

What Ever Happened to *Deeper Teaching*?:

(Re) Considering Process and Outcomes

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But how is education to gain from student personnel work the full values that it offers? Must student personnel work continue in education as a collection of special services designed ostensibly to correct the mistakes of educators or, at best, to do what the rest of education cannot do in a system that is frankly dualistic? Is there some better way to conceive of student personnel work—perhaps of education itself—that will eventuate in greater growth and development of each student for life in a society that he [*sic*] will by his living improve? (Lloyd-Jones & Smith, 1954, p. 12)

These questions posed by Esther Lloyd-Jones and Margaret Smith in their pioneering book *Student Personnel Work as Deeper Teaching* are essentially the same as those taken up in subsequent reform documents in higher education and student affairs. Perhaps admirably, we are a profession in a continuous process of self-improvement, always seeking *some better way to conceive of student personnel work—perhaps of education itself*. With each “reform” document, the profession is offered a slightly different perspective and set of marching orders in conceiving the central focus of our work. These reform documents also illuminate that the very roots of our profession are well anchored in the pedagogical notion of *deeper teaching*. The foundational philosophical documents of the field, and the many reform documents that followed, are steadfast in their communication of core principles that center on a commitment to the education of the whole student, the role of student affairs educators in promoting student development and learning, and active engagement in civic life with a sense of responsibility for larger social issues as an intended outcome (e.g., *The Student Personnel Point of View*, the *Student Learning Imperative*, *Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs*) (Evans & Reason, 2001).

I may be a cynic but the constant parade of “reform” documents does not seem to be improving our educational practice—or external perceptions of our practice. Current student life quandaries are as vexing, if not more so, than ever. Issues such as alcohol and substance abuse, serious mental health problems, campus violence and incivility, reduced state support of higher education, budget shortfalls, access and retention, high profile scandals, responding to legislative mandates and parents’ demands, and competition among institutions for students predominate the work of student affairs educators today, as they have for a number of years. The recent delivery of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education’s final report (“The Spellings Report”) only confirms the public perception that higher education is not meeting the demands of contemporary times. The report claimed “Too many Americans just aren’t getting the education they need. There are disturbing signs that many students who do earn degrees have not actually mastered the reading, writing and thinking skills we expect of college graduates” (U.S. Department of Education, 2006, p. xii).

Yet, we have no shortage of language in the historical and current guiding documents of the profession emphasizing student learning and the nature of the practice of student affairs educators. The learning imperative, learning partnerships, learning-centered environments, learning communities, learning outcomes, evidence-based learning, and transformational learning all situate student learning as central and at the core of our work. If we are to *learn* one thing from these documents it is that the commitment to student learning and development has been an abiding one. However, how these noble ideas get translated to practice is not so clear to me, in part, I think, because “higher education in particular, has increasingly come to value content over

context, facts over meaning, and knowledge over conversation and connectivity” (Shi, 2006, p. 6). In short, we are overly focused on outcomes and not process. Indeed, *Learning Reconsidered*, the most recent of the “reform” documents (with its companion piece *Learning Reconsidered 2*) captured this dilemma:

Our educational practice has then emphasized information transfer without a great deal of thought given to the meaning, pertinence, or application of the information in the context of a student’s life. Likewise, student affairs educators have often not intentionally or systematically focused on abstract or transferable learning derived from the out-of-classroom experiences they have designed. But few of the assumptions on which our educational structures and processes were based remain intact in the world of today’s students. The degree of this disconnection is profound and has serious implications for both teaching processes and the structures institutions use to help students learn. (ACPA-NASPA, 2004, pp. 9-10)

As a newly minted MEd graduate and new professional myself, I clearly remember my job interview with the president of a Catholic college (the students called this president “Attila the Nun” which gives you some sense of her leadership style!). She commented to me: “Well, I can tell you are very process-oriented and quite frankly, we have enough of those kinds of people around here and they are very nice. But, I need someone who is outcome-oriented and focused on the product.” After getting over the stunning nature of her communication with me (she did eventually hire me but it took 3 interviews with her), I began to think about the disconnect between process and outcomes and these thoughts have stayed with me as I continue to make my own way in student affairs work as both a student affairs administrator and faculty member.

Related to this disconnect between process and outcome is the bifurcation of theory and practice that we witness, as suggested in *Learning Reconsidered*, in teaching processes and institutional structures. Most notable to this discussion is the disconnect between the world of teaching and learning (domain of faculty) and that of practice (domain of student affairs practitioners). Elizabeth Blake (1979, 1996) offered a provocative, if not amusing, caricature highlighting the differences between student affairs educators and faculty. She noted:

The successful student affairs professional is apt to enjoy people, taking pleasure in their diversity and individuality ... Faculty, on the other hand, are typically oriented to ideas and reflection; to working with books, experiments, and schema of various kinds; to valuing reason and proof, detached judgment, aesthetic sensibility, exactitude. (p. 5)

To extend the profile then, student affairs educators are drawn to process while faculty produce outcomes. As faculty in student affairs preparation programs we may be, admittedly, somewhat of a hybrid persona, however, we too get caught in the divide. How do we measure the complexities of the learning and development processes we witness and promote? As student affairs educators—faculty and administrators alike—increasingly emphasize learning outcomes, the challenge is to bridge both process and outcomes in a way that “*gain[s] from student personnel work the full values that it offers*” (Lloyd-Jones & Smith). Now don’t get me wrong, outcomes are critical to any intentionally designed enterprise, including education. Attention to process is crucial if outcomes are to represent more than an educational check list.

