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The Matter of Morality: Examining Moral-Ethics as a Tenet of Transformative Learning

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Abstract: Experience, a common denominator for all adults, is one of the core elements in teaching transformative learning and making meaning (Cranton, 2006). Key in building the educational foundation of transformation, "the way in which individuals make meaning of their experience facilitates growth and learning (Merriam & Brockett, 2007, p. 141). Transformative learning, as an educational theory, calls for the adult learner to re-examine long held beliefs that are built upon personal experiences. Assessing those individual experiences while considering the shared experiences of others may result in a converted frame of reference.

A frame of reference is our mindset that filters how we engage with the world and make meaning. Mezirow (2009) defines frames of reference as, "structures of assumptions and expectations on which our thoughts, feelings, and habits are based" (p. 22). Comprised of our habit of mind and point of view, our frame of reference reflects the very core of who we are: our culture, language, values, and personal preferences all encompass our frame of reference. Theoretically, in order for learning to take place, transformation of one's frame of reference— specifically habit of mind is necessary.

Habits of mind consist of the broad assumptions from which we see the world. "A habit of mind is a way of seeing the world based on our background, experience, culture, and personality" (Cranton, 2006, p. 25); because the dimensions that comprise a habit of mind are socially constructed they can be deconstructed—thus paving the way for a possible transformation in how one makes meaning. There are six habits of mind noted by Mezirow (2000): (a) epistemic habits of mind which consists of the ways we understand and use knowledge as well as how we learn, (b) sociolinguistic habits of mind are grounded in social norms, cultural interpretations of signs, symbols, and use of language, (c) psychological habits of mind speaks to personality types or traits, individual needs, perceptions, and examinations and expectations of self, (d) philosophical habits of mind are based on personal philosophies, religious beliefs and transcendental worldviews, (e) aesthetic habits of minds are our values, attitudes, personal tastes, and standards of beauty, and (f) moral-ethical habits of mind refer to our conscience and moral norms (Cranton, 2006). An understanding of the function of habit of mind is essential in fostering transformation on both an individual and a collective level.

There has been much discussion about the first five types of habit of mind and their contribution and function within the transformative learning process (Cranton, 2006; Mezirow & Taylor, et. al, 2009). But probably the most under researched habit of mind mentioned by Mezirow is morality and ethics and its role in transformative learning. There has been some discussion about the role of morality and ethics in organizational transformation as an ideological critique (Mezirow, 2000) and social evolution (Brookfield, 1998) but there is a lack of scholarship around this particular tenant of transformative learning; be it on the individual or organizational level.

The six platforms for habit of mind are not independent of each other but rather influence and interrelate with each other (Cranton, 2006). If this is the intent in ascribing to multiple ways

of understanding habit of mind then one cannot fully understand all states of habit of mind until the issue of morality and ethics is better developed within the theory of transformative learning. This roundtable will serve as a line of inquiry concerning morality and ethics as it relates to transformative learning.

References

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