Web of Meaning

Tangibles, Intangibles & Universal Concepts

Universal concepts mean something to everyone; however two people may not come up with the same meaning. They provide the maximum amount of relevance to the widest audience. For example, love, freedom, hunger are all universal concepts, but each one will mean something different to a teenager versus a Sunday School teacher; a 2 year old versus a WW II veteran; and a homeless person versus a marathon runner.

The story created by including tangible facts and intangible meanings answers the questions “So what? Why do I care? Why should this be important to me?” Remember, don’t use too much data; try to link every piece of information with a meaning. Interpretation is not instruction; it’s about leading visitors to self-discovery.

Experiential Learning Component:
Before beginning the exercise, place a flip chart outside the circle of participants. Draw three columns and label them with the following headings: tangible, intangible, and universal concepts. While the “Web of Meaning” is being spun, ask a volunteer to record the words verbalized during the exercise. Once the web is complete, ask all participants to sit down, in place, and lay their string down being careful to hold onto their link within the web. Have the volunteer bring the flip chart page and place it on the ground, at the center of the web. Encourage the group to reflect on the exercise.

Go outside and ask the group to form a circle facing inward. Give them the ball of yarn and ask them to begin a “Web of Meaning” for a topic of their choice. The first person says a tangible associated with that topic. Holding the end of the yarn, the first person then throws the ball of yarn to someone else in the circle. The receiver, the second person, vocalizes an intangible meaning they associate with the tangible word of the thrower. The receiver then comes up with another tangible word supporting the topic and throws the yarn ball to another person in the circle. After the yarn ball has been tossed to everyone within the circle, a web will be created illustrating the links between tangibles and intangibles. The web acts as a story or frame to connect all the tangible/intangible couplets of the web’s topic.

Inquiry Based Learning Component:
Can any of the intangibles be considered universal concepts? Which ones? Why?

Which was harder– coming up with tangibles or intangibles? Why?

If we were to write a theme statement about this topic, what would it be? How many different subthemes could be woven into this one topic? How many different opportunities for emotional and intellectual connections would we create? How would these opportunities be woven specifically for audiences visiting your site?

When connecting tangibles and intangibles, which of Tilden’s 6 Principles is demonstrated?
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Time:
20 minutes

Groups:
10 to 15 participants per group

Materials (sets for each group):
One skein of yard wound into a ball
Flip chart pad or large piece of poster board
Marker

Location:
Flat, open space

A. Welch, 2012