IT'S TIME TO PUT THE C.A.R.T. BEFORE THE H.O.R.S.E. OR PUTTING CRITICAL, ANALYTICAL, AND REFLECTIVE THINKING BEFORE "HANDYMAN" ORIENTED RECREATION STUDENT EDUCATION

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Abstract: Higher education is the target of criticism for, among other things, the failure to teach students how to think--critically, analytically, and reflectively--and for placing too much emphasis on career preparation or professional education. While a number of external factors have, perhaps, led to such criticism being warranted, faculty--including those in Recreation and Leisure curricula--are the only ones who can meet the demand for emerging professionals who are professionally competent, can think, make decisions, and solve problems. Additionally, in order for Recreation and Leisure faculty to address the concerns of those outside the academy and to strengthen their positions of respect amongst their liberal arts and sciences and fine arts colleagues it may be necessary to increase the emphasis on thinking critically, analytically, and reflectively and to reconsider their emphasis on career preparation in the marketing of academic programs. At the same time, respect may be enhanced by further eliminating the "handyman" or vocational perceptions that often result from programs of professional credentialing, particularly curricular accreditation. This may be accomplished by revising accreditation standards to reflect significant emphasis on classroom activities that require students to make decisions, solve problems, and thing critically, analytically, and reflectively.

Introduction

Higher education has recently been the focus of critical review, and of the call for increased accountability. Institutions are frequently accused of granting undergraduate degrees to individuals who lack the ability to effectively communicate, to work cooperatively, and to "think on their feet." While there may be a tendency to focus on the minority of cases, the mystical nature of academe makes it an even more savory target. It is human nature to be more critical of those individuals or institutions that are foreign or remote. Nevertheless, some of the criticism may be warranted. Insiders have known for some time that 1) entering freshmen are often inadequately prepared for college-level work, 2) many schools value excellence in teaching less than the generation of grant funds and scholarship, and 3) a terminal degree does not necessarily prepare an individual to enter the classroom as a member of the professorate.

The enrollment driven funding of academic institutions may, likewise, contribute to the criticism. Most institutions, particularly those receiving state support, are funded on the basis of enrollment rather than on the basis of quality. In fact, state legislatures may have no other reliable criteria available. Higher education is still conflicted within its ranks as to what constitutes good teaching, student competency, good scholarship, and the importance of service. Until these issues are resolved those controlling the flow of funds to individual campuses may have little choice but to base critical decisions on student "head count" or on the perceived economic return of the investment to the community. The prevalence of the "head count" criterion has resulted in some campuses adjusting admission standards, increasing freshman class sizes, and spending an increasing amount for remedial services and less time on college-level work.

None of the aforementioned realities lessens the responsibility of faculty to address the criticisms identified; they simply make the task more difficult. In spite of these realities, plus the pressures to comply with curriculum accreditation and professional certification standards, faculty are the only ones who can meet the responsibilities to the students, future employers, and service recipients.

Of the shortcomings of today's graduates mentioned, the third may well be the most difficult to rectify. It may be the most discomforting for faculty and students and the task is the most difficult to define. While communication skills may be addressed in composition and speech classes and working cooperatively can be fostered by requiring students to participate in group processes, teaching students critical (C), analytical (A), and reflective (R) thinking (T) is substantially more difficult. It is very likely the academic mission for which many faculty are the least prepared.

Defining the Problem

"Everyone agrees that students learn in college, but whether they learn to think is more controversial" (McKeachie, 1992, p. 3). This statement introduces the controversy confronting higher education today. Bannon (1981, p. 3) was more to the point when he wrote, "Ask any educator, employer, or recent graduate what is lacking in education today. Their answer probably would be practical skills in how to read, write, and think. Such skills are considered so fundamental that they are simply overlooked, especially on the college level. Most students are unaware that they lack them; employers, on the other hand, expect to have to train employees anyway." In the same work (p. 4) Bannon further defined the task facing faculty when he stated, "These problems are not solved solely by many years of education. They also require an ability to think clearly and logically, to judge, to select, and to predict outcomes. Most importantly, they require an ability to make decisions and to transform them into successful solutions."

