

SECTION 2
ASSOCIATION FOR THEOLOGICAL FIELD EDUCATION (ATFE)
AND ASSOCIATION FOR REFLECTIVE PRACTICE
IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION (ARPTE)

Editor's Introduction

In her recent article “The Root Work of Formation,” Kristina Lizardy-Hajbi challenges traditional approaches to theological education that imagine a linear progression from anticipation to mastery, a seed-to-seedling model of development. Using cholla cacti as her central metaphor, Lizardy-Hajbi argues that vocational formation for adult learners is primarily “root work,” as students enter education with decades of life experiences, values, and behaviors already formed. Unlike the seed-to-seedling metaphor, Lizardy-Hajbi suggests formation is more about examining existing roots—noticing their color, texture, depth, and how they connect with others. Theological field education experiences can be particularly disruptive, requiring students to adapt to unfamiliar settings. However, uprooting can be generative when supported by a network of relationships that helps students re-root themselves in new understandings and practices.¹

Lizardy-Hajbi’s “root work” model helpfully describes a central dynamic explored in the five articles in this section. These articles adapt cornerstones of experiential learning by attending to the roots of formation. Graeme Flett examines the power of exploring metaphor in the root-work of supervision and coaching practices. Sean Gilbert challenges the root structure of traditional models of formational pedagogy that rely on experts to dispense supposedly complete knowledge, calling instead for what he calls a “pedagogy of conscious relinquishment.” Dorothee Tripodi is concerned with sustaining the roots of vocational formation in a season of uprooting, showing the nourishing potential of spiritual practices that ground the work of learning in communal wisdom. Richard Trist charts the movement of reflective practice from the periphery of ministerial formation in the Australian and New Zealand contexts to its roots, showing how four major approaches to reflective practice create “new landscapes, new relationships, new perspectives,” helping practitioners not only develop technical skills but also grow personally and spiritually as they serve others. Finally, Christina Zaker chronicles a six-step process of transforming field education assessment at Catholic Theological Union, moving from traditional evaluation to growth-oriented assessment.

By attending to and reworking the roots of experiential pedagogies, these authors reinvigorate cornerstone practices in theological field education. These contributions invite us to look more closely at the root networks of our work. What are

the roots that nourish our pedagogies and practices in field education? What can we learn about the future of formational pedagogies by attending to the deep roots and root networks of our practices? How have assumptions we've made about linear "seed-to-seedling" models of formation obscured the nourishing potential of the roots of vocational and ministerial formation? We hope that these articles frame and energize the continuing conversation.

John E. Senior
Editor

NOTES

¹ Kristina Lizardy-Hajbi, "The Root Work of Formation," *Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* 6, no. 1 (February 2025), 18–31.