FOSTERING TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

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Transformation is a much-used word in today's world. Colleges, universities, social service organizations, private businesses, and other agencies proclaim that they transform individuals' lives. Mezirow (2003) notes that transformative learning changes our assumptions and expectations to be "more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change" (p. 58). Transformative learning suggests life-altering changes in thinking. Examples may include Ku Klux Klan members renouncing their membership in the Klan and converting to Judaism or individuals recognizing that helping others is more important than acquiring material possessions. Transformative learning means seismic shifts in worldview (Hoggan, 2016; Mezirow, 2000). Certainly, as educators, we hope to foster transformative learning to expand students' worldviews.

In this article, I briefly describe Mezirow's (2000) popular view of transformative learning as well as other lenses through which transformative learning has been considered. Next, I discuss the general outcomes of the transformative learning experience. I delineate Taylor's (2009) core elements necessary to foster transformative learning and provide a few examples.

Transformative Learning

Mezirow's (2000) transformative learning theory has generated much research. Based on the experiences of women who returned to higher education after a hiatus (Mezirow, 1981), his theory contains ten phases that begin with a disorienting dilemma (e.g., death or divorce). As Mezirow (2012) explains, people critically examine their assumptions about the world, recognize that everybody experiences discontent and transformation, explore new roles, relationships, and actions based on their new perspective, gain confidence in their new roles and relationships, and integrate the new perspective into their lives (p. 86). These phases, though presented linearly, are recursive (Mezirow, 1978). Similarly, Moström (2021) found that fostering transformative learning in the classroom was a recursive process with teachers serving as "process leaders" in the classroom where they adapted to changing conditions (p. 13). There was also "recursive reflection," with teachers and students reflecting on activities from various perspectives (p. 15). Thus, the different transformative learning phases can repeat depending on the learning experience.

Mezirow's psychocritical conceptualization is just one of several lenses through which transformative learning has been explained. His approach focuses on critical reflection of the experience and practicing dialogue with others to make sense and new meaning of the experience. In contrast, the psychoanalytic view (Taylor, 2008), based on the concepts of Carl Jung and depth psychology (Boyd 1989, 1991), describes transformative learning as "a process of individuation, a lifelong journey of coming to understand oneself through reflecting on psychic structures" such as the ego and the collective unconscious (p. 7). Likewise, Daloz's (2012) psychodevelopmental approach focuses on personal development during the lifespan. Daloz discusses the importance of

a mentor, dialogue, and stories as integral to helping individuals make more profound meaning of their experiences during the life course.

Whereas Mezirow, Boyd, and Daloz focus on the transformation of the individual, Freire's (2018) social-emancipatory approach combines personal empowerment with social change. To this effect, the teacher and student learn from each other, and the teacher invites students to critically examine their world to learn how social forces affect their lives. Dialogue and critical reflection are integral to the social-emancipatory approach. Freire believes that changes in people's thinking result in social action.

Additional sociocultural perspectives include the cultural-spiritual, race-centric, and planetary approaches. The cultural-spiritual way of viewing transformative learning focuses on the importance of spirituality, feelings, and engaging the whole person in learning in the transformative process (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006). The race-centric perspective puts race at the center and is "grounded in oppositional spirit" (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006, p. 54). Like Freire's, these approaches are grounded in a sociocultural context that recognizes oppression and the need for challenge the status quo.

Other perspectives include O'Sullivan's (2012) planetary perspective. This perspective discusses the interconnections "between the universe, planet, natural environment, human community and the personal world" (Taylor, 2008, p. 9). In addition, Taylor discusses the neurological approach to transformative learning, which asserts that men and women learn differently. Further, an individual's brain is not separate from emotion, which can affect the individual's decision-making process.

Transformative Learning Outcomes

Now that transformative learning has been defined, and its various lenses have been discussed, a taxonomy of expected outcomes may be helpful. Hoggan (2016) analyzed 206 articles written between 2003-2014 describing transformative learning outcomes. Using content analysis, the author identified six categories. The first is changes in worldview, which included modifications in: (1) "assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, expectations," (2) "ways of interpreting experience," (3) "more comprehensive or complex worldview," and "new awareness or new understandings" (Hoggan, 2016, pp. 66-67). Second, adjustments in "Self" included changes in one's meaning or purpose, personality, or identity. Third, a transformation in epistemology, or way of understanding the nature or origin of knowledge, included "using extrarational ways of knowing" such as embodied or somatic ways of knowing (p. 67) and being more open. Fourth, a changed ontology means a way the person exists in the world. Subcategories included "affective experience of life" and "ways of being" as well as "attributes," including having more empathy, integrity, or kindness toward others (p. 68). Fifth, differences in behavior were shown in "actions consistent with a new perspective," "social action," and changes in "professional practices" such as leadership (pp. 68-69). Last, capacity refers to developments in abilities. Subcategories included cognitive development, consciousness, or spirituality.

