

Why do students rave over Exploring Teamwork Essentials?

Chickering's Theory of Identity Development offers clues

“I liked the thought-provoking nature of the questions. They forced us to delve into our hearts and reveal our fundamental values.”

“It brought me closer to myself.”

“The powerful part was the centering aspect. The group discussions really helped me to center myself. At that center, I found a lot in common with my group.”

“I actually experienced a sit down and deep thought with people who are different from me. This doesn't happen much.”

“I loved the depth of the questions. They will make me think for a long time to come.”

“The movie was an eye-opener for me.”

“I loved working in small groups and having a serious discussion that made us really think. It taught us about our classmates and we learned things about ourselves.”

“I loved the insight and diverse answers. I could feel my mind stretching.”

Background: From its first student test experience to the present, the Exploring Teamwork Essentials program (ETE) has generated an emphatically strong and meaningful response from students. People actually *love* it. Built from insight and experience working with young adults in the workforce, ETE is a foundational program lasting a mere 3-4 hours. A primer designed to provide education and skill-building in teamwork essentials, ETE was also designed to develop diversity appreciation, promote inclusive behavior, and nudge students to understanding themselves a little better.

I was hopeful that the program's content would resonate with students as much as its rationales would appeal to higher education leaders. But quite frankly, the student reactions have literally blown me away.

ETE was designed to fill an observable need. After working in high tech and operations environments for over 14 years, I knew young adults needed to become skilled in the art of teamwork, including its diversity dynamics. From experience, I also knew that when diversity content was offered within the context of developing teamwork or leadership skills, young workers were immediately drawn in.

ETE Basics: First students read a short booklet that educates on the importance of developing team skills, the attributes of high performing teams, and the role of understanding and appreciating diversity in a team setting. Short reflection exercises are assimilated through student small group discussion. Then they watch a documentary film in which a diverse group of people answer timeless questions. In the next segment they again form small groups to answer and discuss the film's core questions. Here, they practice skills of listening, articulating views, and suspending judgment on the views of others. Finally, an assimilation exercise concludes the program.

After researching the topic of student development, I came across a body of work that may offer an explanation for the program's strong appeal.

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No doubt well known to most of you, Chickering's Theory of Identity Development, as described through its seven vectors, illuminates the probable intersection of student motivation and the ETE experience.

ETE: Explaining Student Engagement through Chickering's Seven Vectors

Chickering's seven vectors enable student development professionals to understand how students adjust to the uncertainty of adulthood. His theory provides descriptors of the emotional and psychological transformation students might potentially undergo in college.ⁱ

Chickering's seven vectors remind me of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which also provides insight into human motivation and how needs are pursued in a somewhat sequential nature. Chickering offers a detailed view into the psychosocial motivations of the young adult in a similar vein.

Could it be that ETE simultaneously strikes the chords of many vectors, chords that students most desire to be struck? Following are very brief vector descriptions, explanations for how ETE program components satisfy motivations within each vector, and more student feedback.

Vector 1: Competence

Through the interpersonal component of this vector, the students strive to develop listening, understanding, and communication skills.

ETE features a small group session where students take turns answering questions like these:

- Why is there poverty and suffering in the world?
- Why don't people live up to their full potential?
- What is the greatest human quality?
- What does it mean to find true peace?

When students engage in this segment, one stated purpose is to practice listening skill. While each student practices articulating an opinion to a highly

relevant question, others are instructed to listen only until each person answers the same question. Finally, once everyone has their turn, they discuss points of commonality and difference.

“I'm not a good listener. But this time we learned to be good listeners.”

“I liked how we had a chance to actually talk and express the way they feel toward certain things and how everyone in the group was open-minded.”

“I learned to understand, listen to people more and not judge so quickly.”

“The program asked the deep questions to help you understand yourself and those around you.”

Vector 2: Managing Emotions

Students strive to develop awareness of and coping skills with emotions such as anxiety, fear, anger, guilt, etc.

Through the film *ONE*, ETE provides students with the idea that fear is a normal emotion to be managed. Importantly, the second small group exercise allows students to share their emotions by answering questions such as:

- What do I most fear?
- What distracts you most from living in the present moment?

