

Chapter 1

Transformative Learning: Theory and Practice for Faculty and Students

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical as well as practical overview of transformative learning and how this theory applies to both faculty and students. Transformative learning (TL) is the stage where the educational process becomes more than just a transfer of knowledge; it becomes authentic, true learning. TL is reflective, experiential, student-centered and requires self-directive learners and faculty who are willing to provide meaningful, relevant, problem-based assessment and use a variety of teaching methods. The major tenets of transformational learning and how it applies to learning and curriculum are also discussed in this chapter.

WHAT IS TRANSFORMATION?

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary (2014), to transform is to “change in character or condition” or to “change something completely and usually in a good way” (p.1). The typical illustration of transformation is the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly. Transformative theories first took hold in business in the form of transformative leadership. Robbins and Coulter in 2005 identified transformational-transactional leadership as an important leadership theory that included four major aspects: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration

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and intellectual stimulation. These are the same things students want from faculty; they want new knowledge to be presented to them in a way that is influential, motivating and intellectual. In addition, they want to be treated as individuals with different diverse perspectives and experiences. Transformational leaders treat their followers as “ends, not means” (Khan, Ramzan, Ahmed & Nawaz, 2011, p. 132). They work for the benefit of the organization, their followers, themselves and their world at large. There is a significant relationship between transformational leadership style and follower satisfaction (Bodla & Nawaz, 2010; Emery & Barker, 2007; Griffith, 2004). The organization also benefits through increased productivity (de Jong & Bruch, 2013; Carter, Armenakis, Feild & Mossholder, 2013). Khan et al. (2011) note, “transformational leadership is important in every setting...transformational leaders pursue others to perform beyond expectations and beyond what they think possible” (pp. 131-132). Isn't that what education is all about? Cheng (2014) found transformational leadership in colleges and universities resulted in higher faculty satisfaction and performance; the higher the level of transformational leadership the higher the satisfaction and performance. If this is what faculty want for themselves, then it is feasible this is also what students want in the classroom.

Khan et al. (2011) took these transformational leadership principles and applied them to students and education by surveying 400 faculty members working in higher education institutions through the state of Punjab in Pakistan. They evaluated three types of leadership styles in these educational institutions: transformational, transactional and laissez faire. Transformational leadership yielded both follower satisfaction and production while transactional leadership yielded satisfaction but no extra effort. Laissez faire leadership correlated negatively to both faculty satisfaction and effort. Cheng (2014) surveyed 292 faculty members and yielded the same results. If faculty members are happier and more productive with transformational or transformative leaders, therefore, it is not a stretch to draw the conclusion that students are likely to be happier and put forth more effort as well. Faculty must transform and be the type of leaders they prefer. When this occurs, students themselves transform and develop critical thinking and higher level reasoning. For synergy and maximum learning to occur, both faculty and students must transform.

WHAT IS TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION?

Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transfers of information.

– Paulo Freire

First comes thought; then organization of that thought, into ideas and plans; then transformation of these plans into reality. The beginning, as you will observe, is your imagination. – Napoleon Hill

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