

Engaging students in reflection on beliefs, values, meaning, purpose and direction

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Practitioner

Grew up in Arkansas – international career

- Diplomat in the Commercial Service for 29 years
- Came to academe after retirement – no reputation to defend or theories to prove
- What do students in this generation need that I might be able to provide?

Major Influences

- *Souls in Transition* – Smith and Snell; vague moral concepts; Moralistic Therapeutic Deism;
- *Aspiring Adults Adrift* – Arum & Roksa; half of grads drifting through twenties without clear sense of purpose, direction.
- Wave after wave of ethical failures in business and government – complaints that EAs ethically blank
- My conversations with students

The needs of Emerging Adults have changed; academe not keeping pace

Objective Agreed with John Tyson:
To stimulate a significant on-going conversation
about faith among students.

“Authentic Leadership in a Multi-faith Workplace”

- Challenged the students to identify and reflect on
 - Faith (functional beliefs) per James Fowler, 1981
 - Their top 3 – 5 top values, and
 - To articulate what gives them a sense of meaning purpose
 - What kind of persons they wished to become

Authenticity in a Pluralistic, Multi-faith Workplace

- Learn Communications Skills
 - Appreciative Listening
 - Conduct Difficult Conversations
- Study six wisdom traditions – Huston Smith (5 great religions + secular humanism)
 - Engage a practitioner of each tradition
 - You may ask any question to help you understand, not criticize or correct (appreciative listening)

IMPACT

- Posts, essays, class discussions, anecdotes and student evaluations indicated students made meaning in helpful, even transformative ways that could have lasting impact.
- Dr. Patricia Herzog Patricia Herzog conducted mixed-methods research 2015 – positive results
- See: “Moral and Cultural Awareness in Emerging Adulthood: Preparing for Multi-Faith Workplaces” in *Religions*
- Additional publications in process

Course Rejected by Faculty → Look Outward

Who Else Is Doing Courses Like This?
What Impact?

Networks

- Academy of Management - AOM
 - Management, Spirituality and Religion – my tribe - mentors and kindred spirits
 - Transformative teaching and learning – Slavich & Zimbardo, et al.
 - “Humanistic Management”
 - Center for Positive Organization Studies – U. Michigan
- SSEA Conference 2015 - Carolyn Barry & Ofra Mayless
 - EA lens; specialists from domains outside AOM
- Management and Organizational Behavior Teaching Society – passionate teachers

Exploratory Research 2015

- 10 question survey mostly through MSR listserv – 60 responses; webinar June 2016:
<https://tfsw.uark.edu/resources.php#videos>
Harris slides summarize data
- Individual academics all over the Western world responding to perceived gaps in the business school curriculum
- Rich and highly diverse approaches among different demographics
- Very positive responses from students

Hypothesis 1

- Most of Academe, especially business schools, failing to engage students *as whole people*
- Faculty view: We just equip students with knowledge and skills; not appropriate for us to tell them how to use it.
- “Formation” is anathema in post-modernism.
- West Point – USMA illustrates the flaw in this approach
- We equip very bright, highly ambitious young people with powerful tools and release them into the business environment to use those tools in whatever ways advance their *perceived* best interests;
- No meaning-making framework to discern what their (enlightened) best interests may be.

Hypothesis 2

- Students are far more willing to engage the big questions(with respected adults) than faculty (Astin, Astin & Lindholm, 2005)
 - Post-modernist fear of “truth” in a secular, pluralistic classroom
 - Boomers rebelled against the social control and imposed frameworks of their youth – have not recognized different needs in today’s students.
 - Lack models on how to address meaning making in a classroom.

Conclusion

- We *can* engage students **to reflect deeply** on their own beliefs and values and to explore what gives them meaning, purpose and direction,
- We can help them **articulate** their values in ways that are true to themselves without being judgmental of others, and we can do so
- In ways that are culturally sensitive and appropriate in a wide variety of demographics.
- So What?

Pro-social Benefits of Meaning Making

- Purpose and Direction
- Resilience: “He who has a ‘why’ to live can bear with almost any ‘how.’” (Nietzsche cited by V. Frankl)
- Values-based Ethics and Leadership
- Citizenship – sense of responsibility to the society
- Diversity – Authenticity + Communications skills to develop shared values in multi-faith workplaces

**Approaches to engage students
in meaning making in culturally
sensitive and demographically
appropriate ways**

Creators Know Their Demographics

- Overarching goals of the institutions
- Private or Public
- Religion, Faith, Spirituality
- Composition of the student body
- What language is acceptable
- Seniority of the teacher
- Does anyone really care what you teach so long as the student evaluations are good?

International

- Copenhagen Business School – Insight-based Critical Realism – goal to producing good EU citizens (Tackney)
- Stockholm Schools of Economics -- Inner Being (Lasse Lychnell, Emma Strenström)
- Philippines: Forming Reflexive Managers through Critical Realist Action Research - MBA program at De La Salle University in Manila (Benito Teehankee)
- New Zealand: “Managing with Spirit” elective for business degree at Waikato Management School - Final exam is an art project (Kathryn Pavlovich)
- South Africa: Witwatersrand – Spirited Leadership

USA

- Georgetown University – Leading from the Center – elective for MBAs; focused on meditation; led by a Benedictine and an entrepreneur
- Case Western Reserve: Educating for Character and Moral Clarity: Religion as a Transformative Vehicle for Inclusion (Susan Case, Edward Chavez)
- West Point: Psychology of Leadership
- Texas A&M Central Texas –Leadership Formation and Development
- Focuses on spiritual leadership for executive MBA students (Louis Fry)

