

Minutes of the LPWG

June 24, 2008 – 3 p.m.

Red and Gold Room

In Attendance: Jack Gittinger, Steve Griffith, Walter Pearson, Jim Hayes, Rick Spellerberg, John Pauley, Amy Doling, Nick Proctor, Jared Kemper

Dean Griffith called the meeting to order. He reviewed the embedded skills that had already been discussed – critical thinking, information literacy, teamwork and collaboration, oral and written communication. He said that the areas that needed to be reviewed yet were thoughtful reflection and ethical & moral reasoning.

Jim Hayes then presented the information from the ethical and moral reasoning group (separate document included with these minutes). He noted that he, Jim Thorius, and Kedron Bardwell put this area together. Coming to a definition and programming ethical and moral reasoning was a challenge as we all have our ideas about it. There also seems to be a disconnect in that persons can talk about it, but living out the ideas or the disconnected or contradictory behaviors are sometimes an entirely different thing. Jim Hayes was hoping Sal would be here for some good social psychology input.

Jim said that we all have our ideas on what it means to be good, have good character, but to institutionalize this and/or teach the skills might be a challenge. Talking about it and then doing it are two different things. The rationale is important to raise the ethical questions in the liberal arts setting, especially if we're working for people to think critically about their own behavior and character. On a college campus, we all like to talk about sensitivity, motivation, judgment, and character and then we have behaviors such as date rape, vandalism, urinating on buildings on the way home from the bar, etc. Student development, out of class experience, and peer relations are certainly areas where ethics and moral reasoning could be emphasized as well as in the classroom to the degree that we are able.

Jim said we're certainly not alone in thinking about character and who we are as a person as it is a topic in the corporate world, in organizations, in government, etc. The AAC&U is doing research on a bunch of this stuff regarding character – there are a number of sites on the internet also.

Jim noted that Kedron put together the specific curriculum components, but was having back spasms today and could not be here to elaborate. Kedron has some ideas to share regarding the curriculum factor. Jim pondered whether we can proceed regarding feeling and behavior if we don't have some kind of cognitive foundation to what that means, some kind of academic base? There's a diversity of feelings about it. Do we want to have some kind of course/s that helps students to learn to think critically about ethic and values?

Bookends courses have enough ethical codes out there that students should be able to wrestle with ethics in those particular courses. Also, teaching the ethical behaviors needed for graduate school bound students – what is needed for a prospective law, medical, business school, and etc. student? Another tactic is to develop a 24/7 curriculum and college experience where the culture is intentional in developing ethics and character. There would be a relational component where students would relate values in all things that they did. A successful example is Calvin where they established the top 10 virtues that they wanted the students to develop while there. What are the values students would embrace by the time they graduate? How could that be measured? Would the student have a trajectory experience that would change who she/he is as a person or would it be part of thinking critically throughout the college experience that affects their core values? Perhaps assessment might be approached as not so much what the end product is but rather what happens to students while they are at college.

A series of assessment is listed. Some are dated, but some might be worthwhile. It would depend on how invested we would wish to become in this. Jim Hayes wished that Sal could be here to talk about the assessment part of this also. Jim noted that this is an intriguing conversation but may be hard to get any kind of consensus about what this means.

Dean Griffith then posed the question, “Is it really the case that the outcome is that we teach people to be good – do we really go that far and grapple with this?”

Jim Hayes answered, “We’re asking them to reflect critically about what that means. It is a part of the mission statement. Personal integrity, moral responsibility, earth, community and social justice are loaded values. What does this mean for you and for me?”

John Pauley said that doing it as a class – it can help some people – but teaching it? We have expectations for behavior, in class and out of class.

Jim Hayes said that we should have the language – you could get it in a Greek philosophy class, but maybe the language could be incorporated in a business class for example.

John Pauley expressed that at a modest level, we would all agree on some expectations – respect for others in the class, academic honesty, etc.

Jared Kemper said that every class you’re in there is a certain level of behavior and a certain level of academic honesty expected. He feels that to put these ideas into a particular class is excessive for that class and perhaps unwarranted.

John Pauley said that it does not have to be anything that is hard on any one class, but perhaps a description is needed that every class would follow.

Walter Pearson said that Dewey's perspective on cultivating values is through habit and practice. Willingness to consider both sides of an argument and other patterns of good habits intentionally practiced can become habits. If we're serious about it, we need to assess it.

Dean Griffith asked if following repeated exposure is a difference really made and can you really assess it.

John Pauley then asked if we could agree that there are certain values to have a liberal arts environment – if there's something that is constitutive of a liberal arts environment. We could start with open-mindedness, tolerance, willingness to consider the views of other persons, and a responsibility to develop one's own views that could withstand critical scrutiny. John didn't know how far you could go on the cognitive side. You have people who are avid moral reasoners but their behavior doesn't necessarily follow. And what is the honor code – don't cheat, don't steal?

