

“How Might Truth Prosper Amongst Us?”

FAHE Session – 8/25/2020

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In advancing the rationality and intelligence of a society, what kind of truth and what larger purpose should higher education serve?

To staff an economy producing ever more GDP?

Or:

To nurture the growth of a community of ethical beings that develop right relationships with each other and the other creatures in their environment?

“Civilization is not an incurable disease. But we should always remember that the English people are currently afflicted by it.” – M. K. Gandhi, ***Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule***

The Culture of Conflict core metaphor for life:
Two Islanders and only one coconut . . . and so
they look for weapons . . . (monological reasoning)



Practices of Quaker Communal Discernment,
Gandhian nonviolence (satyagraha),
peaceful revolution through parallel
institutions (swaraj)
and a host of other methods of conflict
transformation and problem solving
exemplify a different culture.

A Culture of Peace core metaphor: the process of birth . . . (dialogical reasoning)



The pandemic experience teaches us something essential:

It is possible to have dramatic change at an unprecedented pace.

In Elise Boulding's phrase, we should be "Imaging a Dramatically Better World" and seeking to start living in it now.

How should we envision the role of higher education in advancing the learning in a culture of peace and its role in creating nonviolent revolution through parallel institutions?

We should image a future of higher education as dialogical human ecology which is spirit-led:

as the study and creative expression of the relations between humans and their natural and social environment

in a **problem-centered**, (life centered),

interdisciplinary way

inclusive of all relevant **stakeholders and their points of view**

in authentic **intercultural dialogue**

in the processes of knowing, deciding and cultural expression (cf. Paulo Freire)

To be problem centered, interdisciplinary, inclusive, authentic intercultural dialogue, the learning in higher education has to be:

student(s) centered,

place based

spatially distributed (translocal)

community supported

online enhanced

and grounded in loving, nonviolent discernment that is spirit-led
(cf. Quaker communal discernment, Gandhian satyagraha and swaraj)

An Attempt this spring to teach in some of these ways: “Learning Languages on Your Own”

Model for Course:

1. Students each devise a learning plan in constant experiment and revision

Long term and short term goals, challenges and strengths, strategies, resources

2 . They meet weekly with me as coach – reviewing their plan, it’s progress and possible revisions

Helping “listen into being” their best selves as learners

The model here and in class: “guide from the side” instead of “sage on the stage”

3. Weekly meeting with other students as a kind of support group

With a textbook on metacognition and language learning

Exercises to apply the readings to their own plans

Small groups sharing as support – insights, comparisons & contrasts, emotional support

Internalized norm setting – which as an authority I could not easily do

Build community through mindfulness and “Slow Zoom”

Assessment

How well does the course work in person?

Less content -- More long term success

Lots of reported generalization to other classes in learning skills and motivation

Student centered life long learning skills are a better investment than teacher centered course learning (which typically stops at the end of the term).

How well does it work online?

Culture shock of online immersion actually helped

Loss of some kinds of intimacy and mindfulness but gain in others

For students with health and other challenges, it was especially helpful

Wonderful opportunities for accessing field resources

Could it work for other courses?

In an important sense, students learn a new language in every course

Almost all courses would benefit from more explicit work on learning how to learn

Could allow for community projects and service learning – with many notions of community . . . ornithology, revising models of public safety, climate change, arts . . .

And communal discernment practices from Quaker and other traditions

Extend QIF experiments in "meetings for worship for the conduct of research"

In higher education today, the query as to "How Truth might prosper amongst us?" might take the form of this question:

How can the pandemic create opportunities to transform our classes and institutions so that they are: Student Centered, Decentralized, Place-based, Community Supported, and Online Enhanced in ways that are Spirit-led – nurturing the growth of a community of ethical beings that develop right relationships with each other and the creatures in their environment? "