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An Argument for a Better Practice in CICA

Intro:

In the process of writing this paper for a better practice I realized I was missing a pattern, or a broader concept of student engagement that included participatory design, collective decision making, informal learning groups and shared experience. Also missing was a pattern to describe the mode of those interactions, so introduced first is a new pattern card, Democracy.

Problem: Every school child in America from kindergarten on knows that the United States is a democracy, one where we vote for a president every four years. However, many don't know the deeper meaning of a democratic country or that voting for a person to rule over you is actually a republic not a democracy. The practice of democracy requires nothing less than an intimate connection between its citizens and politics, where there is a continuous feedback loop among an engaged educated public and its institutions. In recent years the American public has been plagued by new levels of apathy caused by a variety of influences: a silenced 4th arm of government, corporate media, an absence of activity from activists, a disappearance of cultural critics, and a lack of social consciousness. A capitalist society seems to be in and of itself anti-democratic. "[When] social considerations and notions of the public good are replaced by an utterly privatized model of citizenship and the good life, [this creates an] increasingly, collapsing intellectual ambitions are matched by a growing disdain toward matters of equality, justice, and politics and toward how such issues might be addressed critically by educators,

artists and others." (Giroux, 2001, p. 5-23) Today this concept of a democracy that involves active citizenship in the day to day functioning of society is unheard of, if not completely extinct.

Context: Democracy can be used in any organization or social organism to describe the social values and structural model of power. Democracy also provides an active mode of being or living for civic intelligence to thrive in and spread.

Discussion: Democracy, much like Civic Intelligence, is based in the belief that human beings can solve mankind's problems through collaborative discussion and collective action. As John Dewey states, "The foundation of democracy is faith in the capacities of human nature; faith in human intelligence and in the power of pooled and cooperative experience. It is not the belief that these things are complete but that if given a show they will grow and be able to generate progressively the knowledge and wisdom needed to guide collective action." (2009, Patrick Jenlink, p.327) Therefore democracy in its fullest sense of civic engagement, social consciousness, diversity of voice and power is nothing less than an approach to spread civic intelligence.

Solution: The solution to undemocratic institutions and an apathetic population is to eat, breathe, and excrete democratic ideals so that they permeate throughout all of society. From local to federal, from corporations to cooperatives, from work to school, from every past experience to all the future one's, democracy should pervade.

Why do we need a better practice?

The CICA class introduced and exposed students to the concept of civic intelligence and highly civically intelligent organizations but failed to replicate a similar degree of civic intelligence in our own educational organism. All of our examples of civic intelligence this quarter came from a bottom up model where the participants were the creators, the modifiers, and the actors who ultimately made their shared vision a reality. Another similarity between the social organisms we studied was that they all took on active roles in their community; whether it was song, dance, or social justice, none were passive in their pursuits. My initial feeling about the class was that we could do things smoother, that we could use the patterns more effectively to design, run, and critique our class educational model. The survey I conducted to gauge the class's civic intelligence showed similar trends.

A large portion of the problems that inhibit this class lay outside faculty or even the student body. A successful class needs an engaged student body as well as a teacher who can excite the students through meaningful classwork and discussion, which we have, but there are a multitude of factors that can severely limit the productiveness of the educational organism. I would argue that our class was successful by all conventional standards but significantly less successful by the indicators of civic intelligence (see Appendix 1). One of these limits comes from the fact that our class is a evening and weekend course that is offered quarterly and so doesn't have a consistent class core population that can build a repertoire of common knowledge and shared experience. Even this year's CICA two-quarter program had a high turnover rate, which in turn limits what the class can accomplish. The other main barrier, not only in this class but also in the larger

Evergreen community, is how far the idea of student centered learning goes? Does it stop at the faculty focus and individual contracts, or does it extend to who is involved in creating course programs and decisions at the structural level of the college? In other words, does student centered learning include a democratic structure where students play a pertinent engaged role in the food, energy, financial, security, and technological systems at Evergreen?

Argument:

As students of Civic Intelligence, pupils and faculty alike, should participate and be equally invested in course curriculum, classroom design, and class goals. In this way students will learn the value and importance of participatory design, where those most affected by the design are an integral part of creating that design. This is critical because not everyone in the Evergreen learning community picked the educational space they are trying to function in, i.e. classroom layout, student/ teacher learning roles, educational styles. Dewey addresses this failure of engagement that inhibits democratic learning, "…just as there is no defect in traditional education greater than its failure to secure the active co-operation of the pupil in construction of the purposes involved in his studying." (1938, Dewey, p.59) It's ironic that Evergreen is considered an alternative school by most of the educational community but by the standards of Dewey's philosophy, Evergreen is still very traditional.

