

# In search of transformative moments: Blending community building pursuits into lifelong learning experiences

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## 1. Pursuit of asset-based thinking

*Everyone possesses talents and gifts that enrich the lives of individuals and communities (McKnight & Block, 2010)*

- Do we create opportunities for lifelong learners to meet outside of the classroom?
- What invitations do we send to our members as we try to set the right tone for lifelong learning through storytelling and sharing of different perspectives?
- How are we showing appreciation and recognition for each individual's gifts?

## 2. Pursuit of critical reflection

*Awareness of underlying assumptions and power dynamics equalizes experience (Brookfield, 1995; Freire, 2000)*

- How might we prepare instructors to adopt critical reflection in teaching practices?
- How do we encourage our students to be critically reflective?
- What steps do we take to equalize access to expertise by students and instructors in our classrooms?

## 3. Pursuit of systems thinking

*The dynamics of phenomena studied are embedded in a larger whole (von Bertalanffy, 1968; Emery & Flora, 2006)*

- What guidelines do we give to our instructors so that they present topics holistically?
- How willing are we to pursue depth and awareness in our learning experiences?
- How are we inviting learners to share their expertise with life's various systems?

## 7. Pursuit of meaning in life

*Giving back elevates us above the everyday and helps learners find purpose in life (Frankl, 2006; Lerner, 2004)*

- Do our classes allow for reflection on what it means to leave a legacy?
- What volunteer opportunities do we promote in our organizations and programs?
- What helps us establish an atmosphere of sharing and serving inside and outside of our communities?

Positive individual  
and community  
transformations

## 4. Pursuit of cognitive vibrancy

*A positive psychological focus leads to physical and mental health and wellbeing (Antonovsky, 1979)*

- How challenging or in-depth are the questions asked in classes and do they allow disparate points of views to emerge from different learners?
- What activities do we include in our curriculum to enhance creative expression?
- Are we inviting our students to reflect on meaningful past experiences in their lives and to share these experiences with others?

## 6. Pursuit of creative expression

*Creative expression unlocks new learning opportunities (Hoggan et al., 2009; Westoby & Dowling, 2013)*

- How can creative expression be cultivated among the communities of our learners?
- What roles are we allowed to play and perform in the classrooms?
- As we interact with one another, what are we learning and how do we use what we are learning beyond the classroom?

## 5. Pursuit of inclusiveness

*Honoring diversity means to unleash the asset of difference rather than to manage it (Smith, 2012; hooks, 2010)*

- Who is *not* in our classrooms currently?
- What messages are engrained in the invitations we send out?
- In the classroom setting, are we – as instructors and students – willing to put ourselves in positions of vulnerability as we embrace diversity?

## Contact information

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## About this inquiry

We reflected on how community building enhances lifelong learning programs. Adding to Gruidl and Hustedde (2015, 2003) we postulated seven pursuits through which practitioners can facilitate positive transformations for individuals and communities. For each pursuit, we offer some questions to encourage reflection about our own praxis.

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