Students learn that others are similar, often struggling with these emotions. Finally, since students are instructed that everyone's perspective is not to be argued or debated, the exercise provides a safe place

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to explore these emotions and overcome the fear of expression.

unique qualities be they physically, personality, or culturally derived. They become open to others.

“I liked the unique questions. They were not questions you hear on an everyday basis; it allowed you to open up.”

“I really liked hearing everyone's different views. It made me feel relaxed and close to my group.”

“I liked that we were all able to express ourselves without being judged.”

“The discussion provided a setting where I normally would have felt awkward, but sharing and respect came very easily.”

Through the student booklet, ETE offers compelling data that links diversity (behavior/style norms) and team performance. It also highlights key team-based communication and behavior norms across ethnicity, gender, generation, and work styles. Furthermore, the film opens the heart to accepting differences to the point of embracing them as special and to be valued.

Again, the questions and instructions force a temporary suspension of judgment. Students actually practice tolerance of diverse perspectives. In the process they experience the bond of inner commonality, which might also promote acceptance of outer difference.

“I got to see where others come from. The power is strong.”

“The book was so informational about teamwork and diversity. I really enjoyed it.”

“I liked the overall message of understanding.”

“The booklet was a great way to explore diversity and how it is a great thing.”

“It made me think about a wide perspective of diversity - I had to step outside of the box of myself.”

“I learned not to judge so quickly.”

“I most liked how I bonded with other students.”

Vector 3: Autonomy to Interdependence

Being able to take care of oneself, both emotionally and practically, is critically important to becoming independent from one's family of origin. This phase of development also recognizes that we can achieve emotional and instrumental autonomy and still rely on one another for support.

ETE simultaneously embraces autonomy and interdependence. Students learn the importance of team skills to life success (interdependence), while answering questions that promote an inventory of values separate from family.

“I liked that we had the opportunity to develop our own ideas about things.”

Vector 4: Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships

Students are motivated to develop the capacity for intimacy and to develop appreciation of differences. They develop tolerance of others'

Vector 5: Establishing Identity

In this phase students gain comfort with their body, appearance, gender, and sexual orientation. They develop a sense of self in social, historical, cultural contexts. From self

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awareness, esteem, and acceptance comes personal stability. These internal processes are important to establishing a positive identity.

others' views and perspectives. In this phase, self-respect is developed.

Through student exploration of identity-related questions, ETE does trigger self awareness. It invites self-reflection.

“The questions really made you think and allowed you to explore yourself and your ideas.”

Vector 6: Developing Purpose

Purpose includes development of career goals and personal aspirations – finding one’s bliss. It is where commitments to family are weighed against personal strivings. During this phase students establish, reinforce, or change their course of study in college.

In the film and through the discussions, students are exposed to many viewpoints and must contemplate and reveal their own to questions such as:

- What is the meaning of life to me?
- What is my greatest quality?
- When do I most live in the present moment, when time seems to fly?
- What is my wish for the world?
- What contribution to society do I want to make?

“I really enjoyed getting to discuss questions that provoke consideration regarding the ‘meaning of life.’”

“The film was amazing.”

“I learned that I am not doing everything I could to live my life to the fullest.”

Vector 7: Developing Integrity

With beliefs, values, and purposes established, integrity involves preserving them in the face of

It is a stretch to suggest ETE plays a role in this stage of development. This phase tends to occur toward the end of the college experience and is the culmination of developing the preceding vectors. However, as with the suggested alignment between ETE and Chickering’s vectors, the heart and mind are propped open, even if temporarily, to understanding oneself and your relationship to others.

“I felt reminded of the fact that we are all experiencing similar things and we all struggle with the same situations – made me think.”

“That’s the first time I’ve thought that deep in a long time.”

Conclusion:

Why is it that some students chose to continue with the ETE program after its formal conclusion almost every single time? Why did some continue on a Friday night, no less?

I don’t claim that ETE is a be-all end-all. I understand it is a basic team-skills primer that integrates diversity education and student bonding. With the insights gained from the Theory of Identity Development, I now suspect it is also just what students crave. Maybe this is a primer worth your consideration?

- Scott Boone

If you’d like to learn more, please go to www.positivediversity.com or contact me at scott@positivediversity.com or 248-348-9312.

ⁱ Flowers, Lamont A., "Developing Purpose in College: Differences between freshmen and seniors," College Student Journal, Sept., 2002

