

The Common Good: Strategies and Solutions

Mendocino College, Fort Bragg Campus

Spring, 2017

Purpose:

The purpose of the class was to grapple with the difficult questions of the day, together, as a group representing the common good.

Methods:

Present ideas and practices that have the potential to improve on our methods of working together and maximize our civic engagement.

Practicum:

Each student chooses a project to work on. Encourage collaboration and working in groups.

Teaching:

As the teacher, it is my job to point out the relationships in the components of the commons, the community. The various elements need to be shown as a whole, all in relationship to the natural environment in relationship and to each other.

1. Setting the Stage, Creating the Atmosphere

Create an atmosphere that engenders and encourages trust, respect, risk-taking, uncertainty, creativity, equality, empathy and responsibility.

It is important to give some attention to the process of change. Identify some of the feelings that occur during the change process so that people can recognize them and make a choice as to how to act, as opposed to just habitual reacting. For instance, changing ways of doing things involves moving through uncertainty, often leading to discomfort. If people can recognize the uncertainty and create new ways of a more inclusive, expansive, choice moving forward.

If we create new ways of being with each other, there is more likelihood of creating a strategy that is meaningful and effective. The basic idea is to model systemic change. Provide ways to practice it:

- **Creating a holistic approach**

I wove in various ways of learning that engage people through the different senses, for example, I included walking, stretching, balancing, yoga, singing, tonal healing, and music. Each of these elements were presented by professionals in the community.

- **Recreate resistance.**

Go as deep as you can, find out what is in common, and manifest that. Continue to learn from the experience. Move on. Repeat.

- **Create a safe atmosphere for this process to evolve.**

I also tried to create a rhythm to each class, so that over time, a certain familiarity might be experienced.

2. The Vision

Hold the vision of the future in your mind all the while we are working towards it.

- Create the common conversation. Look to others who have put a lot of time and effort into such an effort.

The Next System Project at thenextsystem.org is the resource that I used. I showed the videos, and followed each on by a conversation. Within each broad example, I tried to connect the idea to the local situation.

In addition to the big picture of what we want, and how to achieve it, I wanted people to see the relationship of people at the local level who are expressing the values right now in our community. I presented a panel of local, engaged citizens the class to share their vigor, their life force, their passion for their life's work. We had panels, lectures, and discussions. This helped demonstrate the existence of a broader network of working towards the common good.

3. Civic Engagement: Practicum

Can we coevolve? Can we work with nature and each other to evolve instead of destroying? I believe we can practice moving a positive agenda forward. I think we can learn it by practicing together. Move from curiosity towards and discover what we can do together.

We did some brain mapping exercises that flushed out local issues of interest to the participants. From there, groups were formed and people working together. Research, set parameters for the project, and determine a realistic goal within the time constraints. Some of the planning was done in class, so that I could coach them when they got bogged down or stuck. Each group presented a final report at the end of the session. I only wish that I had videoed this aspect.

The idea was to work together for the duration of the class and report on what the group learned and accomplished.

There was a sense of all working together even though they were working on different issues. They were all aware and respectful of each others work and how it related to the commons. There were several opportunities for helping across group lines.

4. Schedule

The class was once a week for eight weeks and lasted 3 hours.

The class titles are as follows:

- The Next System: What is it?
- The Next System: What do we want?
- The Art of Possibility
- Solidarity Economy
- Local Issues (class projects, in class work)
- Carbon Sequestration and a local farm family
- Qualities of Change, Making Change
- Final Project Presentations and the road map ahead