

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

Teaching Strategies for Transformative Learning

Previous articles in *Transformative Teacher-Scholar* have characterized transformative learning as prompting a change of perspective in the learner. The change might be in the learner's perception of self. The change might relate to how the learner conceives of knowledge within the discipline (e.g., evolving vs. absolute). The change might be that the learner discovers that old, limiting beliefs can no longer fit in with a new worldview the learner is adopting in light of new information or interactions with new groups of people.

In short, changing perspectives to be more inclusive, more diverse, more tolerant, better informed, more thoughtful, etc., is part of what a transformative college education seeks to accomplish. UCO's Central Six are the routes through which such transformation can occur. The college experience which transforms is usually cumulative in that there may not be any single instance a student will remember as an a-ha moment concerning a particular change of perspective, but campuses which consciously act to provide consistent, multiple, designed-in transformative opportunities undoubtedly create more student transformation than those which do not.

What kinds of strategies in the classroom bring this about? Whether it's part of activity within disciplinary knowledge or related to health and wellness, how do faculty help nurture transformative student experiences? Patricia Cranton (2006) describes a questioning strategy that can accomplish this.

In her book targeted to educators of adult learners, Cranton (2006) indicates that a summary of proceedings from the first Conference on Transformative Learning, held at Columbia University in 1998, revealed that "questioning develops a constructive process appropriate for fostering transformative learning" (p. 138). Cranton posits questioning types — content, process, premise — that can be effective in prompting the reflective process necessary as part of a transformative experience, and then conceives of the types as connected to developing reflection concerning one's habits of mind or kinds of knowledge.

Helping students learn how to learn — a critically important faculty role (and topic of next month's article about transformative learning) — relates to habits of mind. Concerning kinds of knowledge, Cranton conceives of content, process, and premise questions in terms of their impact on the learner's consideration of the material being studied:

<i>Reflection</i>	<i>Knowledge</i>		
	Instrumental	Communicative	Emancipatory
Content	What are the facts?	What do others say about this issue?	What are my assumptions?
Process	How do I know this is true?	How did I integrate others' points of view?	How do I know my assumptions are valid?
Premise	Why is this knowledge important to me?	Why should I believe in this conclusion?	Why should I revise or not my perspective?

Table from Cranton, 2006, p. 37.

The questions presented in the table above prompt the kinds of self-reflection that force students to engage in the *deep learning* we want to occur most frequently in college because it is better remembered, because students connect new information with existing information to grasp the meaning of the whole, and because deep learning means students *understand* the material (as opposed to merely being able to remember discrete pieces of information that are not effectively connected to produce meaning-making; that kind of learning is called *surface learning* — see Marton & Säljö, 1976, as the foundational work on deep and surface learning; [here](#) is a brief summary of deep vs. surface learning).

It is deep learning that is transformative, and questioning students to self-reflect about the knowledge they are seeking can be a powerful instructional strategy to prompt such transformative learning.

The bottom-right cell in Cranton's table above leads to the student's transformative experience point concerning disciplinary knowledge. By employing a mix of content, process, and premise questions concerning course materials and activity, faculty can lead students to this consideration, thereby prompting them to self-determine whether they should change their current understanding of the material.

Cranton (2006) says that content questions can help raise learners' awareness of their assumptions or beliefs. Other content questions might be, "What new facts do you know now?" or, "What new realization have I come to because of the new material I've learned?"

Process questions revolve more around the process the learner has used and is using to engage with the material. Other examples of process questions might be, "How did you decide the author's assertion is flawed?" or, "What's the key point that made you agree with ____ theory?"

Premise questions really force self-reflection because they're built around the "why" of

the learning and the knowing: “How will knowing this make a difference for me?” or, “What’s the value of this information to others?” or, “Why does it matter that I share my new understanding of this theory/philosophy/concept?” Students who are asked these kinds of questions, and then work to answer them as part of meaning-making, are students who are more likely to have a transformative learning experience.

You may not have worried whether what your students learn in your class contributes to their transformation or not as long as they just learn the material. But if you ask questions along the way that you know will force students to begin drawing value-based conclusions about their learning, your classroom will more likely be a place that contributes to the transformative experiences UCO desires for its students.

Atherton, J. S. (2011). *Learning and teaching; Deep and surface learning* [On-line: UK] retrieved 24 April 2012 from <http://www.learningandteaching.info/learning/deepsurf.htm>

Cranton, P. (2006). *Understanding and promoting transformative learning: A guide for educators of adults*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Marton, F and Säljö, R. (1976) On qualitative differences in learning: II – Outcome as a function of the learner's conception of the task. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 46, 115-127.