A Student Affairs Perspective on the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Theory of Change

Presenters:

- Michael Sanseviro, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students at Kennesaw State University
- Stephanie King, Director of Civic Engagement and Knowledge Community Initiatives, NASPA

Agenda:

- Visioning Exercise
- Review of CLDE Theory of Change
- Exploration of the Student Affairs Educators and Faculty Role
- Questions

What are the key features of the thriving democracy we aspire to enact and support through our work?
History of the CLDE Theory of Change

Marginal
Episodic
Celebratory

- Integral
- Relational
- Organic
- Generative

The CLDE Theory of Change builds on threads of the 2012 *A Crucible Moment* report's figure asking What Would a Civic-Minded Campus Look Like?. Both the report and the theory in its current form argue that higher education must cultivate campus environments (civic ethos) as well as individual and collective capacities (civic literacy & skill building, civic inquiry, civic action, and civic agency) to advance civic learning and democratic engagement.

Civic Ethos of Campus
Civic Literacy & Skill Building
Civic Inquiry
Civic Action
Civic Agency

History of the CLDE Theory of Change

1. The Vision Question
   What are the key features of the thriving democracy we aspire to incubate and support through our work?
   Premise: We haven't experienced a truly thriving democracy yet.

2. The Learning Outcomes Question
   What knowledge, skills, and dispositions do people need in order to help create and contribute to a thriving democracy?
   Premise: These learning outcomes include both individual and collective capacities. In part because we have not achieved clarity in our answer to the first question, it is likely that we have devoted insufficient attention to some important knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

3. The Pedagogy Question
   How can we best foster the acquisition and development of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for a thriving democracy?
   Premise: The environments in which we foster these qualities must reflect our intended learning outcomes. At present, they often do not.

4. The Strategy Question
   How can we build the institutional culture, infrastructure, and relationships needed to support learning that enables a thriving democracy?
   Premise: People and institutions do not change readily. Changes in everyday practices and relationships can be the hardest to achieve.
### Common Assumptions

#### Nature of democracy
Democracy consists of formal processes and institutions in which citizens participate mainly as consumers. (Dewey, 1937, pp. 473-474).

#### Locations of democracy
It exists only “out there” beyond the edges of college and university campuses, in formal systems and community organizations.

#### Students’ motivation
Students lack a sufficiently well-developed sense of duty and responsibility, and/or need to be shown that their participation will produce individual benefits for themselves.

#### CLDE Theory of Change
Democracy is a way of life expressed in “the living relations of person to person in all social forms and institutions.” (Dewey, 1937, pp. 473-474). The key to motivating students is to help them discover their capacities as co-creators of communities and institutions (including their colleges and universities), and to view the people around them as human beings engaged in collaborative processes rather than as their equals.
### Barriers to students’ participation

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<th>Common Assumptions</th>
<th>CLDE Theory of Change</th>
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<td>Students’ lack of information, sophistication, and exposure to rational arguments about the value of participation.</td>
<td>The principal barriers to student participation relate to their conception of themselves as mere spectators and consumers of public life, and of institutions as static or given.</td>
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**Vision (Purpose):**

What are the key features of the thriving democracy we aspire to enact and support through our work?

**Learning Outcomes:**

What knowledge, skills, and dispositions do people need in order to help create and contribute to a thriving democracy?
Pedagogy:
How can we best foster the acquisition and development of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for a thriving democracy?

Strategy:
How can we build the institutional culture, infrastructure, and relationships needed to support learning that enables a thriving democracy?

- Civic work that is not (yet) named as such, and the people who do that work.
- Democratic threads in institutions’ stories.
- The widely felt yearning for consequentiality and connectedness.
Questions

Values

- **Dignity**: respect for the intrinsic moral equality of all persons
- **Humanity**: embracing environments and interactions that are generative and organic; rejecting objectification, and the marginalization of people based on aspects of their identities
- **Decency**: acting with humility and graciousness; rejecting domination for its own sake
- **Honesty**: frankness with civility; congruence between stated values and actions; avoidance of deceit, evasions, and manipulative conduct
- **Curiosity**: eagerness to learn, have new experiences, and tap the wisdom of other people
- **Imagination**: creativity and vision, including with respect to possible futures in which all of these values have become more central to our society and institutions
- **Wisdom**: discernment; comfort with complexity; non-manipulability

Values Cont.

