

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

UCO Faculty Prompting Transformative Learning

It's a fact that many UCO faculty mindfully design learning experiences to have a potentially transformative impact on students. The TL experiences happening in two of those students are described below as those students work on a STLR student TL project (outside of class project). The project is connected to this month's snapshot and is creating changes in these two students that are palpable and long-lasting.

The Oklahoma Lynching Research Project (OLRP) is headed by Drs. Elizabeth Overman and Marc Goulding. It's exciting research for a number of reasons: adding to and/or correcting archival information concerning significant historical events, developing and archiving new material and information for future historians to examine, highlighting events in the past from which current generations can learn, providing opportunity for all involved in the research and those with whom the research is shared to reflect on opportunities to improve the way we interact with each other.

The chance to learn from history must never be taken away, for coming to terms with history's blood, tears, jubilations, and all lessons of any kind can be deeply transformative. For two of the students involved in the OLRP project, the transformation is already visceral, evident, and life-changing.

Ambre Chambers' statement of her experience with the project was recorded last September and is accessible at about the 14:10 mark of this [TEDxUCO video](#). You'll hear Ambre talk about her research of the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921. Herself a Tulsa native, it wasn't until working as part of OLRP she learned of her city's history in contributing to the Oklahoma numbers you see in the snapshot.

Most important, you'll hear the impact in Ambre's voice of how the project has transformed her thinking about humankind's actions toward each other, prompting the realization that the horrific acts perpetrated on the Tulsa riot victims are a call, even today, to work at eliminating hatred, fear, and bigotry.

Jake Jones' life has also been transformed. His engagement with OLRP has, in his own words, transformed his conception of what he wants his personal future to be in terms of his music. Instead of continuing a pursuit of a "self-indulgent kind of art" — making music he likes and that other people would like enough to buy — Jake now wants to find a way to have his music somehow contribute to the social good, helping people understand each other better and exhibit more compassion.

Are these transformations?

Unquestionably.

Were these transformations prompted by mindful, intentional design of experiences that not only helped students develop skills and knowledge as researchers (part of the content connected to the project), but also develop important affective skills like empathy and perspective-taking?

Without doubt.

And the faculty facilitators are collecting students' reflections as artifacts of their TL experiences. These artifacts will then be assessed using STLR rubrics, with the artifacts, the rubrics, and the assessments all eventually pushed into students' STLR eportfolios.

Ambre and Jake will have powerful evidence of their cultural competence to highlight in their eportfolios' work show case pages if they choose to do so.

The OLRP project, then, and the student transformations resulting from it, are excellent examples of Transformative Learning in action.

Experience a bit of this yourself. Read the excerpt below. It's the type of source material with which students might engage in this project:

“Mary Denston, the elderly wife of a Somerset County farmer, was returning to her home in Princess Anne on the morning of October 17, 1933 when she was attacked by an assailant. A manhunt quickly began for the alleged perpetrator, 22-year-old African-American George Armwood. He was soon arrested and charged with felonious assault. By 5:00 pm, an angry mob of local white residents had gathered outside the Salisbury jail where the suspect had been taken. In order to protect Armwood from the increasingly hostile crowd, state police transferred him to Baltimore. But just as quickly he was returned to Somerset County. After assuring Maryland Governor Albert Ritchie that Armwood's safety would be guaranteed, Somerset County officials transferred Armwood to the jail house in Princess Anne, with tragic consequences.”

The report continued: “Sources are conflicting regarding many of the details of the assault on Denston and the subsequent murder of George Armwood, but what is certain is that on the evening of October 18 a mob of a thousand or more people stormed into the Princess Anne jail house and hauled Armwood from his cell down to the street below. Before he was hung from a tree some distance away, Armwood was dragged through the streets, beaten, stabbed, and had one ear hacked off. Armwood's lifeless body was then paraded through the town, finally ending up near the town's courthouse, where the mob doused the corpse

with gasoline and set it on fire.”

As Baltimore’s Afro-American newspaper reported at the time, in addition to Armwood’s blackened skin, mutilated face and missing ear, his tongue was “clenched between his teeth,” giving “evidence of his great agony before death.” It continued: “There is no adequate description of the mute evidence of gloating on the part of whites who gathered to watch the effect upon our people.” (Maryland Historical Society Library, 2012)

Words fail to convey emotions and transformative realizations sometimes — our limbic systems don’t have the capacity to form words, so we translate as best we can with the help of our prefrontal cortices. Some readers may, after reading the description above, wrestle with what their reflective journal entry might be the evening after grappling with this kind of historical artifact.

We sometimes ask much of students when devising potential TL experiences.

They often produce much in return as they expand their perspectives of their relationships to self, others, community, and environment.

References

Maryland Historical Society Library. (2012, November 29). An American tragedy. Underbelly: From the deepest corners of the Maryland Historical Society Library. Baltimore, MD. Available: <http://www.mdhs.org/underbelly/2012/11/29/an-american-tragedy/#>