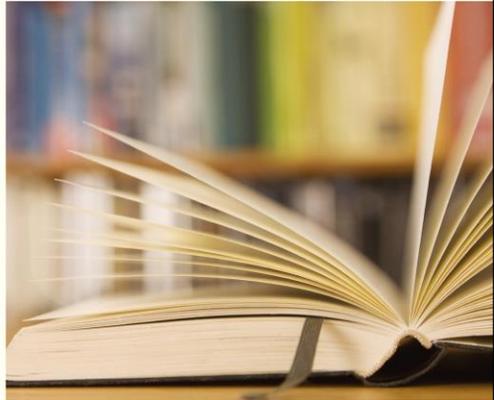# TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING
AS A METATHEORY (HOGGAN, 2016)

Using transformative learning as a mentoring tool
Nina Smith, Ed.D. January 2018

This presentation was used for professional development in Mentoring Circle where mentors gather to discuss and learn from each other.

Transformational Learning – a Change

- New information or experience must create a "crack" in the existing knowledge or understanding – creates an intrinsic "need" to learn.

- Mezirow (2000) coined this as a "disorienting dilemma" (p. 22)

- Hoggan (2016) suggests that as a result of this students "may embark on a process of introspection and change" (p. 61).

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Especially for adults it is important to perceive the training and instruction meaningful. Otherwise their engagement may be reduced to instrumental or superficial activity of completing tasks (Kahu, 2013).   Intrinsic interest and engagement relate to enjoyment and increased attentiveness that support the transfer of learning much better than just complying to finish the activities. The "disorienting dilemma" occurs when we can't fit new experience or information into our existing meaning structure, thus causing possibly stressful emotions and reflections that can lead to new, transformative learning.   Engagement in deep learning may depend on experiencing the change – the personal need to learn new things.

Engagement vs Compliance

- Schlechty defined levels of engagement with Commitment and Attention:

- Engagement – Strategic compliance – Ritual compliance – Retreatism - Rebellion

	High	Attention	Low
High **Commitment** **Low**	**Engagement** Task is meaningful and valuable		
	Strategic Compliance No direct value, extrinsic goals, not retaining learned	**Ritual Compliance** Effort to avoid negative consequences, to meet minimum requirements	

Deep

or

Surface

Learning?

There is a big difference between engagement and compliance in learning. High attention and high commitment support deep learning. We can be attentive and compliant in meetings and trainings without really engaging in the deep learning process. Surface learning and strategic learning are often used engagement strategies when we don't have personal interest or motivation to learn the content, and our commitment and attention are low. Deep and deeper learning both refer to acquiring transferable knowledge through learning experiences. The term "deep learning" resulted from the original phenomenographic research of Marton and Säljö (1976) where researchers found out students having different approaches to learning. These approaches describe how learners perceive tasks – either as disconnected pieces of information to be memorized in order to pass the exam (surface learning), or as knowledge to be constructed and understood in order to create new meanings (deep learning).   Deeper learning has been defined by American Institutes for Research (Huberman, Bitter, Anthony, & O'Day, 2014) as "a set of competencies students must master in order to develop a keen understanding of academic content and apply their knowledge to problems in the classroom and on the job" (Opportunities and outcomes section, para. 2).

Adult Learning and Mentoring Practice

- We want to believe that education can bring about profound, positive change in people's lives (Hoggan, 2016, p. 59).

- Perspective transformation is important for adult learning

- While creating the metatheory Hogan listed 5 themes (p. 64) that are applicable for holistic mentoring practice:
  - Shift in basic premises of thought
  - Shift in feelings
  - Shift in actions
  - Shift in consciousness
  - Altered ways of being in the world

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Mentoring adult students in higher education settings is more than just instructing them. It is about supporting the internal change that results when people have personally meaningful learning experiences. Regular and substantive interactions with mentors can promote deeper learning. Learning happens in interactions. Sometimes we have this misconception of adult students not needing the one-on-one interactions with faculty, because they are able to use other learning strategies. This is not always true, and in most cases it appears that students appreciate the opportunity to discuss their understanding of the content they are learning. In spring 2018 I have graduated 220 students from masters degree programs in instructional design in curriculum & instruction. Most of them have verbalized their satisfaction in mentoring practice that focuses on supporting their learning process, in addition to helping to understand the content.

Definition of Transformative Learning

Transformative learning refers to processes
that result in significant and irreversible changes
in the way a person **experiences, conceptualizes,** and
interacts with the world.

Hoggan (2016, p. 71)

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It is important to note that we are NOT talking about transformative teaching, but transformative learning. It is always personal, contextual, situational and results with a change. When my students walk away with this change, I know I have succeeded as a mentor. It is not just a byproduct of graduating with a masters degree, but an opportunity to rethink their practices as professional educators. This is why we have higher education, right? To engage in lifelong learning! To become better in what we do, to improve our professional practice!

Transactive vs. Transformative Mentoring

Processes and Changes	Transactive Mentoring	Transformative Mentoring
Experiences refers to a person's lived, felt learning experience	Moderate yet standardized focus on experience	Strong focus on personal experience
Conceptualizes refers to the way the person understands, makes sense of, and interprets the world and their experiences.	No focus on sense-making and interpretation	Strong focus on conceptualization and knowledge construction
Interacts reflects the way transformation affects how a person acts, including the behaviors they choose to engage in as well as the way those behaviors are carried out.	Strong focus on behaviors	Strong focus on choices for engagement

There is a big difference between transactive and transformative mentoring practice. Transactions focus on products, transformation on learning process. Transactions focus on delivering standardized communications and experiences, whereas transformative mentoring focuses on supporting each student's personal experience. It most likely is different from the experience of others, therefore it is very important for the faculty to focus on supporting students to make sense of their learning materials, and ask questions if something is unclear. It is a misconception that concept development only happens during childhood! Transactions focusing on behaviors is okay if we are visiting a bank teller or fast food restaurant, however, interactions that support deeper learning must be founded on strengthening students' engagement. One way of doing this is to provide more choices for engagement.

Transformative Mentoring

Mentor "serves as a guide, cheerleader, challenger,
and supporter during the learning process,
challenging students to examine their
conceptions of self and the world"

(Merriam, Caffarella, Baumgartner, 2007, p.138

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This is the difference between mentoring and instructing. Being a mentor means stepping down from the podium and being a guide on the side instead of being the sage at the stage.

Practical Applications

- A major goal of higher education is to create lifelong learners (Nilson, 2013).

- Thinking about completion goals is important, but process goals are the short-term achievements that often keep us going

- Reminding students about thinking how the courses and tasks relate to their own work (outcome and value expectations)

- Talking about self-efficacy beliefs students have is important

- Questions to elicit talk are useful, asking open-ended questions of students' learning process and if/how their thinking has changed

- Normalizing the struggles students have helps to open discussions with students

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So, how to engage in transformative mentoring? Support lifelong learning, foster interest and curiosity in course topics. Help students set progress goals, instead of focusing solely on completion goals (think of a doctoral student – graduation may be years ahead!!). Remind of real-life connections (my everyday question to my students is: How could you use this in your classroom tomorrow?). Having a dialogue with students to understand their self-efficacy beliefs, and to be able to support their growing professional self-image. Listening what students say. Reminding students that everybody struggles with something.   Using Self-Regulated Learning in mentoring, and instructing students about the three phases: planning, performing, and reflecting. (Nilson's book has lots of information about SRL)

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