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Transformative Education Framework Applying the Results of a Qualitative Study of Transformative Learning Concepts

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Abstract

This article presents the results of a study of the frequency of concepts contained within definitions and understandings of transformative learning. The results reveal that some concepts are addressed with greater frequency than others, highlighting the centrality of these concepts for transformative learning. Based on these concepts, a Transformative Education Framework (TEF) is developed. This framework can be used to guide the development of transformative learning programs. A case example applying this framework to such a program at a regional mid-sized university along with the impact of this program on student retention and achievement is presented. The impact of this program is found to be statistically significant, lending support for the TEF as a practical and theoretical model. This article closes with a brief discussion of some of the limits of this study, the TEF, and its applications.

Keywords: Transformative Education, TEF, Transformative Learning, Mezirow

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Introduction

Transformative learning has been defined in many different ways, with several typologies and assessment instruments that show the breadth of the diversity of understandings about transformative learning (e.g., Cox, 2021; Hoggan, 2016; Illeris, 2004; Stuckey et al., 2013; Tsimane & Downing, 2020; Walker, 2018; Wiley et al., 2021). In spite of these frameworks, transformative educators continue to struggle with definitions of transformative learning as well as frameworks that can guide teaching practice (Tsimane & Downing, 2020). One of the challenges of the topologies that have been compiled is that they do not document the frequency of concepts that are being used to describe transformative learning. Doing so could help transformative educators to better understand which terms and concepts are most central for transformative learning processes.

This article presents the results of a study of the frequency of concepts contained within definitions and understandings of transformative learning. Definitions of transformative learning from a sample of 37 articles from the past 20 years. These articles were selected by searching for those that addressed "transformative learning theory" and "transformative learning assessment." These articles represent 53 different contributors from 42 different institutions spanning 4 different continents (with more than 80% being from North America). From these articles, 435 separate statements were coded resulting in 308 individual concepts about transformative learning. These statements about transformative learning were coded using qualitative software, following a qualitative coding method known as Content

Analysis. Each of these concepts was assigned a separate code and the statements about transformative learning were coded for each separate concept. Overall, 1,653 separate codes were compiled providing insights into the frequency with which each of the 308 different concepts about transformative learning was used. The different concepts were then grouped into similar major themes, and the frequency of coding was recorded for each of these major transformative learning themes.

The results reveal that some concepts are addressed with greater frequency than others, highlighting the centrality of these concepts for transformative learning. Based on these concepts, a Transformative Education Framework (TEF) is developed. This framework can be used to guide the development of transformative learning programs. A case example applying this framework to such a program at a regional mid-sized university along with the impact of this program on student retention and achievement is presented. The impact of this program is found to be statistically significant, lending support for the TEF as a practical theoretical tool. This article closes with a brief discussion of some of the limits of this study, the TEF, and its applications, leading to suggestions for further research.

Major Transformative Learning Themes

Nine major themes were identified from among the 308 different concepts about transformative learning. The following are these major themes along with the frequency of codes for each one. These major themes, and their associated sub-themes, are listed in the order of their frequency of coding from most numerous to least:

Worldviews, Meaning Perspectives (21% of codes)
- Sub-themes: Assumptions-Expectations, Frames of Reference, Values-Attitudes, and Beliefs

Ways of Knowing-Experiencing (18%)
- Sub-themes: Cognitive-Rational, Emotional-Affective, Extra-Rational, and Experiences-Prior Learning

Critical Reflection (14%)
- Sub-themes: Reflecting, Assessing, Examining, and Elaborating

Acting-Engagement (11%)
- Sub-themes: Social Action, Behaviors-Habits, New Perspectives Guide Actions, and Self-Directed Actions

Types of Transformation (10%)
- Sub-themes: Constructing New Worldviews, Altering Existing Worldviews, Expanding Existing Worldviews, and Reaffirming Existing Worldviews

Social Aspects of Learning (8%)
- Sub-themes: Rational Discourse and Dialogue, Relationships, Cultural Transmission, and Collaborative Learning

Identity (6%)
- Sub-themes: View and Sense of Self, Way of Being, and Whole Person

Characteristics of Transformation (6%)
- Sub-themes: Phases-Stages, Structural Adaptability, Depth and Breadth of Change, Relative Stability, and Inherent Goodness

