Transformative Learning in Practice

Transformative learning is becoming influential in all areas of the educational landscape. In Transformative Learning in Practice, leading authorities and practitioners working in a variety of national and international settings, including college classrooms, corporate workshops, online, and informal groups in rural communities, offer insights and a wealth of strategies for fostering transformative learning in and out of the classroom.

Transformative Learning in Practice will help readers:
- Learn the most effective practices for promoting transformative learning
- Understand the most helpful ways transformative learning informs practice
- Find out how the teaching setting shapes the practice of transformative learning
- Discover the successes, strengths, and outcomes of fostering transformative learning
- Recognize the risks and challenges of practicing transformative learning

This comprehensive resource includes an introduction to the theory of transformative learning, a brief overview of the growing body of research on the topic, and a discussion of areas for future exploration.

Praise for Transforming Learning in Practice

"Transformative learning comes to life in this powerful collection of real experiences which put transformative learning into practice in higher education, the workplace, and in community and social change education. Every chapter is full of candid insights from reflective practitioners about the challenges and rewards of engaging in transformative learning. A must-read for adult educators everywhere!"
— Sharan B. Merriam, professor emeritus of adult education, University of Georgia

"Mezirow and Taylor's book deepens our understanding of a central idea in adult education—that meaningful learning for adults is often triggered by a transformative experience. Readers are provided a rich array of approaches which help them to understand and facilitate transformative learning in multiple settings. Together these practices build a toolkit for those who would support learning that transforms."
— Karen E. Watkins, professor, human resource and organization development, Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy, University of Georgia

"Methods to facilitate transformative learning bear intriguing similarities across varied places and spaces. This book breaks through silo thinking and is for educators across formal and informal settings who are concerned with individual or collective transformation, whether in the 'North' or 'South.'"
— Shirley Walters, professor of adult and continuing education, University of Western Cape, South Africa

The Editors

Jack Mezirow is professor emeritus of adult and continuing education at Teachers College, Columbia University. His previous books include Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning, Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood, Learning as Transformation, and others.

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Transformative Learning in Practice
Transformative Learning in Practice

Insights from Community, Workplace, and Higher Education

Jack Mezirow
Edward W. Taylor
and Associates

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In the past decade, interest has been growing in the field of adult education and higher education about the practice of transformative learning: an approach to teaching based on promoting change, where educators challenge learners to critically question and assess the integrity of their deeply held assumptions about how they relate to the world around them.

Transformative learning has become the dominant teaching paradigm discussed within the field of adult education. It has interested scholars and educators to such an extent that it is no longer just an adult education teaching construct. Rather, it is becoming a standard of practice in a variety of disciplines and educational settings: higher education, professional education, organizational development, international education, and community education. For example, transformative learning guides instruction in a first-year sociology course at a Canadian university, where it provides a framework for facilitating critical reflection in the workplace; it is used to promote female empowerment in Senegal for those who are fighting the practice of female genital cutting; it provides guidance in promoting community among online learners; and it guides the instruction for medical students in palliative care. These settings, as well as many others, begin to shed light on the broad reach that transformative learning offers higher and adult education as a viable and responsive practice.

Research about transformative learning also continues to grow exponentially, to the point that a national conference, held every couple of years, is devoted to this topic. Published research continues to grow as well. A recent
review of this research shows that much of the focus is on fostering transfor-
mative learning. In other words, it is about understanding, identifying, and
making sense of transformative learning as a practice in the classroom
and other settings. Nevertheless, despite its growing presence as an area
of research and a means of practice in a variety of settings, there is still much
we do not know about the practice of transformative learning.

Many questions remain unanswered or inadequately understood. How are
educators conceptualizing the purpose and practice of fostering transformative
learning? What are effective practices for promoting transformative learning
in formal and informal settings? What is it about transformative learning that
is most helpful in informing practice? How does the teaching setting shape
the practice of transformative learning? What are the successes, strengths, and
outcomes of fostering transformative learning? What are the risks, challenges,
and caveats when practicing it?

These questions and others form the foundation of this book, which seeks
to bring to life the practice of transformative learning and its application within
varied educational settings. The chapters in this book, written by a cadre of
talented scholars and practitioners from a variety of adult and higher education
contexts, reveal an in-depth and personal perspective about the everyday
practice of fostering transformative learning within unique educational settings.

The contributors represent a diverse and experienced group of scholar-
practitioners who are actively engaged in the work of transformative learning in
a variety of national and international settings, among them higher education,
corporations, and communities. Readers will be able to glean from these
chapters strategies, methods, and caveats from experienced educators who
deeplly believe in the practice of transformative learning and who respect its
challenges and appreciate its rewards.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Compiling this book required a process of sorting through a variety of resources
in an effort to identify individuals who could provide an informative chapter
on the practice of transformative learning. The central source for this book was
the conference proceedings of seven International Transformative Learning
Conferences conducted from 1998 to 2007, along with a review of published
journal articles on fostering transformative learning (Taylor, 2000, 2007). Seven
collaboratively planned conferences were held from 1998 and 2007: three were
conducted in New York, and the others in California, Ontario, Michigan, and
New Mexico. Each produced a comprehensive publication of peer-selected
papers, accepted for presentation at the conference and included in conference
proceedings.
These proceedings provided an invaluable resource ensuring diverse perspectives of fostering transformative learning. The breadth of application of transformative learning in each conference is reflected, for example, in the Proceedings of the Sixth Conference in Michigan, which contained thirty-two presentations, including addressing applications of transformative learning in education, organizations, religion, diversity, spirituality, gender, critical humility, transformation theory, disability, race, conflict resolution, research, popular education, community development, cross-cultural learning, autobiography, diversity, health, online education creativity, faculty development, films, democratic citizenship, and art. In addition to the proceedings, published research studies about fostering transformative learning were reviewed as well.

