

Lead Article:

- Are our students being transformed?

Inside:

- From the Research Interviews
- Still to Come
- Colloquium and Workshop April 2012
- Final Publication
- Contacts

Incorporating Student Experience and Transformative Learning into Curriculum Design and Planning of Undergraduate Theological Degrees.

A National Research Project supported by the AUSTRALIAN LEARNING & TEACHING COUNCIL and the AUSTRALIAN & NEW ZEALAND COUNCIL OF DEANS OF THEOLOGY

Are our students being transformed?

Mezirow's phases of transformative learning include an initial *disorienting event*, leading on to *critical reflection* on previously held core assumptions, accompanied by *reflective discourse* to test the validity of both assumptions and critique, issuing in some *active outcome*. Significant learning arises from *perspective transformation*, which occurs when people examine their values, presuppositions and beliefs through such processes of critical reflection and rational discourse. Hence, *developmental learning is a process of perspective transformations towards meaning perspectives which are more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative*.

Does the previous paragraph resonate with our theological offerings? Do our classes facilitate such critical reflective development and active outcomes? Do our graduates exhibit such inclusive and integrative perspectives? Some recent interviews with faculty, graduates and church leaders who employ graduates suggest some differences in perceptions in this regard. Most faculty reported that there is no intentionality about such perspective integration, but they are confident that it happens through extra-curricular and informal processes. Recent graduates, however, were not so unanimous, with only about half indicating such development, while half reported no observable

focus in this area. Perhaps most disconcerting was the response of church leaders and employers, who quite strongly lamented the lack of such personal holistic integration. The common assessment was that many graduates have not managed to integrate their learning and their life. While all categories agreed that biblical and theological knowledge is very well addressed in the colleges and universities, the aspect of personally transformed graduates with integrated life and learning was seen as a serious shortcoming, despite the fact that most considered it to be even more important than the cognitive elements.

From the Research Interviews

Variant Perceptions of Institutions' Strengths

	Biblical/theological Knowledge	Ministry Skills	Personal Growth
Faculty	<p>95%: good.</p> <p>5%: lack significant grasp of key aspects or progress through the course.</p>	<p>20%: not our business.</p> <p>80%: work in progress; traditionally weak; working well to redress.</p> <p><i>Basis:</i> all (most) faculty have pastoral experience, so naturally ground teaching in experiential application.</p>	<p>10%: strategic & successful, esp via extra-curricular activities.</p> <p>90%: "wish and hope;" no strategy for integration.</p>
Graduates	<p>100%: good.</p>	<p>50%: successfully prepared for ministry.</p> <p>50%: not good.</p> <p><i>Basis:</i> faculty present one model of ministry, based on their own individual experience, related to an outdated ministry not future needs.</p>	<p>50%: happens informally, esp via PC/growth groups and extra-curricular aspects.</p> <p>50%: no focus.</p>
Church Leaders & Employers	<p>100%: good.</p>	<p>20%: good.</p> <p>80%: poor.</p> <p><i>Basis:</i> aloof; not in touch with congregational realities and needs.</p>	<p>100%: want it as a priority.</p> <p>20%: good recent progress.</p> <p>80%: disappointed.</p> <p><i>Basis:</i> inability to integrate learning and life.</p>

***How do you rate your institution in the above areas?
What evidence do you have?***

Still to Come

Colloquium and Workshop: 27 April 2012

This is a pivotal element in the research. Representatives of ALL theological higher education providers are invited to attend the one-day event in Sydney.

The day will include a report on the findings of the two years of research and, importantly, participants are asked to bring to the workshop the creative ideas and practices they have successfully implemented to achieve transformative goals in their colleges and universities.

Good practices and recommendations from the day will be incorporated into the final publication.

Full details of agenda and registration will be distributed to all institutions during November.

Final Publication: due late 2012

Contacts

- for general information about the Project
 - Project Leader: Professor Paul Beirne
Melbourne College of Divinity
21 Highbury Grove KEW VIC 3101
Phone: (03) 9853 3177; Email: admin@mcd.edu.au
- for specific activities and participation in the Project
 - Project Manager: Dr Les Ball
33 Cooradilla Street JINDALEE QLD 4074
Phone: 0448 143 778; Email: les.j.ball@gmail.com
- for queries about or issues arising from the conduct of the research
 - Human Research and Ethics Committee
Melbourne College of Divinity
21 Highbury Grove KEW VIC 3101
Phone: (03) 9853 3177; Email: admin@mcd.edu.au
- Website: <http://web.me.com/anzcdt>



Promoting excellence in higher education

Support for this project has been provided by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council Ltd, an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council.