- **Courage**: fortitude to act with integrity even when there is a cost; capacity to thrive in the midst of ambiguity, uncertainty, and change; willingness to acknowledge vulnerability
- **Community**: belief that advancing the general welfare requires organized, collective work, enacted through relationships, partnerships, and networks, leveraging the diverse perspectives and talents of many people in order to produce benefits greater than the sum of their individual contributions
- **Participation**: action with other people to develop and achieve shared visions of the common good
- **Stewardship**: responsibility to act individually and collectively in ways that support others’ well-being, and the preservation and cultivation of resources, including norms and processes, necessary for all to thrive
- **Resourcefulness**: capacity to improvise, seek and gain knowledge, solve problems, and develop productive public relationships and partnerships
- **Hope**: belief in the power of people to bring about desired transformations; tenacity

Civic Literacy and Discernment, encompassing individual and collective knowledge of democracy’s principles, contested features, history, and expressions in the U.S. and around the world; knowledge of the philosophical and practical dimensions of public policy issues, and understanding of different perspectives on those issues; and the capacity to distinguish factual claims made credibly and in good faith from error and propaganda.

Civic Agency, encompassing individuals’ self-conception as active agents shaping their world, as well as their capacities to recognize cultural practices, navigate complex institutions and undemocratic environments, imagine alternative arrangements and futures, and develop strategies for effective individual and collective action; and the collective capacities to develop a vision for our common life, recognize and respond to problems, make decisions generally accepted as legitimate, and foster the ongoing development of all of these capacities.
Real Communication, encompassing individual and collective capacities to engage in civil, unscripted, honest communication grounded in our common humanity, including about issues in connection with which individuals disagree based on their different stakes, life experiences, values, and aspirations; and the sensitivity and situational awareness to listen well and communicate authentically and effectively with different audiences.

Critical Solidarity, encompassing individual and collective recognition of the intrinsic worth and equality of all human beings, capacity to envision and identify with each other’s journeys and struggles, and disposition to work for the full participation (Strum, Eatman, Saltmarsh & Bush, 2011) of all Americans in our democratic life and against violations of people’s agency and equality.

Civic Courage, encompassing individuals’ willingness to risk position, reputation, and the comforts of stability in order to pursue justice and remove barriers to full participation in democratic life, openness to learning from others, including people with less formal training, positional power, and social status, and resilience in the face of adversity; and the collective capacity to embrace changes in cultural practices and institutional arrangements when such changes promote the general welfare and full participation in democratic life.

Integrity and Congruence, encompassing individual and collective capacities and commitments to enact democratic values in our everyday interactions, professional roles, cultural practices, institutional arrangements, public decisions, policies, and laws.

Sharing Responsibility and Control - Is there room within courses and programs to shift some responsibility and control from educators to students?

Enabling Spontaneity - To the extent that courses and programs involve scripted content-delivery, directed behaviors, or rote learning, is there room to afford students more flexibility and space for spontaneity?

Embracing Vulnerability - Can we approach courses, programs, and everyday campus interactions with more humility and a greater willingness to be vulnerable, so that students are more likely to experience faculty, staff, themselves, and each other as

Fostering Relationships - Can we do more, both within and beyond courses and programs, to create opportunities for students to build authentic, mutual, and reciprocal relationships with each other, with faculty and staff members, and with community partners?

Building Collective Capacities - Can we do more to support students in activities that both enrich individual students and help them build collective civic capacity over time (as in the Passing the Gavel ritual), in forums that can evolve as their collective capacity grows?
Choosing Empowering Language - Both within our courses and programs and in our everyday relationships and communications, can we do more to choose inclusive and empowering language? Among other things, this would entail avoiding some very common uses of “institution voice,” as when “we” or “us” (meaning, the institution) shares information with “you” (students, who are symbolically reduced to customers, implicitly excluded from “we” and “us”).

Providing Support for Learning from Everyday Interactions - Can we do more to support students in learning from their unstructured experiences of navigating everyday politics, on campus and beyond, so that they become increasingly resilient

Transcending Categories and Boundaries - Can we ask ourselves all of the foregoing questions, not just about courses, programs, and other settings with obvious civic dimensions (service-learning, explorations of public policy or public opinion, deliberative dialogues, voter engagement programs) but about every learning context at our institutions: orientation sessions, student organization meetings, faculty office hours, commencement exercises? Can our entire institutions become teeming civic ecosystems in which students experience and develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions useful to a thriving democracy in many settings?

Contact Us:
- Michael Sanseviro:
  - mсанevи@kennesaw.edu
  - (470) 578-6310
- Stephanie King
  - sking@naspa.org
  - (202) 719-1193