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In teaching for transformation, teachers set the stage and provide the environment in which students can articulate and critically reflect on their assumptions and perspectives.

Teaching for Transformation

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Andrew was a student in Methods and Strategies in Adult Education, a course offered within the New Brunswick Community College Instructor Development Program, which is mandatory for all new college instructors. One goal of the program is to prepare individuals who are hired on the basis of their experience and expertise in their profession or trade for the world of teaching. The summer courses are intensive: students are in class five hours a day, five days a week, and many choose to live in residence. Andrew was proud to come from a military background and equally proud that he was going to be teaching in a highly technical field.

Andrew's thinking and way of expressing himself was clear, organized, and practical, and he viewed things in absolute terms. From the course, he wanted specific rules to follow to guarantee successful teaching. He expected that I would be able to teach him exactly what he needed to do as a teacher. When this turned out not to be the case, Andrew was frustrated, even angry, with me and the entire program, which he viewed as useless. Our textbook, *No One Way: Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* (Cranton, 1998), did not help matters. Day after painful day, Andrew struggled to find the answers he was seeking amid our discussions of self-directed learning, teaching styles, and individual differences. Andrew was intellectually curious; he devoured the readings not only in search of the right answer but also because it was his nature to want to understand.

Sometime during the second week, after about forty hours of class time, there came a moment of profound silence when we all focused our attention on Andrew. I am not sure how he signaled to us that he had something important to say, but we all knew it. Breaking out of his confusion and resentment, Andrew announced that he saw, accepted, and clearly understood the shades of gray existing in knowledge about teaching. He

understood that knowledge about teaching is communicative in nature and socially constructed. He saw that knowing how to teach his subject area was different from knowing his subject area. The moment was joyful and transformative.

We all hope for such moments in our work with students. But how do we teach for transformation? As Andrew discovered, there is no one way, and as Pratt explores in Chapter One of this volume, one size does not fit all. In this chapter, I provide an overview of transformative learning theory and explore ways in which we might set up conditions to foster transformation.

Kinds of Knowledge

Although Mezirow (1991) sees transformative learning as a primary goal of all adult education, and most of us would agree, it is not the only goal. The larger framework within which transformative learning theory fits is based on Habermas's (1971) three kinds of knowledge: instrumental, communicative (which Habermas calls practical), and emancipatory.

Instrumental knowledge is cause-and-effect, objective knowledge derived from scientific methodologies. The acquisition of instrumental knowledge is a goal of education in the trades, technologies, and sciences. This is the kind of knowledge Andrew was seeking, but not finding, in my course.

Communicative knowledge is the understanding of ourselves, others, and the social norms of the community or society in which we live. It is derived through language and validated by consensus among people. The acquisition of communicative knowledge is a goal in the study of human relations, political and social systems, and education.

Emancipatory knowledge, the self-awareness that frees us from constraints, is a product of critical reflection and critical self-reflection. Gaining emancipatory knowledge can be a goal in all facets of adult education, as we critically question, for example, the role of technology, which is in itself instrumental knowledge, or the underlying assumptions of a political system, which is in itself communicative knowledge. It is an explicit goal in life skills learning, literacy programs, self-help groups, women's studies courses, and community action groups. The acquisition of emancipatory knowledge is transformative.

Transformative Learning Theory

At its core, transformative learning theory is elegantly simple. Through some event, which could be as traumatic as losing a job or as ordinary as an unexpected question, an individual becomes aware of holding a limiting or distorted view. If the individual critically examines this view, opens herself to alternatives, and consequently changes the way she sees things, she has transformed some part of how she makes meaning out of the world.

Mezirow (1991, 1997, 2000) developed the theory of transformative learning through a careful integration of theories, models, and ideas from a wide variety of sources. The theory continues to evolve through the inclusion of new perspectives on adult learning and development.

We expect what has happened in the past to happen again. If we failed to understand mathematics, we expect to continue to fail in this subject. If our boss has always been critical of our work, we expect her to continue to be critical. If our parents told us we were stupid, we think we are. The habits of mind that are established may have to do with our sense of self, interpretation of social systems and issues, morals and religious beliefs, and job-related knowledge.

It is easier and safer to maintain habits of mind than to change. It may take a significant or dramatic event to lead us to question assumptions and beliefs. Other times, though, it is an incremental process in which we gradually change bits of how we see things, not even realizing a transformation has taken place until afterward.

