

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

Assessing Transformative Learning (Pt. 1): The Plan-Do-Measure-Adjust Process

When you consider potential Central Six-related activities and assignments which also serve course content goals, you are initiating a key step in teaching for Transformative Learning (TL). In fact, doing this kind of planning in course preparation means you are automatically raising the odds that you and your course will have the kind of lasting impact on students that you know has happened when you get those wonderful letters and emails from former students who, in often moving ways, describe how your course changed their lives.

The process of considering Central Six tie-ins which also provide avenues to course content mastery makes intentional your design of course structures, processes, and activities which can change students' lives for the better.

This may sound lofty or presumptuous, but consider the fact that, if all you desire for your students is that they “learn the course content,” then a considerable number of them — given a modicum of self-motivation — could enroll in a free MOOC (massive open online course) from a prestigious university, or learn content via Khan Academy, or avail themselves of other free resources in libraries and on the Internet. Much of the unique value-add which you bring to the learning process lies in your ability to help students learn how to learn, learn how to think like experts within the discipline, learn to adopt a more expansive view of their capabilities and potential.

When you think about possible Central Six-related activities within your course, you are automatically working within the transformative realm which is *not* a part of mere content delivery.

So the first step in assessing whether TL has happened is that you must mindfully build in the activities and environments in which it is likely to occur. Otherwise, TL happens by chance, and you don't want those odds. Though not every student will have a-ha moments or radically expand limiting perspectives as a result of being in your class, if you have looked for ways to bring in Central Six connections, such learning experiences will be more likely.

This is the “Plan” portion of the Plan-Do-Measure-Adjust process. While the process goes by different names (e.g., the ADDIE Model — Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, Evaluate; the close-the-loop process; the Deming Cycle — Plan-Do-Check-Act), the key aspect is that one plans something, actually does the thing, assesses the degree to which the thing succeeded, then makes adjustments based on what has been discovered during the measurement phase. The process then starts again, with the adjustments informing a new “Plan” step which then initiates another iteration of the process.

The “Plan” step is the first step in assessing the effectiveness of Transformative Learning in your classroom. Thinking of planning as part of assessing is helpful because

it raises the bar for the baseline from which you launch your future measurement.

In other words, you must first identify the “TL-inducing” characteristics of your course that you will then assess in the future. If you don’t plan these characteristics, your assessment of the degree to which TL happened won’t be predicated on anything but guesses about which things might have contributed to TL occurring in your class.

True, in the absence of any planning, you could ask students at the end of the course whether they experienced any TL moments during the course, hoping to find things that work in order to continue doing them. And, in fact, there is value in having students help you identify things that you didn’t even realize would be TL-positive. But having a baseline that identifies which activities you plan because in addition to their value in helping students learn course content they are also TL-focused means you’re employing better course design methodology.

(What if students said nothing contributed to perspective change and you hadn’t planned anything to prompt it? The only thing you would have learned in that case is that *not* planning TL activity meant *no* TL happened.)

Eyler and Giles (1999) write:

Not all learning is transformative. Learning can simply involve acquiring new information or elaborating on information that we already have. . . . Transformational learning occurs as we struggle to solve a problem where our usual ways of doing or seeing do not work, and we are called to question the validity of what we think we know or critically examine the very premises of our perception of the problem. (p. 133)

Your course may be mostly about having students acquire information, but do you want to miss the opportunity to expand students’ perspectives in the process? Planning in potential perspective-shifting learning activities as the first step in assessing the degree to which TL happens in your class at least raises the odds that students’ views of themselves, their communities (local and global), and their relationships are broadened in beneficial ways while they are acquiring information.

Plan. Do. Measure. Adjust.

Next month’s article will discuss doing and measuring as well as examples of how UCO faculty have planned in TL opportunities in service to their course goals.

Eyler, J., & Giles, D. E. (1999). *Where’s the learning in service learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.