

## TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

### ***Homing in on Transformative Learning-informed Behaviors and Their Measurement***

As we provide more and more Transformative Learning experiences for students, what might the cumulative effect produce over time?

UCO operationalizes Transformative Learning (TL) as a two-part definition: TL develops students' beyond-disciplinary skills, and it expands students' perspectives of their relationships to self, others, community, and environment.

Concerning the development of beyond-disciplinary skills, the cumulative effect of multiple intentionally-designed experiences that we hope elicit some degree of transformative realization over time is pretty simple to assess upon graduation in the case of graduates immediately moving into the job market. In that case, we can ask the employers hiring these graduates if the newly-hired grads possess skills like the ability to work in a team, the ability to self-motivate, the skills of self-management and leadership when required, for example.

The issue of assessing perspective expansion, though, is more nuanced.

How can we measure whether a student has developed an expanded perspective of relationship to self? Many might say we know it when we see it, but we don't know how to define it with a set of particulars such that there currently exists, say, a graduated scale that allows us to identify one person as having a 100% successful relationship with her self while another has only a 59% successful relationship with self.

The lack of such a tool, though, in no way negates the importance of helping students reach the goal of relating to the selves they are in successful and expansive ways.

And the problem with self-reports on this topic (e.g., surveys) is that oftentimes people are not consciously aware of limiting beliefs. A survey question asking people to rate on a 5-point scale how they feel about themselves will surely generate some unreliable data.

At least two intriguing solutions exist to this TL-related conundrum:

- proxy measures proven as valid indicators
- tools/processes that bypass conscious filters and biases in eliciting information

One example of a proven, proxy indicator for a 15% increase in the time certain

employment sectors can expect new employees to stay in certain kinds of jobs is the web browser they use:

Cornerstone OnDemand, a company that sells software that helps employers recruit and retain workers, analyzed data on about 50,000 people who took its 45-minute online job assessment (which is like a thorough personality test) and then were successfully hired at a firm using its software. These candidates ended up working customer-service and sales jobs for companies in industries such as telecommunications, retail, and hospitality.

Cornerstone's researchers found that people who took the test on a non-default browser, such as Firefox or Chrome, ended up staying at their jobs about 15 percent longer than those who stuck with Safari or Internet Explorer. They performed better on the job as well. (These statistics were roughly the same for both Mac and PC users.)

Michael Housman, the chief analytics officer at Cornerstone, said that while the company's research hasn't identified anything to suggest causality, he does have a theory as to why this correlation exists. "I think that the fact that you took the time to install Firefox on your computer shows us something about you. It shows that you're someone who is an informed consumer," he told Freakonomics Radio. "You've made an active choice to do something that wasn't default." (Pinsker, 2015)

What might be proxy indicators for an expansive perspective of relationship to self? Which browser one uses is probably not a good proxy, but that's not definitive until the data verify it.

Maybe it actually is the case that, via observational analysis, Mac users are 15% more likely to be happy with themselves compared to PC users.

Or Democrats compared to Republicans. Or Buddhists compared to Episcopalians. Or OSU grads compared to OU grads.

Perhaps a valid measurement could be devised to assess each of the following, which might be argued successfully as proxy indicators for an excellent relationship to self:

- sanguine disposition
- open to, and seeks, new possibilities for personal growth
- comfortable with self — e.g., not self-deprecating (except maybe as an element of humor), not clinically depressed, comfortable with accomplishments and abilities while at the same time desirous of improvement and growth, healthy self-respect, etc.

- absence of abusive self-behaviors like drug use, excessive drinking, self-cutting, etc.
- seeks work and outside-of-work activities that are emotionally and intellectually satisfying

Observational analysis at least removes the artificiality of the survey, but it is time-consuming, expensive, and difficult to scale.

That brings us to proxies based on survey instruments constructed such that implicit biases are filtered out. Harvard's Implicit Associations Test (IAT; see Banaji & Greenwald, 2013) is a research project of many years' standing in this area:

[t]he Implicit Association Test (IAT) . . . was designed by Tony Greenwald to detect the hidden contents of the mind. Its original application was to explore the group-based preferences, stereotype, and identities that may not be accessible to conscious awareness. Since then, it has been used widely to study preferences, beliefs, and identity, and found applications in domains of health, education, business, government, the law and law enforcement. (The Blind Spot, 2016)

An exciting opportunity for UCO to make a substantial contribution to the science of student success lies in the development of an instrument to measure sometimes slippery psychological constructs that nevertheless have an enormous impact on student persistence and retention. An IAT-like instrument could be devised to accomplish this.

Coupled with robust analytics capacity to parse through dependable data about students' relationships with self and others, for example, findings could be used to track the impact of the Integrative Knowledge Portfolio Process (IKPP) over time during students' undergraduate careers as a success intervention and to inform the design of learning environments and activities that raise the odds for transformative experiences.

**References**

Banaji, M. R., & Greenwald, A. G. (2013). *Blind spot: Hidden biases of good people*. New York, NY: Delacorte Press.

Pinsker, J. (2015, March 16). People who use firefox or chrome are better employees: Yet another reason to shun internet explorer. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved February 10, 2016, from <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/03/people-who-use-firefox-or-chrome-are-better-employees/387781/>

The Blind Spot. (2016). Available: <http://spottheblindspot.com/the-iat/> (Web site related to Banaji & Greenwald, 2013.)