Critical reflection is the means by which we work through beliefs and assumptions, assessing their validity in the light of new experiences or knowledge, considering their sources, and examining underlying premises. It helps to talk to others, exchanging opinions and ideas, receiving support and encouragement, and engaging in discourse where alternatives are seriously weighed and evidence brought forth. Insight, intuition, emotion, relationships, and personality may also play roles. Dirkx (1997) argues that purely rational explanations of transformation are inadequate. Carter (2000) finds little evidence of rational discourse in her research, though relationships among people are pivotal. I propose there may be differences based on psychological type preferences in the ways in which people revise their perspectives (Cranton, 1994, 1996).

Facets of Transformative Learning

If we are to understand how to teach for transformation, we need to recognize the various facets of the process. Transformative learning is not a linear process, yet there is some progression to it, perhaps spiral-like (Cranton, 2000). We cannot critically reflect on an assumption until we are aware of it. We cannot engage in discourse on something we have not identified. We cannot change a habit of mind without thinking about it in some way.

In his earlier work, Mezirow (1975) names steps or stages leading to transformation, starting with a disorienting dilemma and ending with restored equilibrium. In most of the writing on transformative learning, many of these facets of the process remain in some form, though they are no longer seen as steps. Here, I identify seven such facets as a rough guide to helping us set up a learning environment to promote transformation:

- An activating event that typically exposes a discrepancy between what a person has always assumed to be true and what has just been experienced, heard, or read
- Articulating assumptions, that is, recognizing underlying assumptions that have been uncritically assimilated and are largely unconscious
- Critical self-reflection, that is, questioning and examining assumptions in terms of where they came from, the consequences of holding them, and why they are important
- Being open to alternative viewpoints
- Engaging in discourse, where evidence is weighed, arguments assessed, alternative perspectives explored, and knowledge constructed by consensus
- Revising assumptions and perspectives to make them more open and better justified
- Acting on revisions, behaving, talking, and thinking in a way that is congruent with transformed assumptions or perspectives

Teaching Strategies

There are no particular teaching methods that guarantee transformative learning. A provocative statement in a lecture, a story told by a fellow student, or an argument set out in an article are just as likely to stimulate critical self-reflection as is the most carefully crafted exercise. Often, neither we as teachers nor the transforming student can pinpoint just what initiated or sustained the process. A lot of what happens is within the student, and the teacher just happens to say or do something that hooks into that person's thoughts or feelings. When Andrew and I tried to understand what promoted his transformed assumption about the nature of knowledge, the best we could come up with was that he felt personally challenged by ideas expressed in the classroom and in his reading.

I think it is this environment of challenge that underlies teaching for transformation. Although this challenge must be combined with safety, support, and a sense of learner empowerment, it is, at the center, a challenge of our beliefs, assumptions, and perspectives that leads us to question ourselves.

I propose strategies for each of the facets of transformative learning, but I do not intend to imply that we can make such clear distinctions in practice between either facets or strategies. In choosing a specific strategy and in knowing what is happening with our students, we may rely on intuition or perhaps a tacit understanding of the teaching and learning context.

Creating an Activating Event. In order to bring about a catalyst for transformation, we need to expose students to viewpoints that may be discrepant with their own. Films, documentaries, novels, short stories, and poems often portray unusual perspectives in dramatic and interesting ways. I am surprised by how often the students I work with choose to express a

transformative experience in a song, drawing, or sculpture. I suspect that if I were more knowledgeable about these art forms, I could also use them as a catalyst for learning.

Whenever possible, we should use readings to present ideas from more than one point of view. We need to encourage students to seek out controversial or unusual ways of understanding a topic. And in our own presentation of ideas, we should always ask, “What if we looked at this from another perspective?” or “What assumptions underlie this viewpoint?”

Articulating Assumptions. Articulating assumptions is hard. It may seem impossible to answer the question, “What assumption are you making here?” Our assumptions are deeply embedded in our childhood, community, and culture. Brookfield’s (1990) technique of critical questioning can be helpful. Questions are crafted so as to encourage students to describe what they believe and how they came to believe it. For example, I might ask, “Do you believe intelligence declines with age?” followed by, “How would you describe intelligence?” and “Is your view based on your own experience or the experience of someone you know?” or “What have you read or heard that supports that view?”

