How Transformative Learning Defines Us

Transformative Learning (TL) can be a slippery construct — it looks different in different situations, means different things in different contexts, and is achieved in ways too numerous to count because each method is a little bit different from the next. In spite of all this, it’s frequently the case that “we know it when we see it” — a difference has been made in a student’s life because she has come to an important realization.

Another TL definition is just as important:

How does Transformative Learning define me?

This is not such a strange question. If asked how, in general, someone else would define you, several answers might come quickly to mind: a generous
person, a good father, a dependable worker, and so on.

But if you asked yourself how you define yourself as a TL faculty member, what would be your answer?

If UCO asked itself how it would define itself as a TL institution, what would be our answer?

The answers just might comprise a darned good definition of Transformative Learning, period.

In the classroom, I have a sense of myself as a teacher. That sense includes the personal values about teaching I’ve always held to be at the core of my teaching self: fairness, helpfulness, never belittling students, making learning fun, holding students accountable to demonstrate their learning, and always conveying the excitement of learning, among other values.

So it’s not difficult for me to imagine what and who I am as a teacher.

When I came to UCO, I added TL into my sense-of-self-as-a-teacher mix, and I had to sit and ponder what that meant. Here are some questions I considered:

1. Does TL align with all the other values I have as a teacher?
2. If so, is helping students have TL experiences as important as the other things I value in teaching?
3. If so, how do I design learning activities and environments that will be likely to prompt TL experiences among students?
4. If I’m successful in prompting for TL in my classroom, how will I know? How will I assess whether I am successfully “doing” TL?
5. Finally, how will I explain to students the importance of TL, and how will I model for them the importance of TL in my teaching?

This kind of questioning process is somewhat similar to McKay and Fanning’s “laddering technique” (1991, pp. 35-36) in that it forces answers to a series of questions, each question predicated on the question before it. However, laddering to question one’s self about TL values and actions can work nicely to help answer the broader question, “How does TL define me?” For instance, in the above series of questions, if I had plugged in one of my other teaching values, I would have been able to answer every question. (I could have, for example, substituted “conveying the excitement of learning” for “TL” in the first question and then worked through the other questions from there.)

After going through this exercise, I was much clearer about why working to build learning activities and environments likely to prompt Transformative
Learning experiences aligned with my teaching values. It was easy to see why it aligned by answering the question, “If a student has a TL experience in my class (or out of class as a result of a homework assignment, for instance), would it be likely the learning experience came as a result of teaching in ways I value?”

While I supposed it might be possible to prompt for TL without, say, trying to make learning fun while still holding students accountable, being a “TL teacher” would not automatically preclude any of the other values important to my teaching self.

But would “being a TL teacher” add anything to my ability to help students learn? Would it increase the odds I would have a positive impact on students? Would it make it more likely that whatever positive impact I might already be having would be greater?

I could only answer those questions with, “Yes.” My reasoning was: 1) it would not mean I would have to stop doing anything I valued as a teacher, and 2) the concept I could actually intentionally work to build opportunities for students to come to important realizations about themselves as I continued to teach in ways aligning with my values meant TL would be a clear value-add for me and for my students.

Transformative Learning had defined me.

I had become a teacher true to all my previously-held values but who now also sought tools and strategies to help students learn about themselves in the process of learning the subject matter. This learning-about-self would never jeopardize learning content; it would enhance it.

The route I took to integrating TL is idiosyncratic — each teacher’s journey is unique. Each teacher’s experiences and values are different. With apologies that the above description is such a personal case story, it is the only story about being defined by Transformative Learning I can present with absolute authority.

What is your story?

Improving your Teaching by Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement

By Jody D. Horn, Ph.D.

