

Religious Education Credentialing Committee
Credentialed Observer Report
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Working With One Another

While several members suggested a fuller orientation to the work and expectations, the group reached a highly functional cohesion quickly, even in circumstances that were individually and collectively very difficult. Much of this I attribute to Sara Lewis' unfailingly accommodating and graceful leadership, veteran committee members sharing institutional memory without holding it too tightly, and each member's obvious regard and respect for the importance of the work at hand.

Interviewing and Deliberating

Committee members took great care in reading the candidates' materials and presenting them to one another respectfully and clearly ahead of each interview. In writing their questions, readers attempted to be direct enough to elicit the necessary information, and open enough to allow the candidate to tell their own story. At every turn, the candidate's inherent worth and dignity was honored. During discussions, committee members helped one another to speak with precision and give candidates the benefit of any doubts. The group was committed to a collaborative assessment and a conclusion reached with consensus.

Power and Oppression

Two guests were present all week, given voice in every conversation, and solicited directly at the beginning, middle, and end of every decision; these guests were 1) power dynamics and 2) systems of oppression. What did they say? How did they look? Where did they move? Were they big or

small in that moment? Would the outcome of a decision be feeding them, or denying them fuel? Committee members got to know these invited guests well, and spoke their names when they went quiet.

Context matters

In evaluating candidates' work, I observed the committee focusing on content submitted and presented while delicately balancing educators' background and demographic information--race, age, region, gender, socio-economic class of origin, generation, church systems where an educator served, etc. Our context matters, and candidates' contexts were handled with awareness and in appropriate perspective. And, because my context as observer matters, too, I offer these thoughts as a cis, straight, Southern white woman who has many middle class privileges.

One suggestion I had here was to adopt a calibration tool or set of mantras or reflective questions to make sure the ratio of relevance that each committee member was using in their evaluation was shared. One example might be, while discussing a presentation--"Is what we saw and heard a representation of culture, or competence?" Questions like that can help the group to keep its focus on its primary task of determining eligibility for the credential within the guidelines given. Also, it could be helpful for the committee to discuss ahead of time what more subjective qualities such as professionalism or presence looks like so that they are evaluating based on the same general criteria and with an awareness of cultural difference.

Another observation I made in this area was that in the discussion, there were advantages and disadvantages to individual candidates and their congregations or work environments being known to members of the committee. For example, in a church system that was known to have frequent conflicts and very high staff turnover, even if that religious educator didn't have that information in their portfolio or reflective essays, the committee was able to take that environment into account. In church systems that were not known, the candidates' work environment was described in more sterile terms--number of children in the program, church

size, number of hours worked, etc. Committee members familiar with candidates' contexts were careful to share sparingly, and only information that was public, but one suggestion might be to ask references to speak to specific aspects of the candidates' context so that there would be more uniformity in how this information was shared and used. Another suggestion might be to simply name this tension at the outset.

Fidelity and Agility

In a brand-new, never-before-tried online endeavor, I observed fidelity to the best features of the thoughtfully crafted process that the committee inherited, careful and compassionate modifications made for anticipated challenges, and agility enough to adapt technical fixes along the way as difficulties were discovered. Larger issues of comfort, accessibility, and equity with regards to the format and structure of the program and interview were noted, and slated for the business meeting of the RECC for further discussion.

Taking Responsibility

I observed mistakes--goofs and mute-bloops and bothersome biases. And I saw those goofs and biases named, owned, and remedied--immediately whenever possible. In this way, committee members were accountable, responsible, and faithful.

Thank you, Sara Lewis, for trusting me to observe this intimate and transformative work, and thank you, Art, Bob, Emily, Jude, Mia, Patti, and Peter, for collectively making this role such a deep affirmation for me that our shared faith is actively creating more love and justice in the world, one crowded Zoom room at a time.