Disorienting Dilemmas (5%)
- Sub-themes: Causes (Triggering Events) and Effects (Disequilibrium)

As may be noted, concepts related to Worldviews and Meaning Perspectives were coded the most while concepts related to Disorienting Dilemmas were coded the least number of times. This list therefore provides new insights into which major themes are being addressed more or less often in the literature on transformative learning. This information can be useful in providing guidance for transformative educators who are working to define and apply transformative learning in their local context. Using this list, one can ensure that their locally developed definition of transformative learning at least addresses the

major themes that are being used most often in the literature. For instance, one might choose to develop a definition of transformative learning that addresses the top five major themes. Doing so can help to ensure that one's understanding of transformative learning aligns with the literature in this field. Overall, then, this pilot study provides helpful insights into the frequency with which concepts about transformative learning occur.

We might also note how these major themes and sub-themes compare with other typologies for transformative learning. For instance, one of the most widely referenced typologies is the one developed by Hoggan (2016). In this article, Hoggan identifies six major areas of transformative learning, each with their own sub-themes. Comparing Hoggan's areas with the major themes listed above, it might not seem that there is much similarity between these two systems. However, comparing the sub-themes for both systems reveals much overlap. Hoggan's areas and their corresponding sub-themes are as follows: Worldview (Assumptions, Beliefs, Attitudes, Expectations; Ways of Interpreting Experience; More Comprehensive or Complex Worldview; and New Awareness / New Understandings); Self (Self-in-Relation; Empowerment / Responsibility; Identity / View of Self; Self-Knowledge; Personal Narratives; Meaning / Purpose; and Personality Change); Epistemology (More Discriminating; Utilizing Extra-Rational Ways of Knowing; and More Open); Ontology (Affective Experience of Life; Ways of Being; and Attributes); Behavior (Actions Consistent with New Perspective; Social Action; Professional Practices; and Skills); and Capacity (Cognitive Development; Consciousness; and Spirituality). This study therefore serves to further confirm these types of typologies for transformative learning. However, it also extends them by identifying the number of times that the various major themes are addressed in the literature. Doing so can help theorists and practitioners to ensure that they are addressing the more commonly utilized transformative learning themes in their work.

Exploring the Major Themes in More Detail

Each of these major themes has several sub-themes that are associated with them. This section provides a brief overview of these sub-themes in order to help better understand the major themes. These sub-themes are therefore intended to further clarify what the many different understandings of transformative learning encapsulate. Doing so may then help readers to better understand the Transformative Education Framework that is described in the next section.

Worldviews, Meaning Perspectives

This major theme includes four sub-themes: Assumptions-Expectations, Frames of Reference, Values-Attitudes, and Beliefs. Transformative learning involves a shift in the assumptions and expectations that students have. As described by King (2004), transformative learning can sometimes result in a critical evaluation of these deeply rooted structures resulting in significant changes to them. Similarly, changes to one's frames of reference, which are described as the "the very structure of how one makes sense of the world," can result in changes that affect some of the other areas discussed below, such as one's actions (Kwon et al., 2021, p. 461). Transformative learning is also described as having the potential of impacting student's values. For instance, Miles (2002) discusses how personal and social change are deeply interconnected and can result in the development of more life-centered values. Finally, this major theme includes understandings of transformative learning that results in students' "profound re-assessment of beliefs" (Cox, 2021, p. 385). Collectively, these sub-themes provide a deeper understanding of the kinds of transformations that are associated with Worldviews and Meaning-Making Perspectives.

Ways of Knowing-Experiencing

This theme includes the following sub-themes: Cognitive-Rational, Emotional-Affective, Extra-Rational, and Experiences-Prior Learning. As summarized by Mezirow, transformative learning involves a "rational process of learning within awareness [which] is a metacognitive application of critical thinking that transforms an acquired frame of reference" (Dirkx & Mezirow, 2006, p. 124). Such cognitive-rational processes, asserts Snyder (2008, p. 166), has a potential "which moves the individual to higher stages of conscious development." Others extend these processes to also include emotional-affective aspects. As

Malkki (2010, p. 56) explains, "a prerequisite to becoming aware of and assessing the problematic assumptions in reflection, one needs to recognize and accept the edge-emotions, so as to become aware of, assess, and explore their bases." An individual's ways of knowing and experiencing are also asserted to involve extra-rational elements, which can involve emotional processes but also "imaginal, spiritual, and arts-based facets of learning, those that reach beyond rationality" (Stuckey et al., 2013, p. 213). Finally, this major theme includes the prior experiences and learning that students come to the learning environment with. As Taylor and Cranton (2013) explain, these experiences form an integral part of transformative learning processes and how new learning experiences are interpreted. Transformative learning is therefore conceived of as a holistic engagement with one's ways of knowing and experiencing.

