

Who in the World Am I? Down the Rabbit Hole...Transforming Higher Education

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Looking down the rabbit hole, who do I want to be? Where will I learn? How will I know?

College students are people in transition

- It's not just a question of *what* do I want to be or *what* do I need to learn;
- It's more a question of *who* do I want to be here and now and *what* do I need to learn to move toward my goals and hopes.
- Think about something really important you learned in college...Was it a *what* or a *who*?

Learning to be Yourself in the World

- Who helped you learn it.. Or did the learning happen as a solitary process?
- Where did you learn it...does the distinction between in class and out of class matter?
- Do you still remember what you learned?
- How does this learning fit into the story of your life?

The Post-modern Self in a Modern University

- Who would you be if you were somewhere else in time or space?
- Who do you need to be in order to accomplish your goals?
What do your students need now to become more fully themselves?
- We hold onto the continuity we have, however profoundly it is flawed...we hold onto continuity across deep rifts of change.
- Change is constant, inevitable, often painful, requiring difficult adjustments.
- Can you sail with the winds or let the waves swamp you?

What Changes Have Influenced your Life Recently?

- Institutional changes
- Professional changes
- Personal changes
- Changes in the lives of your students?

"This is the century of the refugee...We are refugees in time." - *Composing a Life*, Mary Catherine Bateson, 1990

We have to decide what is meaningful in our world.

- We have to create our own story of who we want to be, what we have to contribute and what matters in our lives.
- College is one place where those creations and decisions happen.
- Students are whole people but universities are fragmented institutions.
- How can we support the creation of wholeness with our students?

How do we create meaning? Meaning is huge. Each of us matters.

Changing Ideas About Learning - What if...

- Thinking (cognition) were inextricably connected to feeling?
- Who you believe you are is inextricably connected to what you know and what you hope to do in your life ?
- Learning, thinking, knowing and doing were all part of a process called “meaning making”?
- And learning to be yourself in your world was the major project of your life?

Almost everything about higher education would have to change...

- Epistemology (theories of knowledge, ways of knowing);
- Pedagogy (teaching);
- Research methods (exploring and describing many realities);
- Assessment of learning (demonstrating what we know and how we describe it)...
- Institutional mission (creation of meaning or transmission of what is already known?);
- Organizational structure (silos and ranks?);
- Graduate education(credits and experiences);
- Institutional accountability (contributions, costs and constituencies)

The transformation of higher education is actually a complete transformation of the Western worldview as we have experienced it for the past several centuries.

The Conventional Wisdom

- Subject and object are separate from each other;
- There is such a thing as objective reality;
- Everybody who knows a “fact” will know the same thing i.e. multiple choice tests;
- The “truth” of empirical reality can be known

Unconventional Wisdom

- We’re not really familiar with the notion of consensual reality.
- This is the reality that everybody agrees on even though there is no external, absolute assurance that we’re correct.
- *Consensual Reality* provides a more accurate and useful way of understanding our shared world and agreeing on what things mean.

Transforming our institutions would change everything...

- Focus on learning (information mastery and creation of meaning?);
- Emphasize the importance of relationships among ideas, practices and people;
- Develop mentoring communities;
- Rise above our silos until they look like dots and learn to connect them.

Nobody said it would be easy

- Inertia is the most powerful force in the universe.
- Everybody who is involved in higher education must consider giving up their vested interests and historical privileges (or lack of privileges) in order to focus on learning.
- We are reframing our ideas about teaching, learning and the role and structure of higher education in our time, across cultures and countries and economies.
- We are helping our students learn how to live and create our future.

Learning to Live with Ambiguity

- Fluidity and discontinuity are central to the reality in which we live...The ability to shift from one preoccupation to another...and we are all vulnerable (because we can no longer be experts). - MC Bateson, *Composing a Life*
- Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to *love the questions themselves*...Do not now seek the answers which cannot be given to you, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live the questions now. - Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*

What talents must we develop?

- *Vision* – how did you learn the most important things in your life? How can you help students think about what is important to them?
- *Courage* – begin conversations that are quite unusual- combining the personal and the professional. Discuss your values about learning with your colleagues and with your students.
- *Boundary Crossing*- talk about learning with people who are not part of your regular conversation groups.
- *Asking questions* nobody wants to address and be willing to share your views.

Change the focus | Be Aware of Your Point of View

Don't Get Stuck in One Interpretation | Pay Attention to Context

Learning Should Become Intentionally Transformative...Teaching/learning will probably become one word. If somebody teaches and nobody learns, what do you call that?

“Education should teach students the processes of discovering what is known and applying that knowledge to a deeper understanding of self, relationships and coping effectively with their world.” - Burns Crookston

Transformative Learning Is:

- Engaging students
- Expanding viewpoints
- Diminishing fear and increasing openness
- Allowing people to take chances, tolerate ambiguity, see connections and develop relationships across boundaries

Transformative Learning is Not:

- Informative learning (simple knowledge acquisition)
- Test taking and bubbling answers
- Memorizing for the next test and forgetting afterward
- Learning information that doesn't mean much to you

Isn't that really what student affairs is about? Doesn't that explain the motivation that most of us had for entering this field?

Higher Education is Transforming

- The work world is transforming.
- We cannot know what students will need to know about technology or job related skills.
- We do know that they will continue to need personal courage and flexibility in order to develop the skills of relationship building, conflict resolution, planning and leadership.

"We have become vulnerable to exchanging wisdom for knowledge and moral commitment for method." – Parks

Student Affairs professionals are an essential part of the transformation because:

- We focus on learning.
- We help students develop wisdom in their lives.
- We help to manage student life in our institutions.
- We can (and often do) integrate student learning wherever it occurs.

Wise people have always known:

- You can't separate thinking from feeling;
- If you don't know why something matters, you won't remember it or use it;
- Knowing who you are and what you want to do in the world are connected.
- Leadership, citizenship and vocation are simply different aspects of identity.

"Who are you?" said Alice to the Caterpillar. "That is a rather impolite thing to say to someone," said the Caterpillar. "Who in the world am I? Ah, that's the great mystery."

"You can't believe in impossible things" said Alice. "Why sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast" said the Cheshire cat