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TALKING BACK

We teach facts. We teach theory. Can we also teach students to be practical? Creighton gets a grant to try.

Shaping the Life of the Mind for Practice

By Gail Jensen, Amy Haddad, and Mary Ann Danielson

Assertion: *there is nothing more professional than liberal education, properly construed; there is nothing more liberal than professional education, properly construed; there is only limited potential for practical learning without engagement in liberal learning; and there is only limited potential for liberal learning without engagement in practical learning.* (Shulman L. (2004). *Teaching as Community Property: Essays on Higher Education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass)

Many of our Jesuit universities are institutions that are comprehensive in that they include strong liberal arts and sciences with a variety of professional programs or schools. Often faculty exist in their

academic silos focused on their disciplinary perspective. Conversations among faculty and administrators across the campus may frequently focus on resource allocation and differences or inequalities among disciplines rather than what we have to offer or learn from one another. Insofar as this is the case, we are ignoring a strong emphasis on integration that is found in the Jesuit educational tradition. That, in turn, is linked with 'formation' as a primary goal of the schools the ever-pragmatic Ignatius Loyola saw as suitable apostolic work for his early followers.

In his overview article in the last issue ("Graduate Professional Education: How 'Jesuit?") Charles Currie speaks of the ideal graduate education as a way to "pursue [an] eager quest for knowledge at the next level" - but he admits the "obvious linkage between advanced degrees and access to successful careers" and expresses the hope that "the two approaches need not be mutually exclusive" (*Conversations*, Spring 2009, page 2). Recent focus on "practical reasoning" might suggest a way of insuring that they are not. The Carnegie Foundation for the

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FORMING A LIFE OF THE MIND FOR PRACTICE: TEACHING PRACTICAL REASONING

William M. Sullivan

The central educational practices of today's universities and colleges typically direct students' attention to mastering procedures for describing particular events and objects in terms of general concepts. That is, they teach analytical reasoning. Since all fields, including the health professions, do their their actual occupational training in settings of practice, the social function of the university is not nearly as "practical" as often imagined. In large part, the university is a culture-shaping institution. It inculcates a respect for, if not a full competence in, analytical thinking and its products, especially the sciences and technology. It is this culture-shaping role that makes university education increasingly the entry ticket to economic and social participation not only in the United States, Europe, and Japan, but throughout the developing world.

At the same time, the relation of this training to students' struggles for meaning and orientation in the world, as well as ethical judgment, is all too rarely given curricular attention or pedagogical emphasis. A recast liberal education, however, must go beyond the purely analytical to provide students with experience and guidance in using such analytical tools to engage in encounters with questions of meaning and deliberation about action. It will, I believe, become centered upon teaching the art of practical reasoning—the art of placing analytical concepts into a mutually illuminating relation with sources of meaning and responsibility in the world of practice.

The teaching of practical reasoning enables students to learn explicitly how to move between the distanced, external stance of analytical thinking—the "third person" point of view typical of most academic thinking—and the "first and second person" points of view that are internal to acting with others in a situation. Practical reasoning is this back-and-forth between general knowledge, and analytical thinking, and the challenges and responsibilities that come with particular situations. It means an ongoing process of reflection whose end is the formation of habits of critical judgment for action.

The pedagogical vehicles for teaching this movement between viewpoints are varied: the case study; literary exploration of character and response to challenge; the simulation; participation and reflection upon actual involvements in the world. But their common feature is recognition that in practical reasoning it is always the involved stance, the point of view internal to purposeful human activity that provides the ground and the goal of critical, analytical reasoning. This perspective opens reasoning—and the reasoners—to connection with experiences and perspectives that include but transcend the distanced, external viewpoint of analysis. ■

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Advancement of Teaching implemented an intensive, interdisciplinary seminar, "A Life of the Mind for Practice" from September 2002 to December 2003 that brought together a small group of faculty representing the liberal arts and sciences with the professions from a variety of colleges and universities. The core purpose of the seminar was for faculty (teachers), whose pedagogies, regardless of disciplinary background, exemplified the challenge of placing student formation for "lives of reasoned action" at the center of their teaching mission, to interact and reflect with each other about commonalities, differences, and best practices. The leaders of the Carnegie seminar noted that, "faculty who value practical judgment as an end of their teaching find themselves isolated within their academic specialties without a broadly shared discourse for finding new peers or communicating the value of their work for the academy as a whole." The results of the seminar are shared in the book *A New Agenda for Higher Education: Shaping a Life of the Mind for Practice* by William M. Sullivan and Matthew S. Rosin, which was reviewed in the Spring 2009 edition of *Conversations*.

What Is Practical Reason?

At the heart of this seminar is the concept of practical reasoning. Practical reasoning is always done for some purpose, at a particular time, for a specific situation, and with a particular group of people. While it was Aristotle who first codified the distinction of reasoning into practical and a theoretical form, this concept has continued to be reformulated over time. Senior scholar at the Carnegie Foundation, Dr. William Sullivan is using practical reasoning as one of the central concepts in looking at the interdependence of liberal education and professional education in several of Carnegie's initiatives.

