

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

What is Transformative Learning? (Pt. 2)

(NOTE: Last month's article described UCO's Central Six tenets as mechanisms which enable transformative learning experiences for our students. One tenet, Service Learning and Civic Engagement, is informed by the American Democracy Project and its upcoming [event](#). These articles about TL will occasionally highlight such connections as a way to illustrate opportunities for operationalizing TL within our classrooms and on our campus.)

Last month's article introduced the concept of Transformative Learning (TL) through the lens of its historical roots and development within adult education, but the focus was on TL as a process we engineer for our students. There is great value, too, in undergoing transformations of perspective as faculty members, and this article explores TL from the faculty side of the coin.

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Center for Instructional and Professional Development (CIPD) for several years ran a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Scholars program designed to provide selected faculty the opportunity to design a research project focused on student learning and supported with internal grant funding, an initiative similar to UCO's SoTL grant project. UWM SoTL Scholars concluded their work with a "five- to ten-page summary that describes their SoTL project and findings, the process they undertook to begin and complete their project, and their reflections on the process" (Schroeder, 2005, p. 54).

Has this been a transformative learning experience for these UWM faculty?

To answer the question, recall that Mezirow's initial conception of "transformative" in Transformative Learning means that the individual undergoes a change in perspective, a change in the way he conceptualizes information, himself, and/or his relationship with others and the world. The purpose of Schroeder's article (2005) was to investigate whether research into learning in one's own classroom did, indeed, prompt transformations of perspective.

In short, did focusing on teaching and learning in their own classrooms, digging into the relevant literature, and conducting research to test ideas in the crucible of their college courses prompt any transformative learning experiences for these faculty as teacher-scholars?

Schroeder says yes.

One professor, she says, "developed a new perspective toward the familiar assumption that simply lecturing on a topic leads to student learning, despite his colleagues' frequent support of this conclusion" (p. 60). The professor's "new perspective" is an indicator of transformative learning.

In the words of another professor involved in the initiative, “I have a newfound sense of what quality teaching and learning really are. . . . One could consider my experience a form of enlightenment” (Buchanan, 2002, p. 15). Certainly, as faculty we would celebrate as transformative any student’s self-assessment that a formerly narrow view or belief has been expanded to the point of enlightenment. This would be assessed as a smashing TL success, and in this case, the transformation was in how a faculty member conceptualized teaching and learning.

Such fundamental shifts of perspective about key aspects of one’s professional life surely qualify as transformative learning experiences.

Last month’s Great Teaching article mentioned Harvard professor Eric Mazur’s technique for getting students to read before class. The change in his teaching that resulted in his strategy was a transformative learning experience that radically changed his perspective of himself as a teacher, something he describes in [“Confessions of a Converted Lecturer.”](#) Mazur had won teaching awards at Harvard, for goodness’ sake, and believed himself a good teacher. That perspective was shaken to the core when he administered the recently developed Force Concept Inventory to his students and found that, in spite of the grades they earned in his course, they did not understand basic physics concepts by the end of the course.

There is no more classic experience in adult learning which crystallizes the basics of transformative education than Mazur’s discovery about his teaching and the resulting changes he made in how he conducts his class so that his students *do* understand basic physics concepts by course’s end.

Part of the answer to, “What is transformative learning?” is that it is something which can be experienced by both students *and* faculty.

Buchanan, E. (2002). Examining and promoting student learning through a hybrid course environment. In C. Schroeder & A. Ciccione (Eds.), *Models in our midst* (pp. 9-19). Milwaukee, WI: University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Center for Instructional and Professional Development.

Schroeder, C. M. (2005). Evidence of the transformational dimensions of the scholarship of teaching and learning: Faculty development through the eyes of SoTL scholars. *To Improve the Academy*, 23, 47-71. Summary plus selected references available at:
<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/CTL/Tomprof/postings/621.html>