Student Autonomy: Advisors creating positive change for students

- What do we mean by autonomy?
- Freedom to choose.
- If so, then more choice should lead to more freedom and thus more autonomy.
- If that is the case then why doesn’t it always feel “positive”?
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More choice leads to less satisfaction

Iyenger and Lepper (2000)
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A Man goes to a Priest:

• This man is proactive, communicative and willing to work.
• Is he also autonomous?
• If not, what is missing?
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A Man goes to a Priest:

A sense of responsibility

But responsibility for what?

*crossed out* Ones own choices!

The consequences of those choices!
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Misconception: knowledge creates certainty.

No! It generally creates new uncertainties.
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Misconception: knowledge creates certainty.

No! It generally creates new uncertainties.

“At 13 I knew everything. Senility set in sometime after that.”

Harvey Fierstein in Torchsong Trilogy

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Recall Iyenger and Lepper

- More knowledge creates more choice.
- More choice creates uncertainty.
- Uncertainty creates dissatisfaction.
Our ability to think creates an inevitable gap between us and reality (the here and the now).

Wilhelm Hegel (1770-1831)
Is it then a “positive” change?

- A change is fundamental
- It is a shift in our views and opinions rather than the acquirement of new facts and skills.
- To change is an adaptive challenge rather than a technical one. (Heifetz, Grashow and Limsky, 2009)
- It requires a focus on the fundamentals of the issue (problem) with all its frustrations, doubts and fears.
Is it then a “positive” change?

- True change is unsettling.
- Desirable difficulties (Robert Bjork)
- *Elenchus* (Socrates)
- It requires a leap of faith.
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Is it then a “positive” change?

Negative Capability

John Keats (1795-1821)

The ability to accept uncertainty. Not looking for a quick technical solution but investigating the fundamentals of the issue.

This is a valuable skill in personal leadership.

Simpson, French and Harvey (2002)
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Is it then a “positive” change?

“True autonomy requires not only a particular set of circumstances but also a certain attitude.”

This attitude is:

• One of taking responsibility in uncertain circumstances.
• The essence of personal leadership/autonomy!
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Is it then a “positive” change?

Yes, it is a positive change for students!

But is seems such an incredible hardship.
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How can we create this “positive change”? 

Let’s learn to suffer like athletes “suffer”!

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How can we create this “positive change”?

How do they do it?

Because the effort under **uncertain circumstances** is what it is all about!
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How can we create this “positive change”?

Teach students to play!

In true play our autonomy is natural.

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How can we create this “positive change”?

Poeisis versus Praxis

Aristotle
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How can we create this “positive change”?

**Poeisis** focuses on the result

*The end justifies the means*
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How then can we create “positive change”?

**Praxis** focuses on the process

*It’s not whether you win or lose but how you play the game.*
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And so...

• Autonomy is embracing responsibility under uncertain and difficult circumstances.
• It’s taking a leap of faith and applying *negative capability* to truly change.
• This *adaptive challenge* should be a playful one (praxis).
• In which we naturally accept all consequences, good and bad! And go on!

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Now go out there and play!

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