USA - Continued

- Princeton - Business Ethics and Modern Religious Thought (David Miller)
- University of Virginia: Wisdom and Well Being (David Mick)
- University of Arkansas – "Faith, Spirituality and Workplace" (D. Breaux-Soignet)
- *Stop Teaching: Principles and Practices For Responsible Management Education* By Isabel Rimanoczy

Aspects of curriculum designed to stimulate students to think about the big questions of life

especially what gives their lives a sense of meaning and purpose

- See Best practices from Survey: Harris slides
- <https://tfsw.uark.edu/resources.php#videos>

Sine Qua Non

- A passionate and committed teacher who
- Allows students to draw their own conclusions
- And creates an environment of trust and openness
 - Students to Teacher
 - “I am here to help you on your journey, not take you on mine.” Hold me accountable to that.
 - Here’s what you need to know about me so you can filter for my (implicit) biases. Free to challenge me.
 - Student to Student – Group norms, modeling
- Culturally appropriate to this demographic

Winning Trust as Teacher

- The pitch – this is a unique course; how it will benefit you in your career (and life); stay open, try stuff, move out of their comfort zones;
- Provide stimulating, credible inputs from respected sources that represent diverse views.
- Some students require more empirical data than others (e.g., engineers, scientists, lawyers).
- Sharing stories from your journey as illustrations, so long as you are only one source.

Trust Among Students

- Engagement with other students in diverse small groups around challenging questions
- It seems very important that they experience peers as wrestling with similar questions but coming with different perspectives.
- They probably don't discuss at all or only with close friends; so,
- Group Norms very important – Appreciative Listening (understanding without judging)

Tools for Reflection

- Tools for reflection – meditation/mindfulness, journals, posts, essays, small group sharing;
- A retreat in nature changes the whole dynamic; e.g., more trust among participants and with teacher.
- Students experience deeper reflection, more lasting insights through exercises, speakers, debriefs.
- Some marvel at the experience of disconnecting from media, as well as the insights gained.

Consolidation of Insights

- Consolidation and integration of learning and *application to their lives*
- Rigorous criteria to discourage vague, aspirational description of “my dreams.”
- Essay criteria drive honest, thoughtful summing up
 - that requires setting priorities in describing (directly or indirectly) what kind of person I want to become
 - integrates meaning, purpose, values and beliefs.
 - Values-based, personal mission statements useful if multiple iterations, increasing conciseness & clarity

Grace

- Every student and every group of students will be different; thus the transformative insights, cannot be constructed or predicted.
- The “Aha!” teachable moments may occur randomly
- Be open and sensitive to these moments of grace for *individuals*, as well as the group. Learn to recognize them and hold them lightly.
- Model for students how to support each other.
- Continually refine iterations of the course, but always leave room for grace.

Broad Appeal

- A rich diversity of themes & approaches may be transformational – sustainability, diversity, citizenship, inner life, leadership, HR.
- Wide array of Religious/spiritual orientations of when material presented is attuned to the culture and demographic.
- Academic majors influence presentation need to make meaning is universal. Majors in business, engineering & sciences may want evidence but value being challenged to think in unique ways

What Commonalities?

- Incredibly varied themes, approaches, techniques
- Adapted to highly diverse demographics/cultures
- Passionate teachers stimulate reflection
- Create environment of trust and openness
 - Student to teacher, students to students
- Encourage students to explore, leave comfort zones
- Variety of stimulating inputs to trigger “Aha!” – cannot predict what leads to insight in individuals

WOW!

- Students may be skeptical at first; a few just coast;
- Student evaluations, feedback are highly positive
 - Most beneficial course of my college experience
 - Changed my view of myself and my future career
 - Confident I can work with very different people
 - Helped me define the person I want to become
- Further fuels teachers' passion to refine, expand
- Buzz among students may lead to waiting lists

Research

- Instruments for measuring impact on students during the course of the semester
- Longitudinal studies of impact on attitudes and flourishing pre/post & 6 – 12 months after course.
- Qualitative measures for pro-social outcomes
- Showing strong associations (e.g., Criterion Variable/Predictor Variable) may be more appropriate than demonstrating direct causality

The implications of these course designs for studies of student impact

The challenges of measurement for research and validation.

“Are we a bunch of random eccentrics tinkering with curriculum on the edge of management education, or

Are we an incipient movement that will change the way academe understands its responsibilities to students and the society?”

Daniel Harris – Welcoming Remarks International Association of Management Spirituality & Religion

May 2017

In Other Words

- Is it the responsibility of business schools to help students make meaning?
- To explore and “own” their beliefs, values?
- To discover what provides him/her a sense of meaning and purpose?
- To ask if their values align with employers’ goals?
- To discern the kind of person they wish to become?
- To set life goals, as best one understands now?

Yes, IF We Can Validate

- Purpose and Direction
- Resilience: “He who has a ‘why’ to live can bear with almost any ‘how.’” (Nietzsche cited by Viktor Frankl)
- Values-based Ethics and Leadership
- Citizenship – sense of responsibility to the society
- Communications skills – shared values in multi-faith workplaces

How to Show Impact?

- Every teacher I know has stories – anecdotal feedback that drives him/her to continue, even in the face of indifference or opposition
- Patricia Herzog took a mixed methods approach
 - Pre-post survey with control group & NSYR
 - Qualitative coding of essays and posts
 - “Moral and Cultural Awareness in Emerging Adulthood: Preparing for Multi-Faith Workplaces”

Opportunities for SSEA

- **Need instruments** that are widely accepted to measure pro-social outcomes
- **Longitudinal study** on impact beyond end of term
 - Quantitative and Qualitative
 - Associations, strong links rather than causality
- **SSEA has expertise** in these domains
- **Grant Funding?** Align the research to the mission