Critical Reflection

This major theme includes the following sub-themes: Reflecting, Assessing, Examining, and Elaborating. In the transformative learning literature surveyed, critical reflection refers to a cluster of different approaches to this. As reflection, Henderson (2002, p. 202) summarizes Mezirow's view of reflection as involving "(a) content reflection, which is an examination of the content or description of a problem; (b) process reflection, which involves checking on the problem-solving strategies being used; and (c) premise reflection, which takes place when the problem itself is questioned." Others, such as Taylor (2001), depict critical reflection as a process of assessing and reconfiguring the origins of one's meaning structures. Similarly, Cranton (2002) asserts the necessity of critical examination of limiting or distorting views. Still others claim that transformative learning involves an elaboration of our understandings of relationship with others and the world (Dirkx & Mezirow, 2006). As one of the major themes of transformative learning, critical reflection involves a variety of different types of processes.

Acting-Engagement

This major theme involves the following sub-themes: Social Action, Behaviors-Habits, New Perspectives Guide Actions, and Self-Directed Actions. As social action, transformative learning can occur as people engage in community-based projects, such as graffiti art, that are intended to impact the wider community (Fisher-Yoshida & Lopez, 2021). Action and engagement can also support transformative learning, asserts Taylor (2001), as people develop new behaviors and habits that work to reshape their meaning perspectives. The reverse can also occur, where new perspectives result in changes to how one acts in the world (Tsimane & Downing, 2020), possibly bringing about "altered or new ethical consciousness and practice" (Patterson & Munoz, 2015, p. 315). This major theme also includes conceptions of transformative learning that are fostered by the goal setting and regulation aspects of self-directed actions (Fook & Sidhu, 2013). Similar to the critical reflection theme, then, there are several different ways that this practical action-engagement relates to transformative learning.

Types of Transformation

This major theme includes the following sub-themes: Constructing New Worldviews, Altering Existing Worldviews, Expanding Existing Worldviews, and Reaffirming Existing Worldviews. These four types of transformation are somewhat similar to the ones outlined by Brock (2010): elaborating existing frames of reference, learning new frames, transforming points of view, and transforming existing habits of mind. In constructing new worldviews, transformative learning can result in dramatically new ways of perceiving the world (Calleja, 2014). In some cases, for instance, such transformations can result in groups recreating themselves in novel ways (London & Sessa, 2006). In altering existing views, one can engage in "questioning, scrutinising, breaking down and interpreting [existing] knowledge" which results in deeper levels of understanding of one's current views (Tsimane & Downing, 2020, p. 93). Alternatively, one can expand their worldviews through an "integration of one's inner and outer worlds, a more whole person, greater self-awareness, and greater authenticity" (Hoggan, 2016, p. 61). Finally, one can reaffirm existing worldviews as part of transformative learning process, which can seem counter to many views of transformative learning. In response, Lange (2012) asserts that such reaffirmations are transformative for indigenous communities who are seeking to reaffirm native heritages in the midst of

non-native dominant cultures. Transformative learning literature therefore depicts several different types of transformation.

Social Aspects of Learning

The sub-themes include Rational Discourse and Dialogue, Relationships, Cultural Transmission, and Collaborative Learning. As defined by Mezirow (2000, p. 10-11), "Discourse…is that specialized use of dialogue devoted to searching for a common understanding and assessment of the justification of an interpretation or belief." In a study by Caruana et al. (2015), it was found that 40% of people experiencing transformative learning did so via verbally discussing assumptions/beliefs/values with someone else. It can therefore be asserted that relationships can play a significant role in transformative learning processes. In the Transformative Learning Maturity Model developed by Barker (2020, p. 18), for instance, one of the higher levels includes "inclusive, reflective, and embedded in networks of collaborative learning and sharing of narratives." Furthermore, some of the most significant relationships in our lives can result in cultural transmission. Some of these complex cultural archetypes are transmitted unconsciously (Gozawa, 2009) and need to be critically examined and deconstructed (Torrance, 2012). Collaborative learning can be central to these processes enabling students to re-see transformative experiences (Heddy & Pugh, 2015). The literature, therefore, presents the importance of the social aspects of learning as being a central part of transformative learning.