It is important, not only that as students of civic intelligence and students at the college, that we know that space creates place, but also we learn at Evergreen,

through experience, that we can change the meanings and designs imposed on us. This idea of participatory design can and should be extrapolated beyond an individual classroom to a greater discussion of what the members of the Evergreen community want from their college.

This discussion, at both the individual classroom and the entire Evergreen community, should bring about the foundation for a shared vision of both the present circumstances of the learning community and a vision for the future of said learning community. If the community wants a democratic education then the school has to live up to those ideals:

> When the daily actions are guided by democratic ideals... the school becomes a democratically practiced place through social discourses and practices-discursive and practices originating from within the social space of school as well as discursive, normative practices imposed upon the social space of the school from the outside (e.g. state policy) (p.280 DDR)

Reconstructing social space from a hierarchal structure into a democratic system is civically intelligent because it propagates more civic intelligence through creating new democratic spaces and increases awareness of social design. But to get there, to make a shared vision a reality, we have to start from here. Experience, specifically shared experience, is the argued starting place for this transformation. "Democracy demands, as Dewey argued, nothing more or less than social and political engagement in the direction of shared experience." (2009, p.331)

The pattern language was utilized to create, describe, and critique organizations in classroom exercises. I think that patterns would serve students just as well, if not better when applied to our educational organism. For this use of the patterns to be efficient and successful students will have to become better

equipped with the pattern language. Language is a wonderful complex social phenomenon used to convey abstract concepts, emotional, and physical states. It is more than the sum of its parts and can be used to express intimate intricate interactions to abstract relationships; there is virtually no limit to what a language can express. The one limiting factor in language communication is the language ability of the speaker and of the audience. Fluency, in other words, is the only limiting factor in communication. Unless this fluency is formed at a young age, it becomes extremely difficult, if not impossible to become natively fluent. The best way to learn a new language, no matter what age, is deep immersion in the language. Experience is the best teacher and full immersion is the only way to get that type of deep experiential learning.

While the pattern language isn't a foreign language by any means, English speakers are already familiar with the smaller concepts (words) that make up the whole pattern, the principle that new concepts have to be played with and experienced to be more fully understood still holds true. My argument for a better practice in a CI class includes having full immersion in the pattern language to the extent that students think in the pattern language.

The road to becoming fluent in any language is a long and somewhat tedious process, and you can't get there unless you start here. Starting from week one, students should be introduced to the patterns with the first 3 vocabulary words, patterns: The Good Life, The Commons, and Civic Intelligence. In successive weeks, pattern cards could be introduced in batches of twenty or so. Study groups could be formed to give students diverse interpretations of the patterns that will ultimately

lead to a basis of common knowledge. These groups could even go through different batches of cards in a round robin style and present a few of the most important or relevant cards to the class. After a substantial amount of vocabulary has been established in the learning community, language games like Apples to Apples, Taboo or charades can be used as a source of experimental learning.

Playing Apples to Apples with the pattern language was a great learning experience and has great potential to be improved with increased fluency of the pattern language from the players. In class this exercise served as a tool to expose students to the pattern cards rather than building the class's content knowledge. Although this type of exposure is the foundation on which collective knowledge will grow.

A twist on Apples to Apples as we played it would be group Apples to Apples. This will not only get players more familiar with the pattern language but also give them practice at collective decision-making; adding real world limits such as time and resources could also be added to this learning exercise. After the game, individual groups or the class as a whole, should reflect on the learning experience to better comprehend all perspectives of the group experience.

Conclusion:

Establishing democratic learning practices is an important step in improving a course in civic intelligence. To do this the class should practice democratic learning through creating shared experiences, a wealth of common knowledge and by taking advantage of the diversity of the student body. The majority of the work is already done in the design and creation of the pattern language. The patterns are so

thoroughly conceptualized, it is hard not to come up with civically intelligent ideas when using them. In short, students should be working intimately with the patterns to create the direction and dynamics of the class.

During the process of writing this paper I found that a lot could be done to not only improve our class at Evergreen, but to improve the institutions of the college. Teachers designed the college, and following the pattern of participatory design, did a wonderful job at breaking down previous educational barriers that confine the teachers. The interdisciplinary nature of the school and a shift in focus from research and publication to teaching is evidence of that. But what the college has failed to do, is remove the barriers to actualizing democracy and civic intelligence that students, staff, maintenance personnel, police services, all face in our learning community.

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