A Teaching Philosophy or Teaching Statement is often required for a promotion and tenure dossier. It can serve a variety of purposes, but one of the often-overlooked benefits of writing a Teaching Philosophy is that the process itself can be formative for the professor. A common critique of writing these types of statements is that they can easily be over simplistic platitudes (Haggerty, 2010). Yet, as Seldin, Miller, and Seldin (2006; 2010, p. 37), the leading scholars in the area, note a critical part of the philosophy is documenting “how the professor’s philosophy statement is translated into action.” One can say that they teach a particular way, but giving evidence from a class or classes that you, in fact, do teach that way is not as easy. It is through this iterative process of proclaiming how and why you teach and giving evidence of it that one refines her teaching strategies and beliefs. For example, you may say you teach higher-level thinking but make students memorize information. Does this belief match your strategy?

Seldin, Miller, and Seldin (2010) devote one-third of their book to examples of teaching philosophies from a majority of the academic disciplines. A good place to begin your teaching philosophy is to read others. There are a variety of ways in which professors document how they achieve their teaching philosophy. Following is one way a biology professor’s illustrates her philosophy (2010, pp. 122-123):

I feel that my job is not just to present information—there is a surplus of information available to all—perhaps even too much information…My job as a teaching is to sort through all this information, to determine what’s important, to organize it into a coherent, cohesive package, and to teach the students how to evaluate the vast amount of information…Difficult material is broken into simpler units, on which I build to clarify the more challenging concepts. Providing an outline to follow makes it easier to present small, digestible, retainable sections of material.

The professor then discusses her “course material and student assessment tools” used to reinforce her philosophy.

Students are encouraged to develop their critical thinking skills, to evaluate the wide array of information about drugs and pharmaceuticals to which we are all exposed. To this end, we spend time learning the basics of critical thinking, and then critically
evaluate a number of articles, presentations, and films so students will be able to question information that impacts their lives and health.

In this professor’s syllabus, she has assessment tied directly to students’ ability to critically evaluate. Thus, her philosophy directs her action. Consequently, as you write your Teaching Philosophy or Teaching Statement you become self-reflective in ferreting out the evidence that you actually do this in your courses, and when you don’t you refine your teaching. For those faculty who have never written a Teaching Philosophy or Teaching Statement, here are some guidelines:

- Write one to two pages of clear, straightforward statements
- Be specific, not general: include student exercises, assignments, projects, or presentations that can be illustrative
- Show to other faculty for feedback and to share ideas
- Write clear goals and objectives as a teacher and for your students (e.g., creating environments for transformative learning, encourage mastery or competency, building team players)
- Include how your teaching methods support how students’ learn
  o Include beliefs about how students learn as it relates to the methods you use in class, e.g., you lecture most of the time because you believe students’ learn best by being told or you mix lecture and application because you believe …. Does your belief about how students learn relate to how you teach? Cite theorists and research on student learning you follow. It is common for faculty to include references to learning theory and research as Kathleen McKinney (1988) does in her Teaching Philosophy that follows what she calls the FACES format. [http://my.ilstu.edu/~kmckinne/teaching.htm](http://my.ilstu.edu/~kmckinne/teaching.htm)

In many ways, writing your own teaching philosophy is similar to conducting a self-audit. Once you write your statement, a review of the evidence supporting your statement confirms whether you actually teach the way you propose to. It is a helpful exercise in refining one’s pedagogy.

References


READINGS OF INTEREST

The Transformative Impact of Helping Students Develop Self-Control

You may be familiar with the “marshmallow test” experiment (Mischel, Ebbesen, & Zeiss, 1972) in which researchers attempted to determine correlations between children’s ability to delay gratification and their later success in life. (Yes, a positive correlation was found.) You may not be familiar, though, with the 40-year longitudinal study of 1000 children (now adults) in New Zealand known as the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study which has produced much data and generated many articles, including the one by Moffitt, Poulton, & Caspi (2013).