Student autobiographies can be a powerful technique for unearthing assumptions. Autobiographies can be specific to one aspect of a person’s life: “Tell the story of how you became a teacher and developed as a teacher [or any other profession].” Or they may be personal. The use of autobiographies is enhanced when the educator provides supportive comments and asks questions such as, “How did this come about?” “How did you make this decision?” “What are you assuming here?”

A colleague of mine designed a form of autobiography that he calls a time capsule (Laurence Cohen, e-mail to the author, 2000). Students are asked to come up with a collection of objects representing important aspects of their life and put the objects into a box or container (the time capsule). Students act as archeologists in pairs or small groups to analyze and understand the importance of each object in the time capsule. The question, “Why is this object important?” is also addressing, “What assumption do you make in including this object as representative of your life?”

I have found metaphor analysis (Deshler, 1990) to be useful in encouraging the articulation of assumptions. Students generate metaphors relevant to a topic under discussion. For example, they might list metaphors for summer school as including a prison, a zoo, a cave, and a kaleidoscope. The metaphors are then unpacked by asking, “What are the characteristics of a prison that are also characteristics of summer school?” Students may say, “We have to be here, it’s a punishment, and we can only look out the window.” Each of these responses can then be discussed in relation to underlying assumptions: “Why is summer school seen as a punishment?” “What are we assuming about summer school?”

Critical Self-Reflection. To encourage critical self-reflection, we need to provide the opportunity for students to question their assumptions: to

examine what they think and how they feel and consider the consequences of holding certain assumptions. Critical self-reflection may take place in the classroom, but it is perhaps more likely to take place outside it. What we do in the classroom is set the stage for what may take place when our students are driving home, cooking supper, going for a walk, or telling someone about their day.

Critical incidents, originally developed as a research technique, have been popularized by Brookfield (1995) as a means of fostering critical self-reflection. Students are asked to recall a best or worst experience, usually within a specific context, such as their worst teaching experience or their best interaction with a supervisor. They describe the incident in terms of what happened, who was involved, what made it a best or worst experience, and how it could have turned out differently. Analysis of the incidents, done in either small groups or the whole class, helps people examine their assumptions and provides a structure for reflection on practice.

Reflective journals are widely used in adult education and for some, but not all, students are a good vehicle for critical self-reflection. Students who are more introverted than extroverted find journals especially helpful. Although the literature contains many suggestions for how to structure a journal, I find it best to leave the format open so that students can write as they please. I suggest that they not only report on what happened but also include their thoughts, reactions, and feelings and pay special attention to writing about why they think or feel as they do. I offer to read their journals if they would like me to, which gives the uncertain student a chance to validate his journal with me. When students give me the opportunity to read their work, I encourage further critical self-reflection through comments as questions.

Modeling critical self-reflection and setting up an environment in which critical self-reflection is a group norm may be one of the most important ways to teach for transformation. We should make a point of openly questioning our own perspectives and support students' efforts to do the same. Although it may seem uncomfortable at first, especially if we are used to being the voice of authority in the classroom, a questioning atmosphere can quickly become quite natural.

Openness to Alternatives. Being open to perspectives different from our own can be exceedingly difficult. Students may articulate their assumptions and reflect on them but shut down when faced with accepting alternatives. What we have to try to do in our teaching is to create safe and enjoyable ways for people to try on different points of view—ways of acting out or talking about alternatives.

Role plays are especially useful in giving students a chance to try on an alternative perspective without giving up their own. Role plays can be used in many contexts, and they may be informal and spontaneous or scripted and formal. In order to nurture openness to alternatives, students should take on roles that are opposed to their own perspective. For example, in a course on research methods, I asked students to work in groups of three

where one person adhered to the empirical-analytical paradigm, the second to the interpretive paradigm, and the third to the critical paradigm. In the role play, they were to discuss how to approach a particular research problem. Students' roles were assigned so as to go against their preference for one paradigm over another.

Critical debates (Brookfield, 1990) serve a similar purpose but without the use of roles. A controversial issue is selected, one for which students in the group hold contrasting views. Students identify their view and debate the issue taking the stance that is opposite their own. This may seem hard at first, and students often say they cannot think of any arguments, but once the debate is underway, it can be a source of quite astounding insights. Students also seem to find the process to be quite amusing; it is easy to laugh at yourself when you are saying the opposite of what you think when the exercise is treated like a game. Meanwhile, you are opening yourself to the possibility of thinking in a new way.