Sullivan describes practical reasoning as a three-fold movement or pattern of thinking. For example, in health care, there is usually a process between the patient and the provider that involves a “rhythm of moving back and forth from engagement with the concrete situation, through observation and analysis, and then back again to the more informed engagement with the person and the situation. It is the therapeutic purpose that creates the “imperative for clinical judgment.” A health care provider must decide what course of intervention is good for a particular patient, at a certain time and in this situation. While scientific analysis and problem solving are important skills in professional practice, the ability to engage and learn through the social process - interactions and relationships of practice or apprenticeship is just as important. Sullivan would further argue that liberal education is also concerned with teaching judgment and complex reasoning in uncertain and changing situations.

Reflections on Our Experience

The seminar and the resulting book are valuable tools, but we were intrigued with the idea of implementing a similar project with faculty from a single campus. What would be gained, we wondered, from replicating the seminar at Creighton University?

Creighton seemed the ideal place to implement such an intensive faculty seminar because of the number of professional programs that exist on our campus coupled with a strong undergraduate education. The focus of the seminar project is the interdependence of liberal arts and sciences and professional education. The seminar provides the ideal place to engage teacher-scholars in reflecting on their role of facilitating student learning (formation) in the Jesuit-Ignatian tradition.



Faculty dyad interaction across liberal arts and professional education.

A series of three intensive seminars, modeled after the original Carnegie Foundation seminar, serve as the primary heuristic for both faculty reflection and conversation and the analysis of this faculty development project.

The scheduled seminars (January, May and December during the calendar year of 2009) explore the concept of faculty formation as well as our responsibilities for student learning and formation in a Jesuit/Catholic institution. Faculty needed time and space to engage in collaborative dialogue, writing and reflection, inquiring deeply into what teaching for practical judgment means. Hence the decision to hold the seminars off-campus in a retreat-like setting over a two-day period to allow for uninterrupted time to attend to these important activities. We selected faculty teacher-scholars (16 participants) from each of the Schools and Colleges based on previous interactions across disciplinary lines, toleration of ambiguity, and a tendency toward critical reflection. We purposefully assigned the pairs, matching a faculty member from arts and science with a faculty member from one of the professions (e.g., medicine with education; dentistry with peace and justice studies; phys-

ical therapy with philosophy; business with chemistry; law with sociology and anthropology; nursing with journalism; occupational therapy with psychology; and graduate school with physics).

The eight faculty pairs and seminar team set out to answer the following broad questions: What is the purpose of higher education? How should institutions respond pedagogically to the challenge of preparing students for today's world? How might institutional divisions that prevent such responsiveness be overcome? We next moved to questions that were closer to home such as: What best teaching practices might be identified across the professions and the undergraduate disciplines? In what ways could the professions and the liberal arts and sciences employ one another's insights in order to achieve this end? Might teaching for practical responsibility and judgment prove a unifying calling for contemporary higher education?

First Seminar Structure

We began the inquiry into the teaching of practical reasoning by asking the faculty seminar participants to



Shaping the Life of the Mind for Practice Faculty Development Group.

examine and discuss their own courses and the courses of their faculty partner. In order to do this, we asked them to imagine the lives that their students will live and then reflect on the forms of reasoning that would be required for them to meet the challenges they will encounter. We then asked them to write a brief description of what they imagined, being as creative and broad in their thinking as they wished.

—We then asked each faculty participant to choose a syllabus from those they currently teach or have taught in the past that at least in part is concerned with developing practical reasoning and judgment skills. We then asked them to assess the syllabus in light of how the course prepares students for the life they previously imagined. Then they wrote responses to the following questions to bring to the first seminar.

- To what situation requiring practical judgment might this course contribute?
- What are the key topics or organizing principles implicit in your syllabus?
- What is the narrative or argument of this course as repre-

sented by the syllabus? What are the key surprises or critical transitions in this narrative? How are these connected to practical judgments?

- If you had substantially less time for the course, how would you change the syllabus? What might this reveal about the key organizing principles or practical issues at stake in the course?

Midway between the first and second seminars, faculty have continued their conversations and reflective sharing, by posting their materials on our seminar course site, meeting independently, and/or reforming as a group at a campus reception. Faculty have also been given additional questions for reflection and conversation to be posted two weeks prior to the May seminar.

The May seminar will mirror the January seminar in that it will feature additional background information and context for their continued pedagogical conversations. Additionally, it will encompass Ignatian pedagogy and feature Dr. William Sullivan, who will contribute both to the seminar conversation and advise the larger research project. We anticipate that the project outcome will be a

book, similar to the text generated by Sullivan and Rosin. This book, however, will highlight the impact of such interdisciplinary work on a single campus with a shared value of Ignatian pedagogy. The book will include theoretical concepts around teaching and learning along with a chapter of cross cutting themes that emerge from

our analysis of the seminars. This will be followed by exemplar chapters from the work of the teacher-scholars. We believe that this opportunity for a critically reflective look at teaching in a Jesuit institution will provide faculty with a language and framework by which to study and practice their disciplinary pedagogies while forming and informing other faculty's practices and pedagogies. This opportunity also provides a model of collaborative faculty-development that builds up the teacher-scholar within the unique culture of Jesuit, Catholic [or Ignatian] education. And other institutions may want to model these cross-disciplinary conversations with their own faculty as we each seek to answer our own questions surrounding the purpose of higher education. Ignatian pedagogy is a pervasive aspect of the Jesuit educational tradition where the focus on the context of the learning is as important as the content. Faculty strive to 'form' women and men of competence, conscience, and compassion. The art of practical reasoning is a useful tool for linking analytical thinking with meaning and responsibility that is part of practice. ■