This robust study has teased out several very important findings from the data. By statistically controlling for intervening variables, researchers have been able to report that self-control is independent of socioeconomic status and IQ relative to its effect on success in adulthood:

. . . our 40-year study of 1,000 children revealed that childhood self-control strongly predicts adult success, in people of high or low intelligence, in rich or poor, and does so throughout the entire population, with a step change in health, wealth, and social success at every level of self-control. (Moffitt, Poulton, & Caspi, 2013, p. 353)

If helping students develop self-control leads to better health, wealth, and social success, and if the degree of these benefits increases as the degree of self-control increases, should we aim for building activities and environments likely to prompt transformative realizations about personal self-control? If so, how?

The 40-year longitudinal study is quite remarkable in its rigor and robustness. Researchers have triangulated among means of assessing self-control, depending not just on self-reports, but adding direct observation plus other measures indicative of self-control into the mix. The same is true of researchers’ modus operandi concerning assessment of life-success indicators. And while researchers have been meticulous, the New Zealander subjects have also been meticulous as subjects; they have made an enormous contribution to science, not just because their participation is yielding important findings, but also because the time and transparency commitments required of research subjects have been onerous.

In addition, some of the researchers involved with the New Zealand study are also involved in a sibling-pairs study of self-control, finding “the sibling with lower self-control had poorer outcomes, despite shared family background” (Moffitt, et al., 2011). This lends further credence to conclusions that self-
control correlates to life outcomes irrespective of genetic predispositions.

Owing to the age of the New Zealand study participants, researchers are now finding effects on subsequent generations based on the prior generation’s self-control gradients. Too, researchers now have technological tools, such as functional magnetic resonance imaging, that were not available at the start of the study, and they are beginning to look for neurological markers of a lifetime of self-control at varying gradients.

In short, the evidence is quite compelling that helping students develop self-control serves both them and society in many important ways. Though the biggest bang for the buck is undoubtedly in helping young students develop lifelong habits of self-control, Moffitt, Poulton, & Caspi (2013) do allow that helping adolescents develop self-control skills and dispositions also yields positive societal and personal results (p. 356). Also, Moffitt, et al., 2011, report that some subjects in the study improved their self-control as they aged, and that “children who became more self-controlled from childhood to young adulthood had better outcomes by age of 32 y, even after controlling for their initial levels of childhood self-control” (p. 2696). Later in the same article, the authors suggest the wisdom of a one-two punch — self-control development activities and skill-building in both childhood and adolescence (p. 2697).

Researchers also report that, even in adulthood, there is at least one activity that improves a person’s self-control ranking: “We found one factor that improved some members’ self-control rank: working as a supervisor responsible for subordinate employees” (Moffitt, Poulton, & Caspi, 2013, p. 358).

Self-control is a malleable trait. It can be improved as a result of developmental activities, and it correlates with all the positive outcomes UCO wishes for its graduates: better health and wealth, better social standing, improved parenting skills, a greater likelihood of worthy contributions to society.

So what can a UCO faculty member teaching a freshman class, for instance, do that can help her students develop self-control?

One high-impact practice — group work — relates to the finding that supervising others helps improve self-control. Two of UCO’s Central Six Tenets, leadership and service learning, often directly connect to supervising others, and routing through those two tenets with one or more assignment or activity will likely raise the odds that students will derive self-control improvement benefits.

Another classroom activity can have self-control management implications, no
matter the age of the college student. Moffitt, Poulton, & Caspi (2013, p. 359) report experimental evidence indicating what might be termed “self-control fatigue” — certain situations adults encounter or create can actually sap self-control: fatigue, stress, intoxication. Our Health and Wellness Tenet provides an avenue for faculty to help students understand and manage conditions which can minimize their ability to exercise self-control. Operating under minimized self-control conditions can have the same effects as operating as a person with lower levels of self-control if those conditions are encountered frequently enough. Designing learning activities and environments likely to prompt a-ha moments about personal health and wellness can also be a means of teaching to help students improve self-control.

