

Nic Filzen, Faith Formation Curriculum Sample

Data Set for Faith and Human Development Considerations

(Each of the below folks are based on real people, but are generally fictional)

Christy, 8, is the oldest of two children in her family unit, although she has other half and step siblings after her biological parents remarried. She lives with her biological mother and stepfather. Christy is in the transitional, perhaps even liminal space between self-sovereign mind and socialized mind. She is also solidly out of Fowler's intuitive-projective faith and is at least in mythic-literal faith. She recently has begun to question the reality of Santa Claus, and she certainly questions the idea of a white-bearded old man as God. She does however have her own concepts of God. Once saying, "God is like an invisible string that connects all humans." Though her imagery was literal, it shows a complexity of imagination. Even though she has an open, inclusive grasp of religion and religious meaning, she often says things that mirror what her UU parents say, seemingly to earn approval from them – suggesting that she is indeed living within the mythic-literal faith stage. She is incredibly smart and is often ahead of her same-age peers in development stages in several ways. This includes her faith development, as she flashes clear signs of being in synthetic-conventional faith often. She becomes melancholic and despondent when she can't spend intimate time with her friends – who are important to her. This sadness and lashing out has been amplified by Covid-19 stay-at-home orders. She said about her upcoming birthday, "A birthday isn't worth having if it isn't with your friends." That said, she tends to dominate conversations and situations with whoever she is with (especially her peers) and doesn't have a solid grasp that the world doesn't revolve exclusively around her. She is half Indigenous Mexican (from her biological father), yet so far has not really had to wrestle with her multicultural heritage that much, presenting white in a white family. Her sister presents as Mexican a lot more. They have talked about their skin color differences, and Christy has lamented that her sister will have a more difficult life because of her darker skin. I believe she mostly resides in Atkinson, Morton, and Sue's "dissonance" stage, even though she hasn't had to really wrestle with her own ethnicity. She also frequently questions dominant values (though this may again be related to her socialized mind and parroting what her activist UU parents say; and, she is an intense perfectionist – reacting strongly when she fails – which is indicative of her need to succeed according to white supremacy standards.)

Autumn, 18, a senior in high school, has been applying for colleges for next school year. She just got accepted to the University of Oregon, which was her first choice, to study environmental justice. She has been a member of the worship arts team at USSB since I arrived as an intern, and I've been fortunate to have her as a worship associate during services I've led several times. In fact, I've worked with her more than any other member of the Worship Arts team. In that role, she has offered fantastic and profound reflections in worship, and always contributes real wisdom during Worship Arts meetings. I have told her on more than one occasion that she would make a great minister someday, something I've heard other folks tell her, too. She says it's definitely on her mind but wants to do the environmental work she plans on studying in college first. This is evidence of her ability to hold competing purposes simultaneously; and, a maturity far beyond a typical high school senior. And evidence that as an 18-year-old, is already solidly in Kegan's self-authoring mind. She is very involved in school music programs and talks frequently about being in

the marching band percussion pit. Between her music, school, and church responsibilities, she overextends herself sometimes and has asked to be excused from her duties as worship associate at the last minute a few times recently. Without a doubt, she is in the individuative-reflective stage of faith formation. Often speaking up for her appreciation of classically liberal UU values which promote individual beliefs and experiences – perhaps focusing on that aspect of our faith to the detriment of a larger picture (just like many of our older congregants). Autumn’s parents are divorced. Her mom is heavily involved with the church. I’ve never met her dad and don’t really know his story.

The plan

Both Christy and Autumn are developmentally advanced for their ages. Notably, both of their biological parents are divorced. Using Nye’s SPIRIT model as a basis, I’m going to offer them a shared opportunity to explore what it means to them that their parents have divorced. What big assumptions or fears they might have to be extra aware of because of that particular kind of grief. And, how they can hold that grief in care and community to mitigate any potential negative impacts that grief might have on their future mental health and relationships. Also, they are both overachievers. Which makes me curious. Perhaps their need to overachieve and negative reactions to anything less than perfection is related to the grief from their parents’ divorces, and therefore related to their big assumptions. I believe they share the similar big assumption that they won’t be of value and therefore not belong if they don’t excel at everything. Perhaps, as they share stories with each other in a unique space, utilizing imagination to promote relationship and intimacy, and similar life stories to create trust but at their unique development stages their perspectives will be complexified for the better.

Before implementing the workshop, I would confer with staff and expert laypeople to see if they agree with my developmental assessment of them and to co-create the workshop experience itself.

Agenda

Goal: Explore relationship with the stories they tell themselves about their families and love
Flush out awareness of each participants’ big assumption (it may be something different than assumed above)
Promote a healthier relationship with overachieving/perfectionism
Create a supportive space that encourages connection between unlikely allies

Materials: World of Experience Map, Pawns from a chess set, paper and pencils, dice (if needed)

Time: Two 45-minute sessions

Room/Contemplative Set-up:

Room with a lot of “imperfect” artwork, a large table with an extra-large World of Experience map and a chalice with a lot of imperfections. (In second session, will ask them what they think about the imperfections in the artwork and if it’s imperfect, what about it still makes it art.)

The Exercise (1st Session):

Process:

1. Musical chalice lighting (3 minutes)
(Ask Christy ahead of time what she would like to listen to for opening – her favorite quiet song) Christy lights chalice

2. Exercise: World of Experience Co-Created Game (28 minutes)
Invite silent reflection (4 minutes), first asking where in the world are you right now? Where do you want to be? What will it take to get there?

Use pawns from a chess set to indicate where you are, then invite them to work together to figure out a way to get them where they each want to go (it’s more than okay for it to be the same place). Have them create a game together. Stress that there is no wrong way to get where they want to be (because Christy can try to dominate rule making and enforcing with peers, this is where it becomes important that Autumn is older because Christy may not try to control things as much. They each can make four rules about the game, all with the intention of cooperating). No matter where they end up, they win. Mostly the point is to laugh with each other.

3. Process questions (9 minutes)
(text message discussion across the table, turn off autocorrect):
What does it mean to belong to your friends? What about your family?
What’s the difference between doing something right and doing something well?
Whose love will you lose if you mess up or make a mistake?
4. Closing (1 minutes)
“Recognizing that you probably weren’t able to finish this deep conversation in 10 minutes and ideas that will likely never be fixed or final, I invite you to continue this text conversation until the next time we meet”
5. Music (3 minutes)
(Ask Autumn ahead of time what she would like to listen to for closing – her favorite fun song) Autumn extinguishes chalice

(2nd Session plan and exercise TBD with input from participants and FF colleagues)