There are some other reasons for dedicating our curricula to the pursuit of C.A.R.T. These reasons relate to the status of such curricula on individual campuses. Demonstrating that students are acquiring these skills may offset perceptions by the liberal arts disciplines (English, History, Philosophy, Anthropology, and others) that our curricula are comprised

of nothing other than vocational education, or that they prepare students to work in a career field that few of the aforementioned faculty have little understanding of as to its breadth, complexity, or relevance. The true eclectic nature of Recreation and Leisure education and its relevance to the educational mission of the academy is often overshadowed by the emphasis on professional education or the marketing and recruitment emphasis on enabling a student to gain entry into therapeutic recreation, tourism management, municipal recreation, outdoor recreation, or into the myriad of other areas of professional endeavor. Perhaps it is this emphasis on professional education that has resulted in curricula and their faculty being perceived as less academic, and less capable of contributing to the liberal arts based general education component of the educational mission. The relevance to that mission may likely be measured by criteria other than numbers of majors and FTE (full-time equivalencies) generated or whether or not the curriculum is approved by its Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) approved accrediting body. It may be as much an issue of the academic credibility or of the perceived academic rigor. This is to say whether or not the curriculum is perceived as one that requires its students to think and solve problems may be the essential ingredient in determining the curriculum's centrality to the academic mission. The point being, whether or not a program of professional education continues to exist may rely heavily upon its willingness to put the C.A.R.T. before the H.O.R.S.E. or "Handyman" Oriented Recreation Student Education.

The Components and Their Characteristics

Critical thinking today is unfortunately a foreign concept to many entering students, and the traditional venue for teaching such has become less attractive to the American college student. Perhaps Kinney said it best when he wrote, "Liberal arts courses are no longer at the center of the institution, and what they teach is perceived tangential to the work going on in the colleges of business, agriculture, engineering, medicine, and law or in the career-education technical programs. Today's students have never known colleges and universities to be different. It is hardly surprising, then, that many students shrug off background clatter about critical thinking as not only irrelevant but alien. Their job, they feel, is to get the training necessary for entry into a promising career, not to waste time learning how to think critically..." (Young, 1980, p. 4). Most faculty today will likely agree that little has changed since Kinney first penned his observations. It would then seem logical to assume if students are spending less time in the tradition venue (liberal arts) for imparting critical thinking skills that those faculty in the professional areas have an obligation to incorporate such in their curricula.

Perhaps one of the better definitions of critical thinking is offered by Bandman and Bandman. They view it as the " 'rational examination of ideas, inferences, assumptions, principles, arguments, conclusions, issues, statements, beliefs and actions' " (van Hooft, Gillam & Byrnes, 1995, p. 5). Halpern (1996, p. 5) provides further insights. According to Halpern, "The 'critical' part of thinking denotes an evaluation component. Sometimes the word *critical* is used to convey something negative, as when we say, "She was critical of the movie.' But, evaluation can or should be a constructive reflection of positive and negative attributes. When we think critically, we are evaluating the outcomes of our thought processes--how good a decision is or how well a problem has been solved. Critical thinking also involves evaluating the thinking process--the reasoning that went into a conclusion we've arrived at or the kinds of factors considered in making a decision. Critical thinking is sometimes called direct thinking because it focuses on obtaining a desired outcome." Earlier she provided further clarification by stating, "The term critical thinking is used to describe thinking that is purposeful, reasoned, and goal directed. It is the kind of thinking involved in solving problems, formulating inferences, calculating likelihoods, and making decisions" (1989, p. 5). Though there are a number of variations with respect to just what is meant by critical thinking there does seem to be a consensus that thinking critically involves the objective attempt to judge the merits and faults of a decision, issue, situation, proposal, or an individual.

When viewing critical thinking as the skill of identifying merits and faults, the faculty should take measures to develop the skill in the context of proactive as well as reactive thinking. Critical thinking is a skill to exercise prior to as well as after the implementation of an action. Across the curricula courses (most or all) should require students to identify alternative actions and the scope of consequences of each. When a faculty member inquires of a student what she or he would do in a specific situation the follow-up questions should always be "Why?" and "What are possible alternative actions and their consequences?" Students should be expected to do more than simply make decisions; they should be required to justify their decisions, demonstrate awareness of the scope of possibilities, and to express an awareness of the merits and faults of each--even those which may appear to be less popular or even "politically incorrect". The scope of possibilities should extend to the agency, the consumer, the community, and the profession. It goes without saying that the critical thinking process should be framed by the mission of the agency, the needs of the consumer, the welfare of the community as a whole, the capabilities of the providers, and the values of all concerned. Faculty must impart to the future professionals that critical thinking applied only in hindsight is of limited value and of little comfort to those negatively effected by its tardy application. The key is for faculty to focus less on the product and more on the process when it comes to making decisions and solving problems.

Analytical thinking is that process that engages the student in determining why or how something happened, whether the outcome be positive or negative, and from a proactive perspective it engages the student in determining the steps necessary for the successful completion of a task. Perhaps it is analytical thinking that is the most painful or the one which requires the thinker to be the most introspective. It also requires the individual to disengage from the mindset of problem-based thinking, a mode of thinking that suggests that one needs only to engage in analytical

thinking when something is less successful than desired. A truly analytical thinker does not take success for granted and dedicates as much energy to determining why something was successful or even far exceeded expectations as to determining why something was less successful. Such an individual demonstrates and advocates for proactive thinking and the prevention of problems as much as for the solution of problems. To produce such analytical thinkers the faculty member has the task of convincing students of the value of honest self-assessment and of the need to first look inward when searching for those factors that led to a particular outcome. Doing so may be made easier if the faculty member demonstrates such a willingness by accepting blame when appropriate.

