

Bringing Theory to Practice Project

Well-being Working Conference | Sept. 26-27. 2013 | Madison Hotel

Session I provocation

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- A scholar at one of your institutions (Pitzer) has an article appearing in a well-known journal in which she argues that linking engaged learning and well-being requires understanding a broad epistemological framework—that deep and engaged learning requires agency—actually doing something—and that agency can be linked to personal wholeness—and community wholeness
- A past president of a college (Elizabethtown) argues that well-being could be the defining (redeeming/irrefutable and necessary) component of future of liberal education
- A professor (at Williams) at annual gathering of institution's alumni (acknowledging teaching excellence): "If higher learning is about anything at all, it is about seeing the whole person, educating the whole person, transforming the whole person. Not just the student, not just the citizen—the person. [It is] about teaching [a student] to learn—not just how to argue and reason and participate, but how to live and how to learn and how to learn to live a life of learnable moments."
- A major foundation officer: "Over the years in working at the foundation, and having had the privilege to see so many exciting projects put into practice, a part of me has remained frustrated. When I visit college campuses, I often get the sense that students are somehow not fully alive, that the amazing energies inherent in young adults are somehow not reached by the curriculum or the faculty, that in all of our talk about "core" curricula we are still not reaching students at their core. I wonder if perhaps we are working with a flattened notion of a human being, or the human condition, or only approach human beings within a very narrow range of what may actually be an extraordinarily expansive, multi-dimensional continuum, a continuum that includes flourishing and perishing as essential aspects of our humanity."
- An announcement of the published volume *The Science of Wellbeing*, Cambridge Univ. Press: "...heralds the emergence of a new field of science that endeavors to understand how individuals and societies thrive and flourish, and how this new knowledge can be applied to foster happiness, health and fulfillment."
 - The New Economics Foundation (nef) originally published the *wellbeing manifesto*—seeking to answer the question what would politics [what would education] look like if promoting well-being was one of governments' [institutions'] main aims? The manifesto contends that some academics argue that well-being is best understood in terms of overall happiness or satisfaction—but the manifesto argues that people also want to be leading fulfilling lives—developing capabilities fulfilling their potential and leading socially useful lives. So well-being has several dimensions:
 - Satisfaction
 - Personal development
 - A sense of community/belonging and contributing
- The Declaration of Independence opens with the well-known phrase, "We hold these truths to be self-evident; among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness"—meaning that a key aim of an open/democratic society is where citizens can seek higher levels of well-being. Our Founders understood that happiness is not identical to pleasure—that the eudeemonic is not the same as the hedonic. Happiness is an individual experience in the context of a commitment to public good. It is this "realization of potential", forming identity and contributing

purposefully. It is these more “ennobled” understandings of happiness and well-being to which Founders were willing “to commit their fortunes, lives and sacred honor.”

- On a practical level—international surveys (Brandon Busteed from Gallup is with us) identify five essential elements of well-being:
 - Career well-being
 - Social well-being
 - Financial well-being
 - Physical well-being
 - Community well-being
- Scholarly discussions in journals such as *Health Psychology* explore recalibrating scales of well-being; ask whether pharmacological enhancement of well-being can be measured? And discuss the relation of well-being to markets, and to behavioral economics
- If Aristotle were to be interviewed on “This I Believe” he might claim that happiness/well-being is an inward effort of the soul. William Blake might claim that the necessary conditions for well-being mean having:
 - Something to love...
 - Something to do (work)...
 - Something to hope for...
- Upon referring to the effect of listening to Inaugural Poet Richard Blanco, a colleague writes, “I think people commonly recognize art (here I’m including literature as an art form) as something that elicits emotion, or feelings. And the relationship between education and feelings/emotion is a big part of what I think we are beginning to understand as holistic well-being. What does it mean to be well? And what does it mean that you feel well when being civic?”
- Dan Kahneman (Nobel laureate, founder of behavioral economics) argues in *Thinking, Fast and Slow* that we must distinguish (a) an immediate experience of well-being (e.g. when getting married) from (b) subsequent reflection re how the experience fits in overall view of fulfilling/flourishing life. This is crucial if we intend to promote and then assess well-being. Which do we seek (a) or (b), or both?
- African American scholar and psychiatrist, James Comer (founder of the School Development Program (SDP) at Yale in the 1990’s) put the learner’s social and emotional development front and center—it did not persist as a movement; however, seeing pernicious consequences of NCLB emphasis on test scores, he argues that now (2013) is the “time to fully promote social and emotive learning”—time to promote student well-being as a corrective to NCLB.
- A colleague writes, “In an age of social and professional precarity (Gallup shows that a good job is key for well-being, yet such jobs are hard to come by) well-being is now more than ever harder to attain/sustain; students without habits for and a deeper understanding of well-being are unprepared for a life under these circumstances.
- Arthur Zajonc (research physicist) with Parker Palmer (philosopher and education theorist) contends in their new book that meditation and reflection are missing aspects of learning in higher education—“the whole person must be inclusive of contemplative learning and experience.”

These may be sufficient to suggest the range of dimensions and range of contexts that frame any discussion of “what we mean” and “what you mean” by well-being. But they are much like impressions.

They help to see broadly and to glimpse at possible connections, but focus is a challenge. The range of dimensions can be overwhelming. So let’s go to the challenge of how to focus.

One way we thought helpful is implicit in the exercise we asked you to consider. By “unbundling” aspects of higher learning and “unbundling” aspects of well-being, you open the opportunity to focus on more specific connections and the evidence we have, or need, to support giving more of our attention and resources to them.

To do so, please turn to the “Exercise” provided in the conference booklet.

Now to your insights; to your connections, to your plans and objectives for your own campus project. Enjoy this opportunity to listen to colleagues and to learn from each other.