



Core Commitments:

Educating Students for Personal and Social Responsibility

Taking Seriously Education for Personal and Social Responsibility: Intercultural, Ethical, and Intellectual Development

L. Lee Knefelkamp, Professor of Psychology and Education, Teachers College, Columbia University

Core Commitments Symposium,
"Education for Personal and Social Responsibility: Building Collective Institutional Commitment"

October 17-18, 2007 Denver, CO



Core Concepts of Core Commitments

1. The Dimensions—like development—are integrated and cumulative

2. We cannot expect from individuals what the environment does not expect, support, and reward

3. The “core” of Core Commitments is the concept of institutional capacity

$$B = f (P \times E)$$

Behavior is the Function of the Person in the Environment

$$E = f (P \times B)$$

The Environment is the Function of the Behaviors of the People in the Environment

THREE INTEGRATED ASPECTS OF MATURITY

- Empathy (Feeling)
- Discernment (Cognitive Complexity)
- Appropriate Response (Behavior)

How do educational environments
(educational cultures/campus climates)
help students connect feeling, thinking,
and behavior?

REFLECTION MUST BE:

- Personal/Institutional
- Conscious
- Pervasive
- Transparent

STUDENT QUALITATIVE DATA: ISSUES TO EXAMINE

- Use of Language
- Us vs. Them
- Knowledge...Truth?
- Tolerance for Ambiguity
- Attempt to Understand Alternative Perspectives
- Purpose for Learning
- Role of Authority
- Reason for "Learning"

STUDENT # 1

I find that a lecture type class is my best learning experience. I like to sit back, take notes on the truth, and absorb the instructor's knowledge on his/her subject.

I hate lectures which have a lot of ideas and a lot of questions from the students. Worse are class discussions.

Lectures with discussion are unorganized and so confusing that they don't stay with the course material.

I dislike a lot of extra readings for a class which cover the same subjects but say it in another way!

What is the point when one reading would have been enough?

STUDENT # 1

I tell you, those people hate us. They hate our way of life.

If they would just learn about democratic ways they would be better off. Look at their civilization! Ha!

What a joke!

They don't value life. They teach their own children to explode themselves.

They keep their women in a state of virtual imprisonment. They fight for lost causes.

They act as if their culture were superior, when it is obvious that it is backward and inferior.

STUDENT # 2

This [ideal] course would emphasize discovery and creativity indicating controversy surrounding various positions and detailing how those controversies were settled. It would detail the contributions of great thinkers in the field—how they generated ideas and tackled problems.

Grading would emphasize “thoroughness of knowledge,” “defense of position,” “creativity.” It would require a paper which emphasized research using primary source material and demand a proposal for further research. Tests would emphasize comparisons of ideas, methodologies, and conclusions. [The instructor would be] someone who would challenge the class to present ideas, argue with positions, demand proof. The instructor would use exercises that engage the students in creative problem solving—but who would also provide a thorough basis upon which students solve problems.

STUDENT # 2

Now that I am in an environment where I am constantly seeing more of their cultures, I feel I have been able to understand not only foreign ideas and cultures, but also my own thought more clearly. The more I interact with students from different backgrounds, I find I am able to listen and learn more about where they are coming from and also their thought processes without having to agree or to feel good about our discussions.

I've noticed a change to how I react to debates in class—I'm no longer threatened by the fact that someone had another idea. Now I realize I can disagree with someone but still understand their point of view. Understanding doesn't mean agreement and disagreement doesn't mean prejudice.