Identity

The sub-themes include View and Sense of Self, Way of Being, and Whole Person. Changes to one's identity can be one of the transformations that people experience. Defining self as a central psychological structure that "collects and holds together the outcomes of important learning," Illeris (2014, p. 151) asserts that transformative learning can result in a reorganization of this centralized self. Similarly, Hodge (2019) posits transformative learning as a liberation of one's limited ways of being in the world. Finally, authors like Romano (2018, p. 60) connect transformative learning with more holistic views of the person, including "emotive, imaginal, spiritual…personal, intuitive, and imaginative ways of knowing that lead to individuation." This major theme therefore includes those concepts that focus on more holistic and centralized aspects of one's identity.

Characteristics of Transformation

The sub-themes include Phases-Stages, Structural Adaptability, Depth and Breadth of Change, Relative Stability, and Inherent Goodness. The characteristics of transformation addressed by these articles include a number of key insights. Several sources, such as Nohl (2015), provide a summary of Mezirow's stages of transformation. Wiley et al. (2021) explore some of the impacts of transformative learning as structural adaptations such as changes to epistemic beliefs and the development of cognitive abilities. Others describe transformations in terms of breadth and depth, with depth referring to the "degree to which it affects any particular type of outcome" and breadth being related to the "number of contexts in which a change is manifest" (Hoggan, 2016, p. 71). O'Sullivan (2003, p. 327) affirms the structural shifts in consciousness and goes on to argue that such transformation "irreversibly alters our way of being in the world." Finally, Taylor and Cranton (2013) as well as Naughton and Schied (2010) emphasize the importance of considering whether the transformations are inherently good or not, asserting that transformative learning processes can potentially lead in either of these directions. These sub-themes therefore provide an overview of some of the core characteristics of transformative learning.

Disorienting Dilemmas

This includes the following 2 sub-themes: Causes (Triggering Events) and Effects (Disequilibrium). While disorienting dilemmas are sometimes described as major events in one's life resulting in challenges to one's assumptions (Walker, 2018), they are also described as "the continual encounter with a multitude of minichallenges" (Newman, 2012, p. 44). In this vein, Cranton, for example, indicates that a disorienting dilemma might be triggered by something "as ordinary as an unexpected question" (2002, p. 64). While some of these disorientations can be expected, others can create

disequilibrium due to their unpredictability (Alhadeff-Jones, 2012). Such disequilibriums can, as Buechner et al. (2020, p. 87) asserts, create liminal experiences that "leave individuals betwixt and between." Such are some of the descriptions of disorienting dilemmas described in the transformative learning literature.

Towards a Transformative Education Framework (TEF)

With the major themes of transformative learning concepts identified, along with brief discussions of their sub-themes, transformative educators might benefit from a framework that can help to guide their program development efforts. It is important that any such frameworks or topologies address the more numerously referenced major themes. The following is one proposed way to combine and organize each of the major themes above (Figure 1):