Even a kid who scarfs down the marshmallow the instant the adult leaves the room is not doomed to lower adulthood outcomes, as indicated by research such as that described here. Though UCO classrooms don’t typically include young children as learners, we can still have an impact on helping our graduates achieve better adulthood outcomes by intentionally working to help students develop their self-control skills and dispositions.


eLEARNING

eLearning Innovation Instructional Design Model (e2IDM) — Analyzing (Part 2)

Bucky J. Dodd, Ph.D.

Part I of this article series provided an overview of the eLearning Innovation Instructional Design Model (e2IDM) used by the eLearning Development Team at the University of Central Oklahoma. This article focuses specifically on the Analyzing Phase of e2IDM. Figure 1 highlights the Analyzing phase of e2IDM.

![Diagram of e2IDM](image)

Figure 1. Analyzing Phase of the eLearning Innovation Instructional Design Model

The beginning phase of e2IDM is the Analyzing phase. Analyzing focuses on understanding conditions and factors that may influence how learning occurs within a given context (Callahan, 2005). For example, a course designer may survey a group of past students to learn about their likes or dislikes of a given course. A designer may also examine past course grades and analytic records to determine how students performed in prior versions of the course. While analyzing learning and development programs can be complex, there are several key areas that often make a big impact in the quality of the analysis findings for course design.

1. **The Learner** – Develop a typical learner profile for people who will likely be taking the course. A design question to assist in this process may be: What is the demographic profile of a typical learner who may enroll in this course? Useful findings may include the knowledge and
skills that they are likely to bring to the class, perquisite courses they have completed, or common experiences learners may share. Additional Sample Learner Questions

2. The Content – Establish a baseline understanding of the content and knowledge bases that influence the course. An example design question may be: What is the nature of the content that will be included in the course? Determining content relationships and content type (concepts vs. processes) will help to better understand ways learners may best engage with the learning experience.

3. The Context – While often forgotten or even removed from learning experiences, the context in which learning occurs is quite possibly one of the most important aspects to analyze. A design question to learn about context may be: Where would a learner need to use this information/skill? Additional Sample Context Questions

While these examples provide a starting point, the benefit of using e2IDM is having the ability to personalize the model based on the learners’ and project’s needs.

A challenging task associated with theAnalyzing phase of e2IDM is determining how to collect and analyze this data. Design-Innovation Resources in the e2IDM model provide the tools and strategies to answer design questions. One of the more effective tools to use during the Analyzing phase is an analysis guide. This guide can be completed as an interview with the project’s key decision makers. Another example of an Analyzing design-innovation resource may be using an online survey system to collect “feature ideas” for designing a new course. This strategy invites potential or past learners to suggest what features they would like to see in the course.

Examples of Analyzing Design-Innovation Resources

- A Self-Directed Guide to Designing Courses for Significant Learning
- Course Analysis Checklists
- Allen Communication Learning Services Design Jot
- Qualtrics Survey Suite

Analyzing is a foundational element to effective elearning development. This phase of e2IDM encourages the use of data to drive decision-making. This not only helps to make more informed decisions, but also to allows learners and stakeholders and important voice to the elearning development process. The design questions and design-innovation resources create a representative understanding of the learner, content, and context that have major implications on learning experiences. The next article in this series discusses approaches and techniques for the Modeling phase in e2IDM.
References

Active learning instructional strategies include a wide range of activities that share the common element of involving students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing. (Bonwell & Eison, 1991)

Active learning is characterized by students being engaged in learning and can include activities such as reading, writing and discussing. Getting students involved in higher order thinking is an important distinction between active and passive learning. There are many strategies available to employ active learning including class discussions, polling, group work and collaboration, peer-to-peer mentoring/teaching, and creating interactive lessons that require student participation.

Technology can help you get started using some of these strategies in your own classroom. While there are a lot of technology options available to help implement some of these strategies, there are three tools at UCO that are easy to get started, with including clickers (student response systems), learning management systems such as Desire2Learn and interactive whiteboards.