Whether analyzing outcomes for which the individual was totally, partially, or not at all responsible, an effective outcome of the exercise is dependent upon two elements. First, the individual must possess a clear understanding of the desired outcomes. Not only of the stated goals, but of the relationship of goals to the stated mission and vision of the agency. Time spent analyzing the failure to achieve a goal that was not central to the mission of the agency expends energy that may well be spent in other endeavors.

The second element is a thorough understanding of the specific tasks required for a successful outcome. The individual thinking analytically must frame the process around the specific measures taken to assess the need for the program (the desires and needs of the service recipients and the mission of the agency), the specific elements of planning, the steps taken to implement the program, and means by which the evaluation process itself was developed and administered. These phases should be familiar to all students who have been enrolled in a curriculum's programming course. However, whether the individual is planning a program of activities or developing a long-range plan for the entire agency the development of a successful action plan is dependent upon the individual's ability to think analytically. Both endeavors require the identification of desired outcomes and of the specific actions necessary to attain the stated outcomes. Ideally all courses within the core curriculum should require students to develop such action plans; if not all, at least those courses where the primary focus is either programming or administration.

The action plan will both guide the programmer and administrator in answering the "How" and Why" of the decision-making and problem-solving endeavors. Before the fact, the process of analytical thinking should serve as a guide for attaining an outcome. After the fact, the process will enable the individual to determine why an outcome was or was not realized or what additional steps could be taken to assure future or additional success. Leaders of dynamic or successful agencies are characteristically never satisfied. They not only endeavor to determine "how" something can be achieved and "why" something happened the way it did, but "what" can be done to make it even more successful.

Whether from the planning or evaluation perspectives faculty must address the issue of ego if they are to successfully foster analytical thinking. While most have little difficulty taking credit for success, there are a number that find it more difficult to assume responsibility for outcomes that are less successful than hoped. Faculty should pursue learning activities which involve students in making difficult decisions or solving difficult problems for which answers may not be easily found in the literature. Situations should be selected which place the burden on the student, or situations where the student has few options for abdication of decisions and actions. Faculty must force the student to first look inward or to his or her own actions, whether the results are successful or unsuccessful. Other students in the class should be instructed to analyze the presenting student's actions and to share their findings or opinions in a helpful, honest, and nonconfrontational manner. To develop truly analytical thinkers faculty must convey the essence of such thinking; namely, it begins with the self.

Reflective thinking was the focus of the educational philosopher John Dewey. In 1910 he defined it as the "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the future conclusions to which it tends" (Dewey, 1910, p. 9). It is, also, the process which makes information useful. Without it knowledge prepares us for little other than Trivial Pursuit and we become hostages to those who are able to sort out facts or see their relevance to issues at hand or to the future. Those who do not think reflectively when armed with knowledge are responsible for the adage, "History repeats itself." Had the political leaders of the U. S. been thinking reflectively they may have been able to forecast and plan for the consequences of the demise of the Soviet Union, a confederation that had constrained ethnic hatreds in Eastern Europe. So what is reflective thinking? It is the ability to understand the implications of decisions and actions or to draw from the wells of knowledge that information which will enable us to act successfully. It is that thinking process which truly frees us. Contrary to the adage that "knowledge is freedom" it is thinking reflectively about that knowledge that gives us freedom. Hitler knew that in order to succeed he had to control or destroy the intelligensia of Germany or those individuals capable of thinking reflectively about his actions and his tenets espoused in *Mein Kampf*. The first concentration camps were for the reflective thinkers, not for the Jews.

Reflective thinking enables students to use knowledge to be proactive thinkers by drawing from their past experiences and field of knowledge. Simply put, it is the ability to see the relevance of A to Z or to understand the implications of today's decision on future events. It is what the faculty member is encouraging when students are required to search the literature outside the major. Hopefully it is reflective thinking that the National Council on Therapeutic Recreation Certification is encouraging when it requires students to take coursework outside of the major (Sociology, Psychology, Anatomy and Physiology, etc.).