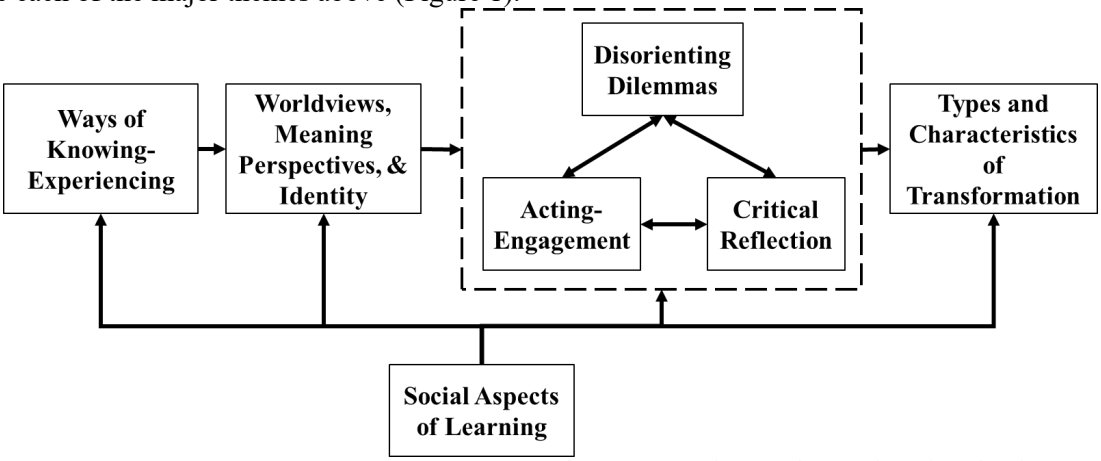

Figure 1. The Transformative Education Framework.

This Transformative Education Framework (TEF) can be used to help guide the development of transformative learning focused programs. Beginning with Ways of Knowing-Experiencing, instructors can seek to better understand students and their backgrounds in terms of their Cognitive-Rational, Affective-Emotional, and Extra-Rational capabilities. In addition, they can work to activate students' Experiences-Prior Learning as it relates to course concepts and skills. Such background knowledge and priming can help instructors to better adapt educational experiences to support transformative learning processes.

Central to transformative learning, of course, are concepts related to Worldviews, Meaning-Making Perspectives, and Identity. As described above, these concepts include students' Assumptions-Expectations, Frames of Reference, Values-Attitudes, and Beliefs. Instructors need to recognize that these have been and continue to be formed by students' Ways of Knowing-Experiencing. Based on what instructors have learned about students' Ways of Knowing-Experiencing, then, they can more directly relate course concepts and skills to students' Worldviews, Meaning-Making Perspectives, and Identity. In doing so, they will be supporting transformative learning processes as they engage with the program. However, this raises the question of what kinds of engagement might be best suited to support and help foster transformative learning processes. According to this study, three major themes emerged: Disorienting Dilemmas, Critical Reflection, and Acting-Engagement. For Disorienting Dilemmas, instructors can use their knowledge of students' Ways of Knowing-Experiencing to select activities, case examples, etc., that are more likely to create a Triggering Event that results in a Disequilibrium. Such Disequilibrium will likely occur with one or more of students' Worldviews, Meaning-Making Perspectives, and/or aspects of their Identity. In response, the instructor can then develop Critical Reflection processes that help to guide students towards reorientation and reintegration of the Worldviews, Meaning-Making Perspectives, and/or aspects of their Identity that have been disoriented. Such reorientation and reintegration can be further aided by Acting-Engagement. To do so, instructors can therefore develop projects that have students apply what they are learning to real-life situations. Students

can learn from these types of experiences the benefits of changing their existing Worldviews, Meaning-Making Perspectives, and/or aspects of their Identity in order to better respond to real-world applications. Instructors can also benefit from understanding the Types and Characteristics of Transformation. As noted above, transformations to students' Worldviews, Meaning-Making Perspectives, and/or aspects of their Identity can take the following forms: Constructing New Ones, Altering Existing Ones, Expanding Existing Ones, and/or Reaffirming Existing Ones. Transformative learning literature has also addressed characteristics of transformation such as it relates to Phases/Stages, Structural Adaptability, Depth and Breadth of Change, Relative Stability, and Inherent Goodness. With this knowledge, instructors can be in a better position to understand the kinds of transformations that each student might be experiencing and therefore better support these processes as they unfold.

Finally, this study has revealed that instructors need to understand how the Social Aspects of Learning can affect each of the other TEF areas. As outlined above, these aspects include Rational Dialogue and Discourse, Relationships, Cultural Transmission, and Collaborative Learning. Clearly, Rational Discourse and Collaborative Learning strategies can be integrated into the Disorienting Dilemma, Critical Reflection, and Acting-Engagement activities. Relationships and Cultural Transmission influence what happens in transformative learning programs but also impact students' Ways of Knowing-Experiencing as well as their Worldviews, Meaning-Making Perspectives, and Identities. Instructors therefore need to better understand how these Social Aspects of Learning are influencing student transformation as well as the educational processes of which they are a part.

