

Theory Throw Down¹

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The pedagogical purpose: Theory Throw Down is designed to smooth out the rough patches on the road to content mastery. It invites students to explore the usefulness and limitations of competing theories by introducing them to the debates from which they arise.

The context: I've found success using this tactic in my undergraduate introduction to religious studies course. It works best in the class meeting after students first encounter information like definitions of religion, where I require students to memorize theorists and their theories. I allot a single class session for this review game.

Description of the strategy: *Review:* Each student receives a set of blank index cards equal to the number of theories studied. Begin by announcing the name of a theorist for them to write down on the first card. Have students share aloud what they can recall about the theorist argued. Then tell students to flip the card over and write down a concise explanation of the theory in their own words.

When done, have students turn the card over to draw an image next to the theorist that will help them recall the explanation. Free association and whimsy are encouraged.

Repeat this activity for all the theories. When done, have students shuffle the order and face of their respective decks.

Game: In pairs, students begin by counting together, "3, 2, 1, show!" playing the top card from their decks. The player with the first card to hit the table recalls from memory the information from the other side of the played card. The second player follows suit.

Players then have two minutes to argue who has the better theory card, defending and critiquing as best as they are able. *Allow, even provoke, raucousness!* After two minutes, announce that play has stopped. Give students one minute to informally debrief before commencing with a new round.

Why is it effective: From the beginning of the review to the end of the game, the activity solidifies comprehension. Construction of the cards guides students not only through the note-taking process but the creation of personalized mnemonic devices. The crowdsourcing portion of the review fosters a cooperative learning environment. And the game itself moves students through a fun version of "think-

¹ Published in *Teaching Theology and Religion* 19, no. 3 (July 2016).
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/teth.v19.3/issuetoc>

pair-share,” even allowing for differentiated instruction (i.e. the critique) and reflection (i.e. the debrief).