As book editors, we went through all the conference proceedings and published literature reviews relevant to fostering transformative learning. Our goal was to identify a host of contributors who provide a diverse approach to practice transformative learning within a variety of settings.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The chapters are organized into five parts. Part One consists of two chapters that set the context for the book by providing an introduction to the practice of fostering transformative learning and to the theory of transformative learning. The next three parts, the heart of the book, contain twenty-two chapters that provide insight into the practice of fostering transformative learning in various settings: in higher education (nine chapters), workplace education (six chapters), and community and social change education (seven chapters). The one chapter in Part Five serves as a reflective analysis of all the chapters, identifying what they reveal as a whole about the practice of transformative learning.

The emphasis of reflection on practice is central to the entire book. Teaching is often a tacit and unreflective activity, with educators rarely writing up their ideas of practice for others to read. In response to this concern and in keeping with the idea of promoting a reflexive practice, we asked the contributors to look back and discuss what new insights and challenges they learned from this experience that would better inform interested practitioners about fostering transformative learning.

In addition, each contributor was asked to develop his or her chapter with an instrumental emphasis and less theoretical analysis concerning transformative learning. The intent was to provide practical and concrete instructional guidance to interested practitioners. We hope that the readers of this book will find new insights into practice and gain a greater appreciation of the challenges associated with fostering transformative learning regardless of the setting. We
also hope readers will explore and take risks in their classrooms and informal educational settings, always pushing the limits of what is known about transformative education.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A book of such breadth and depth does not come together without the hard work of dedicated individuals. We thank the contributors to this book particularly for their creative and thoughtful insights into fostering transformative learning, their promptness in submitting their chapters and turning around revisions in a timely manner, and their patience with our editorial comments. Furthermore, we acknowledge the invaluable contribution by Jodi Jarecke, a graduate assistant at Penn State University in Harrisburg. She spent many, many hours overseeing the administration of the book, editing, and providing insightful comments about the individual chapters. It was our good fortune to have her as part of the editorial team and as a contributor to the final chapter of the book.

September 2009

Jack Mezirow
Edward W. Taylor

REFERENCES


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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Award for Literature in Adult Education (in 1986, 1989, 1996, and 2005). He also won the 1986 Imogene Okes Award for Outstanding Research in Adult Education. His work has been translated into German, Finnish, and Chinese. In 1991, he was awarded an honorary doctor of letters degree from the University System of New Hampshire for his contributions to understanding adult learning. In 2001, he received the Leadership Award from the Association for Continuing Higher Education for “extraordinary contributions to the general field of continuing education on a national and international level.” He currently serves on the editorial boards of educational journals in Britain, Canada, and Australia, as well as in the United States. During 2002, he was a visiting professor at Harvard University. In 2003, he was awarded an honorary doctor of letters degree from Concordia University (St. Paul).

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Peter Easton is associate professor of adult and international education at Florida State University, where he teaches courses in international development education, multicultural education, adult learning, and participatory methodologies. He has worked extensively in Africa and the Caribbean and is particularly interested in problems of education and employment and methods of adult learning. His recent publications include “Social Policy from the Bottom Up: Abandoning FGC in Sub-Saharan Africa” (with Karen Monkman and Rebecca Miles) in Development in Practice (2003); “Education and Indigenous Knowledge” in Rainer Wrote et al. Indigenous Knowledge: Local Pathways to Global Development (2004); and “Adult Education and Social Sustainability: Harnessing the Red Queen Effect,” in Convergence (2007). He received his Ph.D. from Florida State University.

Tony Egan is a psychologist and senior teaching fellow in the Department of the Dean, Dunedin School of Medicine, New Zealand. He has worked on curriculum development and evaluation in medical education for twenty years and sits on school and faculty committees responsible for development of the undergraduate medical course. He has researched and published on a wide range of topics, and his current preoccupations are the role of the hidden curriculum in medical education and learning and assessing how to achieve safe and effective clinical outcomes. He has a long-term affiliation with general practice (GP), coordinating continuing education for local GPs and contributing to the development of undergraduate programs in primary care and rural health. In 2003, he was elected to honorary fellowship of the Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners. He is an enthusiastic contributor to ANZAME, the Australasian association for health professional education,
editor of its journal, *Focus on Health Professional Education*, and serves as a reviewer for a number of journals.

The European-American Collaborative Challenging Whiteness fosters learning and research about white supremacist consciousness. It is a group of six white adult education practitioner-scholars who, as individuals, practice in a variety of institutional and community settings. They have been working together since 1998 to support each other in efforts to change their awareness about privilege, race, and racism and to become more effective as change agents in their professional and personal lives. Members, who came together through a cultural consciousness project at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, are Carole Balas, Elizabeth Karl, Alec MacLeod, Doug Paxton, Penny Rosenwasser, and Linda Sartor. They use a collective name because it reflects their beliefs about how knowledge is constructed. Inquiries about the collaborative’s work can be addressed to collaborative@eccw.org. Further information is available at http://www.iconoclastic.net/eccw/.

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Jack Mezirow is Emeritus Professor of Adult and Continuing Education, Teachers College, Columbia University. He introduced the concept of transformative learning to the field of adult education in 1978 in “Perspective Transformation,” published in *Adult Education Quarterly*. The research base for this concept evolved out of a comprehensive national study of women returning to college. Among his books are *Learning as Transformation* (with Associates, 2000), *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (1991), and *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood* (with Associates, 1990), all published by Jossey-Bass. Mezirow has written several other books, chapters, and articles, and his books on transformative learning have been translated into Greek, German, French, Italian, and Finnish.

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