

Toward a Definition of Transformative Learning

Wholistic Lifelong Learning Stream

Millennium Connection Conference

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Transformative learning is often recognizable in the midst of lifelong learning and wholistic learning.

Lifelong learning spans one's lifetime and all of life's phases from pre-birth through the elder years. It connotes ability and passion for learning inside the classroom and informally within one's social environment. A wholistic, lifelong learner has the ability to learn all of the time, whether attending schools or not.

The wholistic aspect of learning involves the whole-person including physical (wellness, psychomotor, kinesthetic), mental (verbal, mathematical/logical, problem-solving), emotional (intrapersonal, interpersonal) and spiritual (artistic, ethics, values¹, meaning) dimensions. Wholistic instruction is intended to break cultural stereotypes and build bridges among people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

In exploring this wholistic², life-long approach, the conference chose to focus its discussions on the transformative aspects of this learning. Transformation refers to a fundamental self-image change occurring in the learner, a paradigm shift that radically/significantly alters an individual's behavior. More than "knowing" something new (gaining knowledge) or being able to "do" something new (acquiring skills), or "believing" something new (changing attitudes), transformative learning leads to becoming or "being" a whole, new person. It is learning that, in the context of a person's major life crises and passages, redefines vocational calling or reshapes self-identity.

Transformative learning is also a change not merely in "what" one knows, but also in "how" one knows. It is learning that empowers the learner to learn independently for oneself and interdependently with the community. In the process, the teacher/learner dichotomy becomes blurred as both are transformed. Adults who transform in these ways are willing to modify their thinking, can withhold ultimate decisions until all the information is available, and acknowledge the complex and tentative nature of everyday issues. They are also better able to recognize the need for more just, humane, and equitable economic and social structures and better able to work toward achieving these goals. This learning environment is similarly critical for groups to experience transformative team learning, organizational learning and community learning.

The use of comprehensive models such as the Kaleidoscope Teaching Strategy³ is one attempt to achieve transformative results. Within the design of this particular model are also found the five presuppositions of an image-based instructional approach which describes how changed images can change behavior. The roots of this work are found in the documents of "Imaginal Education"⁴, an approach which considers not only cognitive, developmental and affective aspects, but also existential changes of a person in their knowing and learning.

In summary, transformative learning is that which:

- brings out the quality of the human spirit,
- encourages consciousness of one's journey of development,
- enables the use of multiple perspectives,
- deepens the connections of the heart, and
- leads to meaning-making, synthesis, and connectivity.

It is learning comprised of changes that are second-order⁵ in nature--changes that alter our fundamental ways of doing education and being human.

¹ Tillman, D. et al (2000) Living values activities for young adults. New York: Health Communication Inc.

² This particular spelling was chosen for use in the conference to emphasize the whole-person intent of our work.

³ Taylor, Kathleen et al (2000) Developing adult learners: Strategies for teachers and trainers. San Francisco: _-Bass. Page 116.

⁴ Boulding, K (1956). The Image. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

⁵ Fullan, M. (1991). The new meaning of educational change. New York: Teachers College Press.

THE KEYS TO TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

A. ESTABLISHING A HOLDING ENVIRONMENT		B. PROMOTING LEARNER CENTEREDNESS		C. ENGAGING CHANGE			D. SEEKING INCLUSIVENESS		E. EMBRACING MYSTERY			
1. CREATING SAFE ENVIRONMENT	2. MUTUAL SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS	3. BUILDING SUPPORTIVE ALLIANCES	4. LETTING THE LEARNER LEAD	5. UTILIZING FULLY THE LEARNER'S CAPACITIES	6. DEVELOPING REFLECTIVE CAPACITY	7. DISCOVERING OPPORTUNITY IN DISORIENTING SITUATIONS	8. SURFACING AND QUESTIONING ASSUMPTIONS	9. EXPERIMENTING WITH AND EMBRACING CHANGE	10. DECIDING TO RISK TO ACTION	11. BROADENING AND DEEPENING THE LEARNING PLAN	12. DEVELOPING WHOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE	13. CULTIVATING CONNECTIONS TO THE HEART
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safe, honoring environment Sharing & understanding belief systems to come to a common understanding Mutual trust and respect Creating the positive learning environment Affirming learner's life-experience Building on a child's intrinsic values Providing open space and respect Based on affirming the positive; valuing what students already know 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building personal relationships & connections to enable communication Team and individual must be in balance Establishing bonds & caring for each other Creating student/teacher mutuality Mentor as transforming/transformed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Direct benefit to individual & society Needs (social, individual) Support from civic institutions Involving diverse groups Building alliances, not walls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitating active student involvement Asking for student to tell their own story Active responsibility for own learning Develop the child's self-story Student involvement "curriculum" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Openness to cultural differences Respecting individual differences Accepting generations Allowing flexibility & styles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-discovery to find one's mission Continuous reflective thinking Curiosity & asking "right" questions Reflecting on experience-based reflections Focusing on attitudinal change (beyond skills & knowledge) A process of experience & reflection Developing self-belief & curiosity Allowing question rise/come up from 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizing dissonance Life crisis starting point Challenge imbalance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dialoguing with "other" Every solution is temporary Questions old assumptions & paradigms Dialoguing partner for transformation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student openness & (glasnost) to change Will look beyond immediate Developmental readiness to change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empowering Meaningful action Risking failure in action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experiential learning <i>lasts</i> Integrating arts in curriculum Learn through play Creating imaginative experiences Oral language development Deepening self-reflection & expanding social experience Understanding concepts of T.L. Targeting relevant interests Releasing left-brain pressures Evaluation of transform-ative learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Calling for comprehensive context Wholistic includes all the earth Multiple ways to insure sustainability Vision stretching context Broadening social context Expanding metacognition All ages, all senses, whole earth, dynamics not static, social/individual images Learning results in transformation Considers the larger context—family, society, culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To bring out the quality of the spirit Consciousness of journey Change of attitude by use of multiple perspectives Deepening the human spirit Meaning-making, synthesis, connectivity