

Chapter 65

A Case Study in the Application of Transformative Learning Theory: The Redesign of an Online Course in Order to Achieve Deep Learning

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ABSTRACT

Transformative learning can be used as a strategy for measuring teacher effectiveness in online courses. By measuring the transformations that occur within their courses, instructors can understand more about the activities and experiences that are the most impactful for students. In addition, instructors can create opportunities for transformation by designing learning experiences that encourage students to critically self-reflect. This chapter presents an exploratory study that examined instructor and student perceptions of transformation in an online school library graduate program. The data was used to redesign one unit in a course on reference and information services to create opportunities for students to experience transformation with the content.

INTRODUCTION

Transformative learning is a powerful learning theory that explains the steps adults undertake as they develop new perspectives and assumptions about their understanding of the world (Mezirow, 1981). In online graduate programs, transformative learning can be a particularly relevant strategy for guiding adult graduate students through the process of learning new things about a field of study, which may also involve reshaping current ideologies. It is particularly common for major learning experiences like

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study abroad or internships to serve as transformative learning experiences, but can learning activities within online classes have the same impact?

This chapter is a case study of one library science professor's experience to learn more about how online students experienced perspective transformation in their graduate program. This case study was conducted as a means of faculty development and is grounded in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), where a professor seeks evidence of teaching and learning to improve effectiveness. In particular, this case examines the learning activities in an online program to understand more about how online students are impacted so that improvements can be made to a specific course. The goals of this chapter are to: (1) Present transformative learning theory as a method for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching and learning (2) Share a process for other faculty to use to design transformative experiences in their online courses.

DISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE

This case study takes place in a library science graduate program at a state university. This program is a professional program that prepares teachers to become school librarians (see "teacher" definition). Preparation to become a school librarian involves learning curriculum that connects the role of the school librarian with state standards in librarianship and content areas, and national standards for school librarianship (American Library Association, n.d).

The job of the school librarian has changed significantly over the years. Wine (2016) explained that school librarians have experienced radical change and adapted their role to developments in society related to accessing and using information in print and digital formats. Many teachers still imagine that the school librarian serves as the gatekeeper for the school's books and a promoter of reading (Gavigan & Lance, 2015). In addition to these responsibilities, the school librarian may also be a teacher and leader of inquiry, technology and information. Many studies have shown a correlation between school library programs and student achievement (for example, see Lance and Kachel, 2018, who discuss the different types of studies that explore the connection between the school library and student achievement). Misconceptions about the value and importance of the school library can be problematic for securing funding, staffing them with certified librarians, or simply making use of the library as a resource within the school community.

With the introduction of new National School Library Standards in 2018 by the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), it became even more clear that a good school librarian must design a school library program that serves as a center for learning within the entire school. However, many new graduate students come to library science programs with little experience in libraries and preconceived ideas of what librarians do (Cherry et al., 2011). In school librarianship in particular, professional standards have evolved that require school library candidates to adopt an inclusive, innovative, globally connected, and technology-infused practice of librarianship. School librarians are leaders in their schools who protect intellectual freedom and ensure equitable access to information (Wine, 2016). This is very different from the "keeper of the books" image that many associate with school librarians (p. 208). Budd (1995) historically described these misconceptions as related to a positivistic tendency within the field of library science: The practice of collecting, organizing, and retrieving information resources is construed as process-driven, rather than understood as an epistemological approach to librarianship that is more reflective of the people using the systems.

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