The TEF can therefore be used to help guide the development of transformative learning programs. Each step of the program development process can be informed by the TEF and should result in greater insights into student backgrounds and contexts. This information can then be used to develop the activities utilized in one's programs.

The TEF in Practice: A Case Example

While the brief explanation of the TEF above may be helpful as a general guide, questions can remain as to how to implement the TEF in practice. This second half therefore provides a case example for how the TEF is reflected in the development of a transformative learning program at a mid-sized regional university in the mid-west of the United States.

One criticism Transformative Learning (TL) has faced regarding its suitability as instructional practice is that there is still uncertainty about what it looks like in practice (Taylor & Snyder, 2012). The authors of this article suggest that such uncertainty is because, even to this day, there have been few instances of TL at institution-wide implementation in both the curriculum and the co-curriculum (King & Wimmer, 2020).

Other reasons given for why TL is inappropriate or impossible at institutional scale are recounted by ŞAHIN and DOĞANTAY (2018). They describe objections raised which assert that transformation must exist at the personal or individual level, and that while "formal and institutional settings have attempted to introduce elements of transformational learning, transformative learning is mainly regarded as learning theory used in non-formal settings" (pp. 107-108).

The case example presented here argues against those who hold the opinion that TL cannot be implemented at scale in an institution of higher education. The case example also briefly describes the structure, processes, and outcomes for TL as the signature instructional approach in place for more than eight years at University of Central Oklahoma (UCO), known as the Student Transformative Learning Record (STLR) initiative. While the description pertains to UCO, the same structure and processes for institution-wide TL have been successfully adapted at other institutions, including the largest university in Ireland (Technological University Dublin, n.d.) and a 30,000-student university in Brazil (Mackenzie University, n.d.).

Importantly, the case example demonstrates TL's efficacy on a number of metrics: retention, academic achievement, and positive impact on student success and faculty self-conceptions regarding their teaching (King & Wimmer, 2020; and Ellis, 2021; among others as shared at

https://blogs.uco.edu/stlr/publications-featuring-stlr/, where retention and other data and analyses are also accessible).

Briefly, STLR engagement correlates with a 15% improvement in retention from entry to sophomore year census date and a half-letter grade increase in GPA (see STLR analytics at the link immediately above; also, King, 2021; King & Wimmer, 2020). Because STLR reflective narratives occur as part of classwork, there is no self-select or opt-in mechanism at play; all students in the class, regardless of academic or other profile, create narratives. Careful analysis each year of STLR implementation has also shown strong positive impact on the university's at-promise student population (i.e., low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented students).

The TL implementation put forth in the case example evolved within the Disorienting Dilemma, Critical Reflection, and Acting-Engagement activities cycle as described in the TEF. The other components of the TEF were quickly recognized, however, as the institution conducted mixed-methods research to examine the impact of the TL approach on students and faculty. Importantly, the ongoing collection of student reflective narratives comprises a rich database describing the impact of TL on students, their perspectives, and their expanding sense of self and worldview as prompted by critical self-reflective narratives generated as part of curricular and co-curricular activities.

Student narratives as well as the statements made by faculty in survey responses — along with one-on-one and small group interviews of both faculty and students — yield clues to the various social aspects of learning as described above in the TEF. In particular, changes in students' ways of knowing, shifts in their worldviews and perspectives, and the varieties of ways they experience TL are reflected in these narratives. UCO will soon surpass 65,000 such narratives, with analysis of narratives in place since early in STLR's history.

Transformative Learning at Institutional Scale

Undertaking an institution-wide implementation to adopt TL as a focus for pedagogical/andragogical practice requires a strong rationale given the many challenges — structural, technological, political, training, buy-in, and others. In UCO's case, that rationale lived in its mission, which in the 2008-2009 academic year introduced the phrase "transformative education" into the mission statement and also defined a group of key central tenets within which its students would develop: Disciplinary Knowledge; Global and Cultural Competencies; Health and Wellness; Leadership; Research, Creative, and Scholarly Activities; and Service Learning and Civic Engagement. The impetus to move the institution in this direction developed over time in the months preceding the mission statement change as the President's Cabinet considered implications for higher education as communicated in Learning Reconsidered and Learning Reconsidered 2 (Keeling et al. 2004, 2006).

