

Macon, Celie, Patricia and Me: Deepening Understanding of Transformative Learning through the Lives of Fictional Characters and Dialogue

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a reflective analysis on how the author came to a deeper understanding of transformative learning while collaborating on a research project with Patricia Cranton from 2012-2014, resulting in *A Novel Idea: Researching Transformative Learning in Fiction*, published by Sense Publishers in 2015. They read six contemporary novels and then analyzed the transformative experiences of the main characters. They created imagined dialogues between the characters to explore emergent themes from the research. They further explored the themes through dialogues between the two of them. Through her work and relationship with Patricia Cranton, Randee had the opportunity to explore new and exciting ways to understand transformative learning and to contribute to the development of theory. This writing is her tribute to Patricia.

KEYWORDS

Arts-Based Research, Collaborative Inquiry, Dialogue, Fiction, Transformative Learning

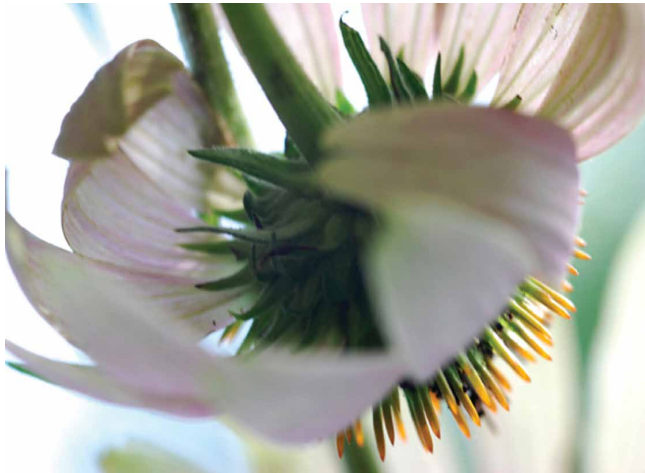
HOW IT BEGAN

I met Patricia Cranton at the Transformative Learning Conference in Albuquerque New Mexico in 2007. There we discovered we both had an interest in photography. In fact, we had both studied with the same photographer, Freeman Patterson in New Brunswick, Canada. We were attracted to his style that tends to be more impressionistic than realistic. At that time Patricia was teaching at Penn State University in Harrisburg Pennsylvania. We started emailing our images back and forth. I think this inspired both of us to be more creative. Patricia's comments were never of the mundane sort such as "that's very nice." Instead she would describe what she saw in the photograph and how it spoke to her.

Figures 1 and 2 show two of the photos we shared. Patterson talked about seeing the world as other non-human beings would see it. I experimented with looking at flowers from beneath them and imagined how that flower would look to a mouse. Patricia and I talked about how limiting it was when we failed to consider worldviews differently from our own. Patricia shared her photo of a duck in between land and water. The water reflected the landform and it was difficult to tell what was reality and what was a reflection of that reality. This photo exemplified the theme of reality or consciousness that later came up in our study.

We realized that photography could be a tool for transformative learning. We can learn to see in different ways and to experience different perspectives through the camera lens. This understanding eventually led to a collaborative conference presentation and subsequent journal article (Lawrence & Cranton, 2009). As Patricia stated:

Figure 1. Mouse eye view by Randee Lawrence

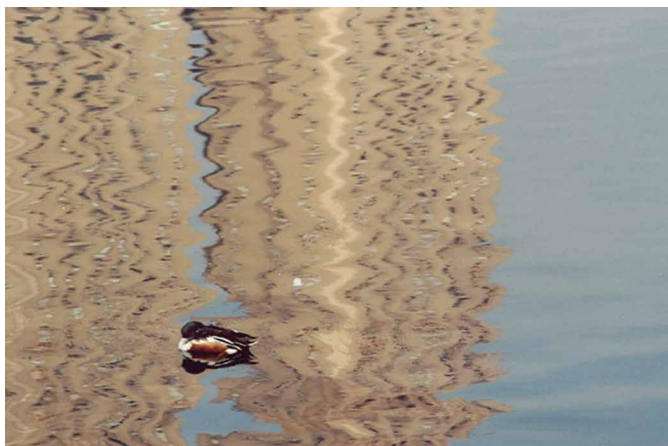


I saw those images in the world around me; then, after a while, even when I did not have my camera with me, I saw those images. I saw art everywhere around me. . . creating photos has been transformative for me in the way I see my surroundings. (p. 315)

My research interests center around the role of the arts in teaching, learning and research.

I am particularly fascinated with how the arts can both foster transformative learning and be an expression of that learning. Patricia shared and encouraged my interests (Lawrence & Cranton, 2009). We both incorporated arts-based practices into our teaching and delighted in sharing the amazing work that our students created. We also recognized how institutions present struggles, particularly in supervising students doing arts-based dissertations. We talked about these highlights and challenges in a book chapter (Lawrence & Cranton, 2013) that was largely written as a dialogue between us. We discovered through the dialogical process that the conversation deepened as we shared our experiences, asked one another thought provoking questions, and searched for answers.

Figure 2. Duck in Central Park by Patricia Cranton



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