Jim Hayes said that it's an interesting question on what is a person who is educated in the liberal arts supposed to have embraced as far as values.

Walter Pearson said that as far as the values we hope to nurture and practice, the process is remarkably uncontroversial. The implementation is what's difficult.

Jim Hayes said that rather than intentional learning opportunities there are also other areas such as peer interaction – another area that they can learn this stuff. Encountering others either by sheer habit of interaction or getting involved is an important way to practice values. Some kind of co-curriculum transcript that notes all the co-curricular activities that students are involved in can help track or provide assessment.

Rick Spellerberg put forth the idea of a student forum. He envisioned the idea of the forum as a platform to address these issues. He thinks that the peer aspect is an important one.

Jim Hayes said that it does happen that you can shake somebody up and change their ideas about how they think about the world. Transformative experiences are being had by the Wesley scholars which are currently about 80 of our students. Reflective activities can be had outside the classroom – people come back from Costa Rica and the students could present a forum to other students about life in the developing world or business students could participate in a reflective activity about their experiences in an internship.

Dean Griffith thanked the ethical and moral reasoning group and said we'd set that piece aside and consider thoughtful reflection.

Nick Proctor spoke for that group and said that the group talked about it and decided that thoughtful reflection should be a subset of critical thinking. In essence they thought it best understood there. A lot of the methodology is the same.

Dean Griffith said it's certainly something we value in the community which Nick agreed and acknowledged. He said, "So you're recommending that we take it off the list?" "How do the rest of you feel?"

Nick said yes, they were recommending not having it as an identified embedded skill but to include under the larger umbrella of critical thinking.

Jack Gittinger said that he went to a conference and a point made at some of the sessions attended was not to just say to students to "reflect" but rather to give them a set of specific questions – it's got to feed back to what you are doing or learning to make any difference.

Jim Hayes said that it's a leadership development model too. Critically looking at my world and what can be changed in my world came out of the liberation theology of Latin America.

Jack Gittinger noted that there are some skills that make persons better thoughtful reflectors than other persons. The complexity of overlapping of all of these at times makes it frustrating. You think about quantitative reasoning and critical thinking. Quantitative reasoning is part of critical thinking. Several of these skills are much interwoven. Perhaps the skills should be collapsed – fewer but more comprehensive categories. We are getting away from skilled proficiencies and competencies when we talk about moral and ethical reasoning which implies we're going to talk about what it means to reason or think morally but we're going beyond that when we talk about changing behavior.

Jim Hayes said that a person could be very skilled could be very skilled at moral judgment, but have no educational foundation of where that came from and if it has no impact on how you live your life, then it's not really a skill. It's too complex to just leave it at the moral reasoning process. He was in agreement with Jack.

Dean Griffith then asked Jennifer Nostrala to share ideas on her group's work with oral communication.

Jennifer said that the notion was to separate the ideas of small group communication from large communication experiences. She said that there are two main ideas: that of formal presentation and that of communicating using critical thinking skills. She also noted that there is a huge debate about how important it is for a student to speak in class. One of the problems is that persons sometimes are not fully listening as they are waiting in turn to have "their say" and trying to keep in mind the points they want to make.

Jack Gittinger noted that there's an overlap too with ethical reasoning here. One has a responsibility to one's classmates to share ideas and therefore would need to speak in class.

John Pauley said that you can't possibly develop any of the traits we desire if you're not listening.

Jennifer said that you have to have the conviction that you are right to be able to speak which is also another challenge for students.

Walter Pearson said that Iowa State constructs the communication idea as communication across the curriculum.

Jennifer said that yes, you will see a lot of CAC's in the material.

Walter also said that our graduates are seen as better writers than other institutions, but that there could be improvement in the oral communication skills. Perhaps the idea of writing across the curriculum should broaden out to communication across the curriculum. He asked how you get students to be more engaged and have meaningful verbal dialogue.

Dean Griffith thanked the oral communication group and said that we've now talked about each of these areas except for quantitative reasoning. He said that he finds it very helpful if we have a similar format for each of these. And so he has asked Sal if she would take each of the documents created by the groups and work with you and create similar formats for the distinct areas. Maybe next time we will have all the areas put forth in a similar format.

Jennifer asked if we wanted to have a document for critical thinking and a document for writing and a document for speaking/oral communication.

The Dean said yes, but maybe going forward we maybe will decide to put a couple of those together, but at this point it is helpful to think of them separately.

