

## TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

### *Is There a Moment-Point Shift that Signifies Transformative Learning?*

Dr. Paul Scheele will be keynoter and workshopper for UCO's 2015 Collegium on College Teaching Practice on August 12 here on campus. Paul is the author of several books and is a long-time workshop leader on, among other topics, how to facilitate effective learning by helping students use inner strengths and processes of which they likely are not consciously aware.

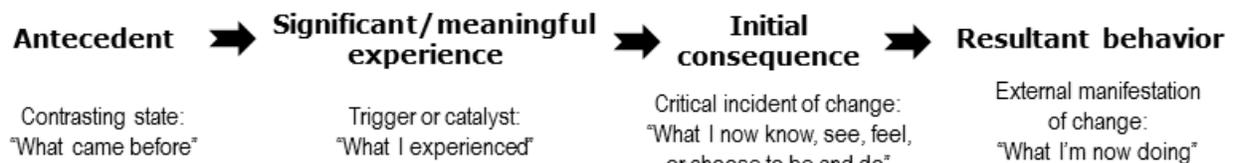
He also did his doctoral dissertation on Transformative Learning (TL): *Researching Critical Incidents of Transformation* (2013). Paul was intrigued by the question of exactly when a transformative expansion or shift in perspective occurs when a learner, prompted by an experience structured to elicit TL, has the a-ha moment. He used Critical Incident Technique (CIT) to investigate the issue.

Paul's dissertation research is relevant to TL at UCO. It involved adult learners in a learning environment utilizing "high-impact training approaches to inform participants about social injustices and environmental practices that threaten the planet, and to encourage them to act on that information" (Scheele, 2013, p. ii). He sought to find the stimuli and/or internal processes that seemed to be most transformative.

Frame his study as "TL related to high-impact practices concerning Global and Cultural Competencies and Service Learning and Civic Engagement," and you have an in-depth research study about Transformative Learning connected to two of UCO's Central Six Tenets (at least two — Leadership is potentially connected, too).

His findings can help us understand the moment-point shift that occurs in our students' minds when they experience a transformative event.

One important finding is that, for the subjects in Paul's research, he discovered the standard model for Critical Incident Technique left out a discernible step when applied to personal transformation. He found an intervening step, "Initial consequence," that located between the standard model's "Significant/meaningful experience" and "Resultant behavior" steps:



From Scheele, 2013, Fig. 6.2, p. 181

Further, he found language differences to be a common marker of change when subjects described their sense of moving through conceptual stages to ultimately expand a perspective or change a limiting perspective (as described in UCO's language

in our definition of TL: “develops students’ beyond-disciplinary skills and expands students’ perspectives of their relationships with self, others, community, and environment”).

For faculty and staff interested in doing research about Transformative Learning at UCO, Paul’s discovery of language differences could be very helpful in determining the moment-point shift (i.e., the “a-ha experience”) in a student’s thinking/being that would indicate a TL experience.

The language shift is from past tense to present tense:

**Second finding: Revealing changes in state with the verb to be.** More evidence of the difference between the assumed model and the emergent model was found in a nuanced distinction between the language participants used to describe their significant/meaningful experiences and the language they used to describe the initial consequences. They tended to see their experiences during the symposium as transitory states and the initial consequences of those experiences as states of existence. To understand the difference, it’s helpful to compare English and Spanish treatments of the verb *to be*. In English one verb describes both states: A person can “be happy” and also can “be a woman.” The first describes a temporary condition, while the second describes a more permanent characteristic. In Spanish the verb *estar* means “to be” in the sense of a transitory state, and the verb *ser* means “to be” in a state of existence.

Many of the subjects’ responses in the surveys and the interview used the past tense in describing the significant/meaningful experience as a sensory-based transient event. For example:

- “It just really hit me.”
- “It was suddenly like a little light went on.”
- “I just sat there and felt bewildered and sickened.”
- “The presentation touched all my senses.”
- “It really kind of clicked into focus.”

By contrast, the initial consequence of that experience was described in the present tense and coded as a more-permanent state of awareness:

- “The world in general just seems like a more friendly place.”
- “It just gives me the sense [that] there’s other people out there that sort of have my back.”
- “I am less inclined to need to look outside myself to find an identity.”
- “I’m not crazy for the things that I do and the way I choose to be and the path I’ve chosen to walk.”
- “I feel my connection to everything.”

None of these statements describe overt behaviors. Instead they indicate a new awareness, perception, or agency as an ongoing state of being able to think, feel, or function in a new way. (Scheele, 2013, pp. 181-182)

As UCO continues work with STLR as our mechanism for operationalizing Transformative Learning, Paul's dissertation can be a resource in designing disciplinary-based research studies (e.g., psychology, sociology, education) and for Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) studies.

## **References**

Scheele, P. R. (2013). Researching critical incidents of transformation. *Dissertations and Theses*. Paper 21. <http://aura.antioch.edu/etds/21>