Finally, adding one more layer of complication to the disconnect between process and outcome is the gap between how faculty teach and how students best learn. We know from the literature that: (a) although the call is for a shift from a pedagogical approach emphasizing teaching to learning, many of our students expect to be taught; (b) despite evidence that students learn best when actively engaged through collaborative, experiential, problem-based teaching strategies, many faculty still rely on more passive approaches such as lecturing; (c) if students were taught more effectively, then they would learn more; and (d) the learning outcomes deemed most important to faculty and employers are those of least interest to students (AAC&U, 2002; AAC&U, 2007; Barr & Tagg, 1995; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; L. Knefelkamp, personal communication, October, 2005; Wilson, 2004).

To again bring forward the question posed by Esther Lloyd-Jones and Margaret Smith, “*Is there some better way to conceive of student personnel work?*” They go on to suggest that “student personnel workers should not so much be expert technicians as they should be educators in a somewhat unconventional and new sense” (p. 12). Herein lies the potential of graduate preparation programs, that is educating individuals who are both unconventional as well as expert technicians—who reflect and model the long-held values and commitments of the profession, engage in critical thinking and questioning, while working toward the learning outcomes deemed necessary for a productive and contributing life—for themselves as student affairs educators and the undergraduate students with whom they will be working. Both past and current reform documents clearly illuminate the path for such education to occur—the values, commitments, and beliefs communicated in these documents are enduring and reflective of the philosophical

foundations of the profession. Yet, a disconnect between rhetoric and reality, process and outcomes, context and content, knowledge and dialogue, the unconventional and technical, persists. How do we, as faculty teaching in graduate programs in higher education and student affairs, work to close the gap? A few suggestions follow.

The Importance of Dialogue

Opportunities for dialogue between faculty in graduate preparation programs and student affairs practitioners (including vice presidents for student affairs, assistantship and apprenticeship/internship supervisors) must be cultivated and sustained. These dialogues are critical to maintaining the vitality and relevance of graduate education programs and to assure scholarly-based practice. As faculty, we often teach *about* practice, but this needs to be informed by those *engaged in* practice. By dialogue I do not mean a once-a-year conversation at an annual conference, but authentic and persistent conversations that get to the heart of the purpose of our work and how to best accomplish intended outcomes.

Our literature emphasizes the importance of academic and student affairs partnerships and we can begin by modeling such authentic, meaningful, and truly reciprocal partnerships in our corner of the campus. This starts with developing an understanding of each others' cultures. A tension exists here as many higher education and student affairs faculty members began their professional careers as student affairs educators so presumably have a good sense of student affairs practice; however, the reverse is much less likely. As one of these student affairs-educators-turned-faculty members, I also know that professional practice has changed a lot since my day and I

need to be open to learning from my colleagues (and my students) working “in the trenches.”

We need to find a way out of the not-so-helpful critiques of one another’s work—“faculty have such an easy life....summers off, office hours a couple times a week, working at home, they don’t know what the heck they are talking about” and “How much more I could accomplish if I had an administrative assistant, travel budget, staff, and nice big salary—but all those meetings!” Our cultures are quite distinct and we are rewarded for very different activities and ways of being in the world. I was rather lonely as a new faculty member as I sat in my office with the door open wondering when my colleagues would extend themselves to me. In fact, I learned early on that if faculty members were around too much, then colleagues held them suspect in not spending their time “correctly” (e.g., conducting research that would become published as a single-authored article in a highly ranked, prestigious, educational journal—and better yet, that research would be funded by a large grant from an external source!). Acknowledging the cultural distinctions, misperceptions, and realities of our different worlds of educational practice does not obviate the natural connections we must make with one another. Such dialogue brings us closer to a relevant curriculum, one responsive to contemporary issues, and educational practice anchored in the research and scholarship related to that very practice.

A Word about “Quality Assurance”

Responsibility for “quality assurance” is not lodged with graduate preparation programs alone, but instead must be promoted and realized by faculty and student affairs practitioners alike. Quality assurance is tied to closing the gap between theory and practice, process and outcomes through these dialogues. In fact, the quality of any

dialogue is inexorably linked to the knowledge, values, and competence of those having them. Graduate students in professional preparation programs depend upon those in student affairs to help them make theory-to-practice connections (these connections should also be made in the classroom). The quality of the supervision our students receive, in all possible contexts for learning, is critical to success in the field.

