

***Teaching Our Students to Challenge
Assumptions:
Six Practices for Surfacing and Exploring
Assumptions, and Designing Action***

***Muneer I. Ahmad, American University
Susan J. Bryant, City University of New York
Jean Koh Peters, Yale Law School***

Bridging the Gap between Assumption and Action

- Surface Assumptions
- Explore Assumptions
- Challenge Assumptions
- Act, Mindful of Assumptions

Naming and Framing

- NAMING
 - Concepts and Techniques that we already use
- FRAMING
 - Classroom Discussion
 - Discussions with students
 - Discussions with clients
 - Discussions with colleagues
 - Our own reflection

Three Pervasive Values

- NONJUDGMENT
- ISOMORPHIC ATTRIBUTION
- USER-FRIENDLY, EASILY LEARNABLE SKILLS

Overview

- 6 Practices
- 3 Settings
- 1 Scenario

3 Settings to Use 6 Practices

- Classroom
 - #1 Parallel Universe Thinking
 - #2 Except when / Especially when
- Supervision
 - #3 Narrative
 - #4 Disorienting Moment/Reflection
- Collegial Conversation
 - #5 Untangling Agendas
 - #6 Methodological Belief & Doubt

A video still showing two women sitting at a wooden table in a library. The woman on the left is wearing a blue and green striped sweater and is looking towards the woman on the right. The woman on the right is wearing a dark grey sweater and glasses, and is looking down at her hands. There are stacks of papers and a pink cup on the table. The background is filled with bookshelves containing many books. A white timestamp is overlaid at the bottom of the image.

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Clinic Seminar

Client Interviewing

Fall 2006

To: Immigrants' Rights Clinic
From: Margaret and Grace
Re: Interpretation Issues

Grace: *Mae, I know this is very difficult for you, but we would like to ask you a few more questions about when the soldiers attacked you.*

* * * *

[See handout]

1. Parallel Universe Thinking

“Entering the
cultural imagination
of the other”
--Raymonde Carroll

“Down the rabbit hole”
--Lewis Carroll

- Generating multiple explanations
- Suspending conclusions & judgments
- Enlarging & refracting understandings of how the world works
- Suggesting inquiries for future understanding

2. Except Whens & Especially Whens

Identifying generalizations in order to explore their validity

EVIDENCE

Client didn't understand there would be a pelvic exam

INFERENCE/GENERALIZATION

Men would not address pelvic exam with women because of gender norms

CONCLUSION

Reverend failed to interpret re. pelvic exam

The man is much older

The interpreter is well-trained

Especially When...

Except When...

INFERENCE/GENERALIZATION

Men would not address pelvic exam with women
because of gender norms

ESPECIALLY WHEN...

LEFT SIDE OF ROOM

1. Man is significantly older

EXCEPT WHEN...

RIGHT SIDE OF ROOM

1. Interpreter is well-trained

3. Engaging Narrative

- To Reveal Frames of Reference
- To Explore Assumptions Through Contrast
- To Encourage Rich Client Narrative

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Supervision

- Students - Margaret & Grace
 - listen for language & point of view
 - identify & adopt role's frame of reference
- Faculty & Observer -
 - Identify frames
 - Conflicting narratives
 - Explore these assumptions

Engaging Narrative

- To Reveal Frames of Reference
- To Explore Assumptions Through Contrast
- To Encourage Rich Client Narrative

4. Disorienting Moment

- Schema shape expectations
- Experience at odds with pre-existing schema- creates “Disorienting Moment”
- Assimilate new information into pre-existing schema
- Reflection - open to identify, explore, change

Free Writing Exercise

1 minute: Assuming that you must make the final intake decision on the spot, what would your decision be?

1 minute: List some of the major assumptions which underpin your answer.

5. Untangling Agendas

- **ASK:** How does each actor (including the supervisor and each student) view this situation? What are his unique hopes, fears, stakes?
- **GOAL:** Encourage students to consider the same situation from multiple perspectives simultaneously.
- **CONSIDER USING:** Venn diagrams, simple charts, or role playing.

6. Methodological Doubt and Belief

KEY: undertake pure doubt and pure belief:

- i. consciously
- ii. systematically
- iii. explicitly
- iv. with discipline

Exercise for two--3 minutes

Methodological Belief

– Take one person's answer and assumptions and have a conversation in which both of you:

- **believe** everything,
- **no matter how unlikely or repellent** it might seem
- to find **virtues or strengths** we might otherwise miss.

Exercise for two--3 minutes

Methodological Doubt

- Take *the same* person's answer and assumptions and have a conversation in which both of you:
 - **doubt** everything,
 - **no matter how compelling** it might seem
 - to find **flaws or contradictions** we might otherwise miss.

Three Observations about Methodological Doubt and Belief

1. Disciplines you to be wary of acting BEFORE you have subjected your action plan to both methodological doubt and belief
2. Creates a practice for deeply exploring closely, passionately held views
3. Balances out the widely held misconception that rigorous thinking requires doubt alone

Six Practices

- #1 Parallel Universe Thinking
- #2 Except when / Especially when
- #3 Narrative
- #4 Disorienting Moment/Reflection
- #5 Untangling Agendas
- #6 Methodological Belief & Doubt