Another similar simple strategy is to ask students to write letters or memos from a different perspective. For example, managers engaged in a leadership workshop could be asked to write letters from their staff to themselves outlining the changes in the workplace they would like to see. Or students could write letters representing theoretical viewpoints, especially those viewpoints with which they do not agree—a letter from Freud to a female patient, for instance.

Discourse. Engaging in discourse, as opposed to regular discussion, can seem stilted or artificial. I have tried to do this by first presenting and discussing the optimal conditions for discourse: having accurate and complete information, being free from coercion and distorting self-deception, weighing evidence and assessing arguments, being open to alternative perspectives, critically reflecting on presuppositions, having equal opportunity to participate, and accepting informed consensus as valid knowledge (Mezirow, 1991). To some extent, this works. It also helps to ask one or two students to be observers, noting when participants, for example, resort to persuasion rather than evidence.

Addressing the same issue in two ways—through ordinary discussion and then through discourse—helps students see the difference in the two ways of communicating. I have also videotaped discourse, giving students the opportunity to see when and how they demonstrate the optimal conditions.

Dialogue journals provide another format for discourse. Students work in pairs or even triads. They may have one journal that they pass from person to person, responding to each other's ideas, or they may all write simultaneously, exchanging journal entries and commenting on each other's writing (this yields, in the end, two or three journals rather than one). If students remain conscious of the conditions of discourse, it sometimes seems easier to work toward them in writing than in conversation.

Revision of Assumptions and Perspectives. Teaching for transformation is setting the stage and providing the opportunity. When students

actually revise their assumptions or larger frames of reference, there is little we can do aside from giving support. The process may be painful for some, and we need to acknowledge this, or it may be joyous for others, and we can celebrate with the student. Whenever possible, we should make the time for one-on-one interaction with a student who is changing beliefs.

Perhaps even more important, we can encourage students to connect with each other—either fellow students within the same class or students who have taken the same course or program on other occasions. A class listserv or the simple exchange of e-mail addresses and telephone numbers can be an important resource. Formal learning networks or support groups can be established, but generally this kind of support works best when students initiate it in their own way. Depending on the context, we can also suggest that students link up with discussion groups, professional associations, or other resources where people will have had experiences similar to theirs.

Acting on Revisions. To help students act on their revised assumptions or perspectives, we need to set up situations where they have the opportunity to do so. Quite often, such action falls outside the time and place where we work with students, but there may still be some things we can do. Experiential learning projects, where students go out into the real world—schools, hospitals, businesses—can give them a chance to try out their transformed views. Experiential learning may be built into a program, but if it is not, we can arrange field trips or site visits to serve the same purpose. Students can be asked to keep a log or journal of the experience, especially noting how they felt and how others reacted to their views.

If experiential learning projects are not feasible, it is sometimes possible to set up a simulation of a real setting where students have the opportunity to practice or talk about their new learning. Simulated committee meetings or fund drives, mock parliaments, and microteaching are examples of such activities.

Finally, we can help students set up action plans for when they leave the course or workshop. This can be as simple as asking participants to write down two or three concrete things they will do, or it can be a more formal plan with goals, strategies for achieving those goals, and mechanisms for getting feedback from others. The more we pay attention to how students will act on their revised assumptions and perspectives, the more we can ease that process for them. Even ordinary conversations about what people will do when they, for example, return to the workplace from a retreat will help. In some contexts, it may be possible to plan a follow-up meeting for participants to discuss how they have acted on their transformation.

Conclusion

When a student transforms her assumptions, becoming open to alternatives and new ways of thinking, it is a magical moment in teaching. We cannot teach transformation. We often cannot even identify how or why it happens.

But we can teach as though the possibility always exists that a student will have a transformative experience.

There are no special methods that guarantee transformation, although transformation is always one of our goals. In every strategy we use, we need to provide an ever-changing balance of challenge, support, and learner empowerment. Sometimes to ask the right challenging question at the right moment is the most important thing we can do. At other times, it is essential to validate a student's thoughts or feelings. And at yet another time, we need to say, "This is up to you now," because in the end, it is the student who chooses to transform.

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