An important factor prompted President's Cabinet considerations over time leading up to the evocative discussions built around the ideas found in Keeling et al.'s work. Institutional leadership realized that beginning in the late 1990s, student success initiatives had begun cropping up around campus, sometimes connected to some larger initiative, sometimes not. The American Democracy Project was an example, as were the Peer Health Mentors Program and work to formalize an undergraduate research focus and program. These disparate programs were all laudable and focused on helping students succeed, but Cabinet realized the need for a conceptual organizer under which these initiatives would logically fit (Cunliff & King, 2018). At one time, there were 21 such student success initiatives in place. In a self-discovery process that pulled together the need for a student success activities conceptual organizer, early thinking about what that organizer might be as prompted by Cabinet discussions and the development of what the institution called its Central Tenets, the focus on TL as a signature educational practice was adopted.

The important groundwork to stake out Transformative Learning as the philosophical foundation for education at the university thus had a rationale. Over the years that followed, however, the institution struggled to define how TL was defined inside and outside the classroom, how student growth within the key central tenet areas could be documented, and what kind of system could be devised as a system of record.

In 2012, academic leadership reformulated the teaching center operation and tasked the new, incoming center director with "operationalizing TL" at the university. In one of multiple ways leadership emphasized the university's commitment to TL, the new name of the former Faculty Enhancement Center became the Center for Excellence in Transformative Teaching and Learning. Development of what became STLR began in February 2012.

Designing, Building, and Implementing STLR

It was a focus on key aspects of Mezirow's TL theory (Mezirow, 2000) that situated UCO's design focus for what became STLR within the TEF's Disorienting Dilemmas ↔ Critical Reflection ↔ Acting-Engagement nexus. The institution had identified the developmental areas (its central tenets) within which it wanted students to expand their perspectives in service to better outcomes for themselves and those around them. This work entailed applying TL to the curriculum and the co-curriculum. Though early work had already begun before UCO detailed its operational definition of TL, the two-pronged definition helped characterize what UCO wanted TL to do in terms of student outcomes, which was Transformative Learning understood as developing students' beyond-disciplinary skills, and expanding students' perspectives of their relationships with self, others, community, and environment (Kilbourne, 2017).

The first component in the definition above focuses on the development of what might in some contexts be called "soft skills," "graduate attributes," or "institutional learning outcomes." In addition, helping students develop critical self-reflective skills was seen as an important step along a path that has graduates able to work on teams with people who disagree with them, or solve ill-formed problems within collaborative environments, or lead when the situation demands — all attributes that employers, friends, family, and the community desire. These skills are developed within a social milieu, which is one way that STLR's development reflects what is posited here as the TEF.

The second part of the operational definition hews to Mezirow's characterization of critical self-reflection as the triggering process for TL (Mezirow, 1990). In addition, Brookfield's (2016, p. 13) description of a critically reflective human also characterized what UCO wanted to accomplish with students' development within the central tenets, which is "one who constantly seeks out new information, new understandings of existing practices, and new perspectives, so that she can identify her blind spots." Improved learning outcomes accruing to students reflecting on their learning experiences (Di Stefano et al., 2014) was also recognized as a benefit of student reflective practice.

Whether the university had been successful or not in winning a U.S. Department of Education Title III grant to support scaling STLR, the focus of the project was always on improving student success, including the success of at-promise populations. Designing STLR, therefore, occurred with student success outcomes and strengthening the institution's programs overall in mind, as characterized within the grant application. Ultimately, UCO was awarded a $7.7M Title III grant (Houts, 2014).

Introducing disorienting dilemmas that could prompt critical reflection was a new skill for most faculty and staff. Training was necessary for this and as well as in utilizing the technologies that STLR staff developed. There would then be the necessity of assessing STLR impact on students, faculty, the institution, employers, and the community, along with devising the processes and structures to document this kind of development.

To consider and develop these necessities, UCO convened a STLR Project Team comprised of individuals from all over campus: faculty, Student Affairs, staff, information technology, student housing, and others. An institution-wide implementation would require an institution-wide task force to design what became STLR and determine how to operationalize the technology, training, infrastructure, processes, and other considerations. In short, the STLR Project Team had to figure out the "process, tools, infrastructure, training, and technology that allow faculty and staff to intentionally design, track, and assess activities in both the curriculum and the co-curriculum to help students achieve transformative realizations" (King, 2018). There was also a need to do so in a manner that would produce documentation that students could use in formative and summative ways to track their own growth toward the skills, values, and mindsets that make them valuable contributors in the workplace, family, and community.