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Fostering Transformative Learning

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Taylor (2009) lists six core elements needed to foster transformative learning. Experience is the first element. Understanding individuals' depth of experience and creating positive group experiences can facilitate transformative learning. Second, promoting critical reflection is also vital. Premise reflection or questioning why a person believes a previously held assumption about the world can result in transformative learning. Third, dialogue is an important aspect to the

process. Fourth, a holistic orientation to teaching is essential to encouraging transformative learning. Activities promoting diverse ways of knowing, including rational, affective, and somatic, can encourage transformative learning. Fifth, "awareness of context" (p. 11) is a factor to consider in the classroom. Teachers need to consider how "the immediate learning event," as well as the "learner's prior experience" and the sociocultural context in which the learning occurs, affects the possibility for transformation (p. 11). Last, engaging in authentic relationships is essential in fostering transformative learning. In the following paragraphs, scholars suggest activities that can promote Taylor's (2009) six elements of fostering transformative learning.

Cranton (2010) emphasizes the importance of creating opportunities for critical reflection and dialogue in online courses. She discusses characteristics of an online learning setting that can promote transformative learning. First, the "stranger on the train" aspect of the online environment where students do not meet in person may make sharing personal information easier (p. 4). Second, since discussion board materials are available during the entire course, learners can critically reflect on them during the whole class instead of one course session. Third, there are ample resources in an online course, such as videos and websites that can provide alternative views and provoke critical reflections on previously held assumptions. Last, "participatory planning" or allowing students to choose "topics, materials, and methods for learning" (p. 4) may empower students, which can help foster critical reflection, which is a necessary aspect of the transformative learning process.

In addition, Cranton (2016, p. 173) discusses the importance of authenticity and cites Freire (1970) to mention the qualities that promote authentic dialogue, including humility, faith in and love of people, trust, and critical thinking. Cranton provides suggestions for educators to demonstrate care and support to students such as sharing personal stories, encouraging students to

come to educators outside of class, following up with students to ask if they are comfortable, learning from students, providing examples that draw on the teacher's experiences, and encouraging students to do the same. According to Cranton (2016) having authenticity in a group setting is also essential. To have supportive groups, there are certain "dispositions" that groups may have to help support transformative learning (p. 176). Groups that have a hospitable atmosphere and allow participation where people listen to each other intently and with humility are groups that can foster transformative learning. Some guidelines to create these group qualities include encouraging group members to share expertise, meeting outside of the learning environment, helping learners solve group problems, and having open group processes rather than ones bound by rules.

Gardner (2021) presents ana analysis of journal entries of 228 university students engaged in an intergenerational critical service-learning project. She found that students figured things out as they wrote and worked through their emotions. Other activities that helped foster critical thinking and transformative learning were activities that involved the body. The instructor gave students activities that helped them understand the health challenges experienced by older people, such as shortness of breath. Mindfulness activities helped students reflect on their thoughts and feelings. In short, Gardner reveals the role of promoting critical reflection and a holistic orientation for students' transformative learning.

More recently, Silvestro and Nadir (2021) presented the use of portfolios as a concrete example for self-reflection and open-mindedness. They explained that the implementation of e-portfolios supported deeper learning for graduate students in an adult education program. The exercise led to greater self-reflection on individuals' beliefs which resulted in open-mindedness.

Students recognized their personal growth during the program and realized increases in self-confidence and self-sufficiency.

Conclusion

Transformative learning results in a profound change in a person's worldview. Seismic changes occur in different areas, including shifts in worldview, the self, epistemological or ontological modifications, and changes in behavior or capacity (Hoggan, 2016). There are several components to foster transformative learning, including the experience, critical reflection, dialogue, a holistic approach to teaching, understanding of the context in which the learning occurs, and engaging in authentic relationships (Taylor, 2009). Critical reflection can be fostered through journal writing, mindfulness, and embodied learning activities (Gardner, 2021). In online settings, discussion board prompts, videos, websites, and e-portfolios can encourage critical thinking (Cranton, 2010; Silvestro et al., 2021). Lastly, Cranton (2016) commented how showing interest in students' lives and educators divulging some personal information to their class could demonstrate authenticity and foster transformative learning. As educators, we can use techniques to facilitate the transformation that will leave learners with perspectives that are "more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change" (Mezirow, 2003, p. 58). When individuals experience transformative learning, they are changed forever.

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