With respect to what faculty can do to promote reflective thinking on the part of their students, King and Kitchener offer some suggestions. Among these are:

- Show respect for students as people regardless of the developmental level(s) they may be exhibiting.
- Create opportunities and provide encouragement for students to make judgements and to explain what they believe.
- Create multiple opportunities for students to examine different points of view on a topic reflectively.
- Understand that students differ in regard to their epistemic assumptions (assumptions about knowledge).
- Provide both challenges and support in interactions with students.
- Recognize that challenges and supports can be grounded emotionally as well as cognitively.
- Familiarize students with ill-structured problems within your own discipline or areas of expertise. (1994, pp. 230-248)

Finally, faculty, while being supportive and challenging, must require students to reach to the depth and width of their personal experiences, the professional literature, the literature of related areas, and human resources available to them to develop an understanding that each decision and action has a consequence and that in human services events around them do have consequences on the what, how, when, and why they do things. They must be led to the realization that their actions reflect beyond the immediate concern. Students must, also, be made to realize that while creativity is essential to successful recreation programming, that creativity in the absence of reflective thinking is as likely to be destructive to those we serve as it is to be positive or constructive.

Thinking, Credentialing, and Marketing

Today's Recreation and Leisure Studies or Parks, Recreation, and Tourism educator is confronted by a number of opposing forces. There is the pressure to maintain enrollments, to maintain the curriculum's accredited status, to assure the student's eligibility for professional certifications, and to respond to the needs of the professional community. Also, there is the pressure from the academic community to demonstrate centrality to its mission. The third force emanates from the general community and its expectations that all college graduates think--critically, analytically, and reflectively. To satisfy all parties faculty may need to reconfigure the image many have on their campuses, while at the same time requiring students to think and obtain skills necessary to adequately provide for the needs of their consumers.

It may be beneficial to reconsider the emphasis on credentialing. Perhaps one of the things faculty should be the most proud of may be one of the obstacles to being considered "academic" by the typically largest faculty body on campus--the liberal arts and sciences. Frequently the term "accreditation" relates specifically to programs preparing students to enter a specific career. Furthermore, a review of the *Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Baccalaureate Programs in Recreation, Park Resources and Leisure Services* of the NRPA/AALR Council on Accreditation may well support the assumption that such programs do not place adequate emphasis on the development and application of thinking skills. The "handyman" or vocational education perception could well be strengthened by the repeated reference to the faculty's obligation to demonstrate that students have a "Knowledge of..." and an "Understanding of..." with reference to specific competencies. Within the section pertaining to the core curriculum's competencies only six of the forty-one standards are students required to demonstrate the "Ability to...", and of these six three refer to the application of technical skills. Furthermore, in only one standard is specific reference made to decision-making (1999). Nowhere is specific reference made to problem-solving or to thinking. Maybe curricular leaders should petition for more demanding standards with respect to emphasis in the core on activities requiring students to think or reason and to reach beyond the boundries of discipline-specific literature or resources. Perhaps Karabell is correct when he states, "In an ideal world, education and credentializing would be compatible, but in the world of higher education today, they are often at odds" (Karabell, 1998, p. 2).

Perhaps curricular leaders should place less emphasis on professional education in the marketing of programs. It may be more beneficial to emphasize the essence of our curricula; namely, the emphasis on programming, facilities development; the significance of play; ethics; the needs of individuals with disabilities; writing goals and objectives; techniques of budgeting; concepts of organizational behavior; use of communication tools; computer applications; understanding of legal concepts; and the development of appropriate interpersonal skills. Few would argue that these are skills that will benefit all individuals, regardless of chosen fields of endeavor. If remarketing or de-emphasizing the professional or "handyman" nature of recreation, leisure, and parks programs the respectability being sought from the liberal arts (and fine arts) community will not be attained unless programs can also demonstrate an emphasis on thinking by classroom rigor and, if necessary, by accreditation standards that specifically address acquisition of such skills.

Conclusion

We may find inspiration for accomplishing this task of putting C.A.R.T. in the forefront by frequently reminding ourselves of the challenge facing American higher education today. "In the final analysis, the real challenge of college, for students and faculty members alike, is empowering individuals to know that the world is far more complex than it first appears, and that they must make interpretive arguments and decision-judgements that entail real consequences for which they must take responsibility and from which they may not flee by disclaiming expertise" (The challenge of connecting learning, 1991, pp. 16-17). The aforementioned challenge is likewise the responsibility of contemporary faculty, regardless of

curricular affiliation. The responsibility cannot simply be delegated or abdicated to other members of the academy.

Finally, the professorate may do well to remember the words of David Porter in the June 30, 2000 edition of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. He reminds us that "The academy exists to discover new ideas, explore new directions, see the familiar afresh. It is the teacher or president willing to take chances who best awakes that potential, whether in the lab or classroom, the staff meeting or boardroom." Furthermore, he states, "The qualities that I've mentioned as essential to both teachers and administrators are also what we try to teach our students: to be passionate and witty advocates, imaginative liaisons and interpreters, leaders and learners who complement meticulous preparation with the daring to plunge into the unknown" (p. A60). Perhaps he is reminding those of us in professional preparation academic programs to reconsider our priorities and that we should be the dogs, not the tails.

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