The STLR Project Team had multiple priorities. One was to take the least expensive route whenever possible without compromising form or function beyond reasonable considerations. As a result, the Team worked to make the Learning Management System (LMS) the system of record for students' development within the five areas that STLR was designed to track. STLR's ultimate implementation involved the creation of a data hub that integrated inputs from the LMS and the Student Information System. Because STLR needed to track student engagement in "STLR-tagged" co-curricular activities, there was also the need to custom code a mechanism that would enable a student ID card-swipe input to connect to the LMS. In this manner, student co-curricular engagement with any of the STLR areas could be tracked in the LMS, just as student engagement with STLR via STLR-tagged assignments in their classes could be tracked.

To minimize extra work for faculty, the Project Team developed the means to engage students in curricular critical self-reflection by associating one or more of the STLR tenets to an existing assignment (or assignments). This eliminated the need for faculty to add something new to their courses. Rather, they were trained in how to write good reflective prompts that associated one or more tenets to existing class activity.

To briefly clarify here, students engage in the TEF's Disorienting Dilemmas ↔ Critical Reflection ↔ Acting-Engagement loop in their classes when, as described above, an instructor "STLR-tags" an assignment. This means the instructor associates a critical reflective prompt to an existing assignment in the class because that prompt connects to the assignment and also provides students the opportunity to develop their self-reflective abilities. This may or may not result in what Mezirow (2000) would call a transformation in that particular engagement, but UCO's institution-wide operationalization of TL was always designed as an iterative and growth-oriented approach: students could develop across their time at the university, constantly building more expansive perspectives of their relationships with self, others, community, and environment.

UCO devised a 3-level rubric for each of the five STLR tenets. Based on the Association of American Colleges and Universities Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubrics (2009), but then customized into broadly applicable rubrics for each tenet, rubrics development was an iterative process led across a 9-month period by the university's Director of Assessment. The rubric levels were Exposure (students only demonstrate having been exposed to the tenet's concept[s] without corresponding internalization prompting critical self-evaluation), Integration (students' reflections demonstrate they are beginning to consider what implications exist for potential changes in their lives), and Transformation (students can express how their critical self-reflection has resulted in changes to what they think, do, and/or value).

Building STLR's assessment to be evidence-based naturally brought key aspects of the TEF to the forefront because UCO had to develop an efficacious means of knowing when students' worldviews were shifting, for instance, or what evolution, if any, was occurring in their ways of knowing. The reflective narratives were where this evidence would exist, but the rubrics and faculty training had to ensure such student growth could be identified. In this regard, UCO had the advantage of identifying how the components of the TEF were playing out in students' own words. Illustrative of TEF components are student and faculty expressions drawn from UCO's mixed-methods STLR research over the years (B. Wimmer, STLR Assistant Director for Assessment, personal communication, October 22, 2023).

This brief description of STLR is meant to convey the level of care taken to ensure a process that stays close to Transformative Learning as a theory, concept, and practice. The discussion is also meant to illustrate the TEF's Disorienting Dilemmas ↔ Critical Reflection ↔ Acting-Engagement loop as a key approach around which one university built its operationalization of TL at the institutional level. Then, implementing the system and evaluating the evidence of its effectiveness verified the entire TEF in that many aspects of the framework are recognizable in student and faculty reflective narratives and in student growth over time as assessed using the institution's 3-level rubric.

Many more details could be recounted, such as the creation of, and collaboration with, the STLR Employer Advisory Board, comprised of HR personnel and hiring managers from most of the major workforce sectors in the Oklahoma City metropolitan region. Also not covered here is a detailed

explanation of the STLR Snapshot, which documents students' development within the STLR tenets. The authors direct readers' attention to Brunstein & King (2018), King (2018), King & Wimmer (2020), and King (2021) for more in-depth discussions.

Conclusion

The combination of a research-based framework within which Transformative Learning as instructional practice can be envisioned and developed and a case example illustrating how one university's design and implementation of TL fits within the Transformative Education Framework is meant to provide both theoretical and praxis-based substantiation that Transformative Learning can be an effective approach to instructional practice.

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