John Pauley said he wanted to say that informal discussion is really really important. Sometimes he doesn't feel like he is at an intellectual community at Simpson. Part of it is because there is not enough informal discussion because there is not enough between student and student, between student and faculty, between faculty and faculty. He thinks this is the kind of stuff that we should be doing at a liberal arts college. Perhaps there are not enough opportunities for this kind of informal dialogue on campus. John noted back to Rick Spellerberg's idea of student forum type exposure. Also when you're eating together or other social activities where conversation is the norm are venues for interaction. Maybe we can accomplish some things we want to accomplish without putting them into the curriculum.

Gabfest was noted as popular and also noted as interesting to students are sessions when they hear faculty interacting.

Nick Proctor talked about the Reacting to the Past conference that he just attended. They have tested students who have participated in these kinds of classes compared to a standard general ed. component and the students from the Reacting classes have tested with higher empathy and critical thinking, their writing increases at a higher rate, they are all required to speak formally and informally within the games, all the games have a citizenship aspect, culture is examined so there can be a cross-cultural aspect. He wanted to put on the table that the Reacting pedagogy is

a pedagogy that unifies a half dozen or more of the things we have been talking about and now in a proven (through assessment) format. Most places use it in a 3rd semester as a part of their honors college. He thought we should finalize these separately but we should look at pulling them together through a type of course such as the reacting course.

Jack Gittinger said that at the end of the last meeting Jim Thorius asked him if what the bulk of what we are talking about is pedagogy, not goals and objectives of the institution, but pedagogy. And he thought to a great degree that Jim Thorius was right. Jack said that the current interest is a reaction to some things getting lost with an emphasis on content knowledge. A possible way to address this in all classes is to talk about these strategies and methods in every classes to develop these skills and proficiencies as opposed to a course which teaches ethical reasoning for example.

Dean Griffith said he believed we were going down that path. To separate them from the other things that we talk about next which will be things like what constitutes global awareness (which probably will be a course) is where we are headed. He noted if there is any fun in this process, it will be once we have this list of embedded skills that we can reach back and add to a certain class and say now how can we accomplish these objectives. The embedded skills approach is better because rather than teaching these items in a single course they will be a part of many courses. The embedded approach touches all classes. So, for example, a person takes Comp 101 and 102 and somewhere along the way you'll use skills from one of these courses and you'll be a better writer --- This is not the embedded approach. The embedded approach touches all classes and is made intentional, visible, and consistent. Writing skills are a part of many classes.

Dean Griffith noted that this is part of the St. Olaf approach. That is typical across the curriculum stuff.

John Pauley asked what are the other options besides stamps on classes or the single course approach.

Jack Gittinger said he thought we'd end up with a hybrid. Perhaps we will develop strategies that we all know (the faculty as a whole) It will probably be a combination of faculty development and identifying new strategies like Reacting to the Past.

Nick Proctor said he thought that the stamping works because there will always be resisters. A huge body of the faculty will have the embedded skills to use.

Dean Griffith said that the pedagogy you can't force, but the criteria you can enforce. He doesn't have a problem with stamping. He thinks it is the only way we can be intentional about it.

Walter said that the approach has a lot of promise. Utilizing student evaluations will help us all to make good assessment.

Dean Griffith reviewed the embedded skills agreed upon. They are critical thinking, teamwork/collaboration, oral communication, quantitative reasoning, ethical and moral reasoning, writing across the curriculum, and information literacy. He said that these will be refined and reformatted to be presented again at the next meeting. Then we may divide up again. Also, oral communication and writing across the curriculum may be combined at the next meeting. Dean Griffith envisions one workshop per year for strategies and best practices regarding one of the embedded skills varying from year to year.

Jack Gittinger asked what about every course taught having at least one of these skills linked.

Jennifer Nostrala and Amy Doling were not sure that everyone would want to have that requirement linked to their courses.

Walter thought it a provocative question. We need to spend some time with that.

John Pauley agreed and said that “forced to” is not well received.

Jack Gittinger said that there shouldn't be a college course that could not incorporate one of these.

There was some conversation about attaching the stamps in general ed courses vs. all courses.

Rick Spellerberg asked if a course could have more than one stamp. He thought maybe a course should have 2 or 3 of these stamps. He also said that his Calculus course would not be a gen ed course but he could see several stamps that could apply to this particular course.

Amy Doling mentioned that she did not want to see a game played by students such as “if I take these two courses I'd get 5 stamps, but if I take these other two courses I'd get 8, so I'll take the other two where I can get 8.”

Nick said maybe there should be a ceiling on the number of stamps a course can convey.

Dean Griffith was not sure he agreed on a limit of stamps per course. Next meeting we will spend on finishing up and refining the embedded skills. Then we'll use the same method of dividing up in groups and they will work on the various courses.

Dean Griffith thanked everyone for coming. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday July 15 at 3 p.m. in the Red and Gold room.

Respectfully submitted,

Shelly Priebe

