Transformative Learning: Making Meaning and Changing Lives

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Let’s Talk about Teaching
UVic Learning and Teaching Centre
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Schedule

• Introductions and initial discussion

• What is transformative learning?
  • Discussion from a student’s perspective
  • Key characteristics and components
  • Short summary of the research

• How can I implement transformative learning in my courses?
  • Design an activity/unit/course
What about you?

Describe a transformative experience in your own life.

- What was it?

- How did it come about?

Freewrite: Write for 3 minutes on this topic without stopping. Do not stop to think or lift your pen or pencil from the paper.
What about you?

GROUP WORK

- Describe a transformative experience in your own life.
  - What was it?
  - How did it come about?

- After listening to your group members’ stories, try to isolate any characteristics these experiences had in common.

- Describe the context in which these transformative experience took place.
  - Did you notice any similarities or patterns?
  - Were there certain things that came together to facilitate the change?
“This field school changed my life. Not only did I learn about the Holocaust and memorialization in an exceptional environment with wonderful students and incredible group leaders, but I learned about people, humanity and that the two do not necessarily always coincide. This program has given me two invaluable gifts: a direction for my degree and future studies as well as new standards of tolerance and humility.” (2011 I-witness participant)
2016 I-witness Field School

- Video
- Student perspective
  - Eliot Teng
- Q & A with Eliot
What did you get out of the field school that would not have been possible in a traditional classroom?

• “thinking outside the box”
• “greater understanding and multiple perspectives”
• “see [things] through the lens of another”
• “personal connection”
Participant Surveys
(Survey 3)

• What did you get out of the field school that would not have been possible in a traditional classroom?

• “build my own relationship with the events”

• “when experience and academia are understood together there is a greater sense of understanding”

• “grew as people as much as scholars”

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Key Components

- Experiential Learning
  - exploring memorial sites first-hand

- Reflection
  - accessing personal thoughts, feelings, and values

- Dialogue
  - interacting with other participants, European students, site guides, as well as family and community back home

- Social Action
  - raising awareness and encouraging students to work for change
Transformative Learning

• “Transformative learning has to do with making meaning out of experiences and questioning assumptions based on prior experience” (Cranton 8).

• “Transformation theory's focus is on how we learn to negotiate and act on our own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others -- to gain greater control over our lives as socially responsible, clear thinking decision makers.” (Mezirow, Learning as Transformation 8).
Key Concepts

- Experiential Learning
- Reflection
- Critical self-reflection
- Dialogue
- Holistic Learning
- Social Action
- Storytelling
- Empathy
Facing History and Ourselves' Pedagogical Triangle

Intellectual Rigor

My Civic Participation

Emotional Engagement    Ethical Reflection
What about you?

- How could you implement transformative learning in your own course(s)?
  - Think about the courses you currently teach or would like to teach.
  - How would you like to begin? With an entire course, with a curricular unit, with one activity?
- Outline the content of the course, unit, or activity.
- List 2-3 components you could use to facilitate transformative learning (reflection, dialogue, debate, etc.).
- Describe one specific activity you could use to promote perspective and meaning making.
Sharing Your Ideas

**Group Work**

- Present your idea to your group.
- Brainstorm with your group how best to implement your idea.
- Listen to what your group members would like to do and brainstorm with them.