

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

Transforming with the Use of Teaching Tools

This instrument can teach. It can illuminate; yes, and even it can inspire. But it can do so only to the extent that humans are determined to use it to those ends. . . . There is a great and perhaps decisive battle to be fought against ignorance, intolerance and indifference. This weapon . . . could be useful.

Can you guess the source of this quote? Can you guess the instrument to which the speaker refers?

More important: Is the quote relevant to what faculty do in their classrooms, whether brick or click? Because UCO is an institution committed to helping students learn in ways that transform their conceptions of themselves and their relationships to others, the environment, and the inner world of knowing, the quote is evocative — it causes us to reflect on the potential of our teaching tools to enhance our ability as faculty to design transformative activities and environments.

The person speaking these words, and the instrument he describes as being capable of teaching, illuminating, and inspiring, are –

– Edward R. Murrow addressing the Radio and Television News Directors Association in Chicago on October 15, 1958, as he spoke about the potential of television.

To what extent do we use teaching tools in service to creating potentially transformative learning experiences? As Murrow suggests, television is a tool that had/has the potential to teach, illuminate, inspire — things we all probably agree should be happening at a university focused on Transformative Learning. Consider the order-of-magnitude greater potential that the Web offers.

Are we tapping that potential to its greatest effect?

To stick with the Edward R. Murrow example, his speech in 1958 was written and delivered in a milieu that included the role he played in the high-profile struggle around McCarthyism. The perspective Murrow presents in his speech was most likely galvanized in many ways as a result of his reporting on McCarthy's Congressional hearings. The issues involved were substantive and touched the lives of every American. They are the same issues we face today around other subjects: guilt by association and interpretations of Constitutional rights.

One of UCO's Central Six Tenets is civic engagement. The Edward R. Murrow – Joe McCarthy battles constitute riveting drama about civic engagement. If you are doing a course redesign to infuse civic engagement activities and content that relate to course outcomes into your class, you could choose books or articles written about the

McCarthy hearings and the face-off between Murrow and McCarthy. Certainly there is much quality material to draw from: books written years later, transcripts of the hearings, newspaper articles from the time.

You could also put a link in your course shell to [this video excerpt](#) of Murrow's broadcast about Senator McCarthy's actions and words and McCarthy's response. You and your students would see and hear Murrow relate McCarthy's words about one party of American Government being disloyal for its stance, and you would see and hear McCarthy characterize Murrow as a member of the "jackal pack" always at the throats of anyone who dares to expose Communists.

Would that prompt a discussion about current American politics? Would that be a prompt for invigorating and possibly transformative discussions in your class?

What are the chances that showing the video clip instead of assigning a reading would cause more students to think deeply about civic engagement? How would students react to seeing and hearing Senator McCarthy say, "Wait until you hear the bleeding hearts scream and cry about our methods of trying to drag the truth from those who know . . ."? If students watched the video vs. reading a transcript, would they more likely engage with the history in a different way?

These kinds of questions can trigger faculty self-reflection about exploiting the capabilities of modern technology. Are the odds increased that students will experience a change in perspective or realize the importance of an issue they've never really thought about before simply because they see a video instead of read a passage? As their instructor, you will have to guess and then act accordingly.

We are incredibly fortunate to have many more teaching tools at our disposal today compared to decades past. As Murrow points out, though, the impact of any tool lies in how it is put to use. He feared that television would never achieve its potential to teach because the tool would be under- or mis-utilized.

How would you assess television's accomplishments as a teaching medium? Is the Web as a tool going to be better?

We have bigger tool belts as teachers today. That should mean we also have more ways of enabling student transformative learning. One joy in teaching lies in choosing among a multitude of tools, old and new, for helping students learn.

Murrow, E. R. (1958, October 15). Speech to the Radio and Television News Directors Association. Chicago, IL. Available:
http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/education/lesson39_organizer1.html

Video and audio excerpts of Murrow's October 15, 1958, speech:
<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/MovieSpeeches/moviespeechgoodnightandgoo>

dluckmurrow.html

Audio of Murrow's entire October 15, 1958, speech:

http://www.rtdna.org/content/edward_r_murrow_s_1958_wires_lights_in_a_box_speech

Video excerpt of Murrow's March 9, 1954 broadcast plus footage of McCarthy speaking, in Congressional hearings, and responding to Murrow's characterizations:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e4LZsDqSSfk>