

# Transformative Learning in Our Past and Future: A Retrospective Review toward Greater Heights

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## Abstract

*Amid times of change and transition, we glean insight through reflection. This retrospective review discusses the relevance and vitality of the Journal of Transformative Learning (JoTL) as the authors conclude their six-year JoTL co-editorship. Accomplishments include expanding the Editorial Board, converting to a new publishing platform, and achieving on-time releases of multiple volumes including three special issues and four conference proceedings. With deep appreciation and gratitude, the co-editors share thoughtful takeaways concerning the future of transformative learning that most certainly should include more special issues, more theories, frameworks, and models, more conference proceedings, and more opportunities for mentored student engagement.*

*Keywords:* Transformative Learning, Leadership Longevity, Editor Transition

## Introduction

Times of change and transition are fitting moments worthy of reflection. For instance, coping with a life-threatening illness, launching a new business, adjusting to the loss of a loved one, and initiating a relational commitment—all are situations of change that can have physical and mental implications. Our story of transition, though not life-threatening, has been life-changing; it is equally significant and worthy of a retrospective review. New co-editors are slated for onboarding soon, and the *Journal of Transformative Learning* (JOTL) is nicely positioned for future growth. This is a perfect time to look back and forward.

We agreed to serve as co-editors in 2016 and thus began our JoTL co-editorship journey. The JoTL work was not our first foray in partnering. We were already meeting weekly as research collaborators. Our research affiliation began from a chance conversation following an awards luncheon that changed the trajectory of our scholarship. Multiple presentations, two funded interdisciplinary grants, and two book chapters later, we are still somewhat obsessed with leadership longevity—the process by which individuals navigate personal leader identity over time to continue leading for longer. The rhythm of our scholarly work has included sessions at the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership and Higher Learning Commission conferences with leadership findings fitting for academicians, corporate executives, and nonprofit leaders. Through the development of the four-faceted model for accelerating leader identity (Sims & Cunliff, 2022; Sims, Cunliff, Robertson, & Sims, 2018), we developed a unique viewpoint for examining leadership across cultures, racio-ethnic identities, industries and contextual areas of inquiry. We would bring the same academic- and practitioner-oriented perspective across disciplines to transformative learning and to our efforts of laying the foundational scope for the JoTL.

Our vision for the JoTL has been to provide a forum of perspectives on the practice and application of transformative learning for use among organizations and educational institutions. We privileged outlooks across disciplines shared in original research manuscripts, essays, and teaching notes as well as through scholar Q&As and Special Issues. Steeped in a view of transformative learning as an

active process of learning that encourages seeing new things, seeing old things differently, and re-conceptualizing mindsets, the JoTL has fostered dialogue that provides essential resources for transformative learning practice. And, we have been the primary beneficiaries of witnessing our collective conversations and scholarly engagement up close for almost seven years.

### **Where We've Been and What We Hope to See**

Our vision has taken flight, and we have not travelled alone. We followed the editorship of Dr. Jody Horn and joined the wonderful work of UCO's Center for Excellence in Transformative Teaching and Learning led by Dr. Jeff King. Our first order of the JoTL work was to expand the Editorial Board. Many thanks to this group who gave freely of their time and energy; they are a magnificent team who responded quickly to the need for review, helped find potential authors, and provided an encouraging word when needed. We also expanded our editorship to include student editorial research assistants. Through the years, we have enjoyed the expertise, reliability, and insight of Jacie Harvel, Andi Ullrich, Anna Doré, Augusta Davis, Morgan Scott, Jacquelin Hopper, and Zoe Wright. Their valuable assistance truly made it possible to accomplish so much with so little time. Thank you to UCO's former provost Dr. John Barthell, current provost Dr. Charlotte Simmons, and the Division of Academic Affairs for accepting our proposal to fund the students; this opportunity enabled them to gain practical experience in publishing that has favorably impacted their careers.

Since beginning our JoTL work, we have maintained a dedicated group of scholars and practitioners to serve as reviewers and to share their feedback. Along with expanding the Editorial Board and mentoring student editorial research assistants, we converted to a new publishing platform, and published 11 issues (including this one). Of those issues, three were Special Issues that focused on undergraduate research, international experiences, and the pandemic. Thank you to Dr. Doreen Sams, Dr. John Wood, and Dr. Jarrett Jobe for the time they devoted to partnering with us on a Special Issue. While serving in JoTL co-editorial roles, we also founded and published four UCO Transformative Learning Conference Proceedings and two books focused on transformative learning (Sims, Cunliff, & Dore, 2019; Sims, Cunliff, & Wright, 2022 *in press*). We are joined by two students (Anna Doré and Zoe Wright) in book editorship. None of these accomplishments would have been possible without the support and work of a dedicated team. And, much more potential awaits us in the area of transformative learning. Below we share our aspirations of what we hope to see in the future.

#### **More Special Issues**

Special Issues can elicit imagination and rumination around a topic. They permit others to engage in editorial commentary without the lengthier, multi-year commitment of journal editorship. In essence, the power of Special Issues is in *convening thought*. Since we imagined more Special Issues than our publication schedule permitted, we share this nudge to hopefully prompt many of you toward greater contemplation about the focused conversations that are still needed. What set of questions are missing to drive our thinking and scholarship about transformative learning forward? And, how can we convene a series of manuscripts with essays that think about plausible responses?

#### **More Theories, Frameworks, and Models**

The hope for more theories, frameworks, and models of transformative learning is closely related to our bias on the value of *convening thought*. Scholarship that illuminates our thinking and directs our understanding with lucidity is refreshing. We seek for practitioners and academicians to spend more time playing with logic, with captured observations, and with systematic investigations that help us re-think and know more about transformative learning.

#### **More Conference Proceedings**

The Transformative Learning Conference Proceedings are an extension of the Transformative Learning conference conversations and aligned with the mission of the JoTL. Though Proceedings

publications are not peer-reviewed, they demonstrate the breadth and richness of conference dialogue nestled in a single PDF. If you might have missed the conference, you get a glimpse of the interactions and presentations at the event when you glance through the Proceedings. Our hope is that the Conference and the Proceedings continue to flourish as they return for a come-back following the cancellations caused by the pandemic.

### **More Mentored Student Engagement**

By far, a most enjoyable aspect of our work has been mentoring the development and heeding the instruction of our student editorial research assistants. Their ideas, suggestions, and agile pivots with smiles and laughter have been as much fun as they have been efficient. Plus, their JoTL work has been accomplished alongside their successful completion of undergraduate or graduate studies. Each of them has shared that the influence of the JoTL work on their personal transformation, development, and career is unmatched. It can be tempting to provide editorial opportunities exclusively to well-recognized scholars and practitioners. However, given the power and the possibilities for personal growth embedded in editorial work, our hope is for greater mentored student engagement.

### **Concluding Remarks**

As we publish our final co-edited issue, we conclude our time of service with appreciation and gratitude for your involvement in the JoTL. Whether as a reader, reviewer, or Editorial Board member, your presence contributes to the transformative learning landscape. We are pleased that Shay Rahm and Dr. Laura Dumin have agreed to assume co-editing responsibilities. They are highly qualified and amazing people that you will enjoy working with as the JoTL moves forward to greater heights.

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