First, faculty are the arbiters and guardians of quality in our preparation programs. In our field of student affairs we are both blessed and burdened by the absence of accreditation requirements. Most programs follow the guidelines developed by the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) that set very clear expectations for a quality program. However, we are not really held accountable for following these standards in the same way that CACREP, APA, NCATE, for example, accredit graduate programs. This leaves open the possibility of programs suggesting that they are adhering to CAS standards when they are really not, or simply choosing not to follow these guidelines. Contrary to CAS standards calling for a two-year program, a number of one-year graduate programs have existed in student affairs, including Teacher's College, the site of the first doctorate in student personnel to Esther Lloyd-Jones in 1929. As faculty we have a good deal of flexibility in creating our curricula and teaching courses—and content—according to our own design, but I also find an inertia built in to academic structures that militates against curricular change.

Second, employers seem increasingly willing to hire individuals without graduate degrees in higher education and student affairs, even at the vice president level. Whether for practical, economic, political, logistical, or philosophical reasons—this is not good practice and does little to assure quality. In a persuasively written editorial, Blimling

(2000) made the case that no other profession would hire an individual without the requisite skills, knowledge, competencies—learned via professional education. All too often individuals are hired if they are “nice” (this analysis is saved for another paper) and typically if they were student leaders in their undergraduate institutions and therefore, can learn on the job. I am all for nice people and think I am one of them, but being nice cannot be the most compelling quality an individual brings to an entry level position in student affairs. We need to find a mechanism to assure that those who are hiring new professionals hire individuals with the appropriate training and education. As one of my doctoral students at the University of Maryland suggested, “Perhaps this involves making the case for why folks with degrees truly are preferable than those without. And then making sure they are” (M. Soldner, personal communication, January 19, 2007).

Negotiating Content and Context

In his 2004 keynote address at the ACPA national convention, author and political commentator Tavis Smiley noted “Content without context is pretext.” When we emphasize only content, we produce “expert technicians” who are not adept at negotiating the complexities of professional practice and who presume there is an answer to the issues they are encountering. My master’s students are forever asking me “when will we get to how to apply all this?” or express “I don’t have a clue how to handle this” when given case studies of complex campus-based situations. Nowhere is this more evident to me than in our efforts to teach “diversity” courses. Nearly all students *know* that “appreciating diversity” is important and working with “all students” essential to our work. However, actively engaging in dialogue focused on issues of privilege, power, marginalization, and silencing is a different scenario altogether. Understanding the

context surrounding these dialogues is every bit as important, if not more so, than the content. This is the difference between educating students to work as “intercultural collaborators ... [rather than] commentators on diversity” (Clark & Morris, 2005, p. 73). This example also reflects how difficult the shift from “information transfer to identity development (transformation),” called for in *Learning Reconsidered* (ACPA-NASPA, 2004, p. 10), actually is to negotiate.

Support for negotiating content and context is found in the three principles articulated by Baxter Magolda (2001, 2004) as part of her framework for promoting self-authorship. Attention to these principles—validating learners’ capacity to know, situating learning in learners’ experience, and defining learning as mutually constructing meaning—increases the likelihood of an environment for learning that affirms and acknowledges what students are bringing to the dialogue, grounding teaching and learning in their experiences, and actively engaging students in the learning process. Of importance to success is the role of the instructor. We too must be actively engaged and willing to go where we ask students. Long ago, Seashore (1975) referred to this as our being “in grave danger of growing.” More recently, hooks (1994) suggested that an “engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students ... That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks” (p. 21).

A Return to Deeper Teaching

The authors of *Learning Reconsidered* (ACPA-NASPA, 2004) noted that “Student affairs professionals require a comprehensive education to accomplish the [student learning] outcomes outlined” (p. 25) which included cognitive complexity,

knowledge acquisition, integration, and application, humanitarianism, civic engagement, interpersonal and intrapersonal competence, practical competence, and persistence and academic achievement. This is indeed a daunting undertaking for those of us concerned with the education of future professionals. The pedagogy needed for accomplishing these outcomes requires attention to process, context, and the identities and commitments of teacher and student alike. As Parker Palmer (1998) articulated “*good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher*” (p. 10).

The best “preparation” we can offer our students comes from what we model to them—individuals connected to the history and enduring values of the profession, a professional identity and sense of vocation that anchors who we are, an ability to translate theory to the complicated world of practice and that mirrors good praxis, or the integration of action and reflection, and finally, a commitment to working toward a greater good. That is, as students themselves develop a greater capacity for learning and development, they are also cultivating a sense of responsibility to work toward a more just and equitable society. And this comes, according to Lloyd-Jones and Smith (1954), “not from what is imposed, but is absorbed” (p. 5). As we model *deeper teaching*, we create the conditions and possibilities for *deeper learning*, the preparation of not so much *expert technicians* but *educators in a somewhat unconventional and new sense*. (Re) considering *deeper teaching* returns us to our pedagogical roots and propels us toward a lively future of “transformative learning” (ACPA-NASPA, 2004) that bridges process and outcomes in unconventional ways.

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