledge of their positions through political analysis.

Religious educators should pursue critical re-appropriation of the practice of storytelling by attending to emergent unconscious elements embedded in storytelling as well as consciously intended elements more usually associated with this practice. By embracing both intentional and official practices and unintentional and free-flowing practices of storytelling, teachers and learners may come to embrace a richer and fuller sense of the transformative power of stories and be empowered to explore the complexity and nuance of their own worlds.

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