Student Response Systems - “Clickers” (Turning Technologies)

Instructors are using Clickers for a variety of different in-class applications. In a typical face-to-face classroom, especially when dealing with large numbers of students, the instructor asks a question, and it is answered only by the best, most outspoken students. This can leave the shy or less articulate students to continue to be passive participants in the class.

Clickers can dramatically increase the participation, transforming students from passive learners to active participants (Beard, 2013; Raux, 2012). Using clickers, instructors can pose a question and get immediate, real-time feedback. This feedback allows the instructor to review what the students do not seem to understand, provide additional explanation and examples for a concept that is misunderstood, or move on to the next part of the lesson if students demonstrate comprehension (Mula & Kavanagh, 2009). This allows the instructor to tailor her course material to address specific needs by the group of students sitting in front of her rather than using the same course outline for every section she teaches. This formative approach also allows students to use the instant feedback as well, giving them the ability to judge how well they are understanding the material (Mula & Kavanagh, 2009), ask
for clarification, and determine the gaps in their knowledge. This dynamic delivery of the material and interaction between the class participants allows instructors to more effectively meet the needs of all students (Mula & Kavanagh, 2009).

Turning Technologies is the official supported solution for Clickers at UCO. It is important to use the school’s supported system to help reduce costs to students and so you can get help when you run into any technical issues. UCO faculty can get started with using Turning Technologies in their classrooms by visiting the TRC resource page on using clickers.

Learning Management Systems (Desire2Learn)

According to a recent national survey, today’s workforce has placed the ability to work in a team as the number one skill hiring managers want out of their future employees (Adams, 2013). Technology in the classroom is a great resource that can “bring students together and makes traditional forms of student collaboration more efficient and rich” (Digital Promise, 2013).

Research shows that children show better levels of comprehension when they are active learners, involved in discourse and interactions as they are presented with concepts. There is also research that shows students learn from their social environments, and that they can complete more tasks if not working alone. (Digital Promise, 2013)

The campus learning management system is one resource that can be extremely beneficial when providing for collaboration opportunities among students. Desire2Learn allows instructors to create groups within their courses. These groups can then have access to group-specific discussion boards, dropboxes and even locker areas where the group can share files. Release conditions can also be set to allow only members of specific groups access to certain parts of the course content and/or quizzes so that learning and assessment can be customized to a specific group’s needs.

There are other technologies available that can assist in group collaboration including file-sharing sites like dropbox.com and Google docs that will allow students to work on the same document without worrying about different versions. Social bookmarking sites such as diigo.com or delicious.com can be great ways for groups to share resources, and even social media sites can be a good way for groups to stay connected and work together outside the classroom.

Interactive Whiteboards (SMART Board)

Interactive whiteboards, including brands like SMART Boards, provide for a
multitude of interactive learning possibilities. Interactive whiteboards work similarly to most of today’s smart phones, allowing individuals to draw, drag-and-drop, write notes and deliver dynamic lessons all with the touch of a finger. These dynamic lessons can help provide opportunities for discussion, allow instructors to demonstrate concepts, save completed formulas, and notate diagrams, all without being forced to hide behind a computer screen. Additionally, these and student-written contributions can be saved for future reference and collaboration.

At UCO (2013) “transformative learning is a holistic process that places students at the center of their own active and reflective learning experiences.” Use of these active learning strategies can help you to provide for transformative learning in your own classroom, making active learning easier and more seamlessly integrated into your lessons. These technologies are just a few of the many options available.

The UCO Technology Resource Center provides training and assistance with academic technology including Turning Technologies, Desire2Learn and SMART Boards. Contact the TRC for more information or log in to the learning center to find out when the next training opportunity is available; (405)974-5595 or trc@uco.edu.

Learn more about innovative strategies and digital initiatives across UCO’s campus at Digital Central. http://digitalcentral.uco.edu

References


