Adult Education Research Conference

2000 Conference Proceedings (Vancouver, BC, Canada)

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Recommended Citation

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Abstract: *Conditions for fostering transformative learning within the formal learning setting were examined. The paper focused on the role of the text and the use of symbols and images in construction of meanings associated with the content being studied.*

Over the last 20 years, the idea of transformative learning has emerged as a way of characterizing a deep form of experience in adulthood. Approached from several different theoretical traditions (Dirkx, 1998a; Clark, 1993; Taylor, 1998), making sense of one's experiences is a common theme across these different views of transformation. Discussion of transformative learning, however, has focused primarily on meaning-making as critical reflection (Mezirow, 1991), suggesting that transformative learning is mediated largely through cognitive and rational processes within the individual. Such conceptions lead to particular ways of fostering transformative learning in formal settings (Taylor, 1998). Less well developed are notions of transformative learning as an imaginative process, mediated through images, feelings, and emotion, and reflecting deeper, spiritual movement in adult lives (Dirkx, 1998b). Referred to as a mytho-poetic view, this perspective suggests that meaning in transformative learning is apprehended and understood through symbols and images. Pedagogical strategies grounded in this view of transformation place more stress on emotion and affect in the learning process and attend to images and symbols, which come to characterize instructional cultures.

In this paper, we explore how these symbols and images foster the construction and reconstruction of meanings associated with the content being studied.

Conceptual Background

Through a growing body of research and theory, we are developing a deeper understanding of the various psychological and socio-cultural processes that characterize transformative learning. In addition, numerous publications outline ideal conditions for fostering transformative learning and instructional approaches which may contribute to this educational aim (Taylor, 1998). One of the themes emerging from this body of research is the importance in transformative learning of the socio-emotional environment of teaching. Yet, few studies focus on the specific contribution that content or subject matter makes to the transformative learning process or how that contribution is mediated through particular instructional strategies. About the text, Palmer (1998) argues, "[W]hat we teach will never take unless it connects with the inward, living core of our students' lives" (p. 31). We are interested in the processes through which this connection occurs within instructional settings. "Connecting" with content refers to learners making sense of the subject matter within the context of their lives, processes we understand to be largely imaginative or symbolic perspective (Dirkx, 1998b; Turner, 1986). Beyond the literal meaning of what is done and said in instructional environments, or how lies another world of meaning, characterized by powerful symbols and images, which point to deeper, potentially transformative understandings of self and society. In such environments, these images embody the group's collective meaning-making and serve as gateways to and mediators of deep, transformative learning (Dirkx, 1998b; Stein, 1998).

While rational and cognitive perspectives are often used as lenses for understanding meaning-making, the imaginative or symbolic view allows for a wider, collective, and more integrative interpretations of the various elements and experiences which make up the pedagogical environment. By its vary nature, the symbolic perspective allows us to 'see' emotional as well as rational experiences that characterize the learning environment as a whole, rather than merely a collection of individual experiences. The performative perspective represents a conceptual approach derived from the anthropology of performance (Turner, 1974) for understanding

learning as symbolic action. Actions taken on and enacted in particular roles provoke and elicit images and symbols through which meaning of the texts being studied is generated. This perspective is similar to a study by Gallagher (in Taylor, 1998, p. 52), which demonstrated the critical importance of reflection-in-action, drama, and affective learning in transformative pedagogy.

The symbolic approach emphasizes relational characteristics of meaning-making, stresses fields and webs of relations, and "the dialectics of sociocultural processes" (Turner, 1986, p. 21). Meaning is found to be embedded not in particular assumptions or sets of beliefs of individuals (Mezirow, 1994) but in myths, rituals, and other modes of symbolic action characteristic of the collective within particular situations (Turner, 1986). In this perspective, instructional environments are constituted by symbolic representations of meaning, which emerge within the particular context of any given learning setting. When learning experiences are viewed as symbolic action within a given time and place and as a series of performances, we begin to see how they can mediate learners' deep understanding of self in the context of the subject matter. This view stresses meaning-making as a collective endeavor, in sharp contrast to views of meaning-making as the development of individual, relatively static, cognitive structures. Our goal in this exploratory study, then, was to better understand the symbolic or imaginative dimensions of transformative pedagogy and how interactions of text, teachers, methods, and learners contribute to this form of meaning-making.

Methods

We employed a qualitative, interpretive approach to focus on the various ways in which meaning came to be construed within instructional contexts. Classroom instruction of two graduate-level teachers was examined at a large midwestern university. Dr. Johnston[1] is a white, middle-aged man and Dr. Malcom is a woman of color, also middle-age but several years younger than Dr. Johnston. Both are well established in their academic careers, respected in their areas of study, and are known by students and colleagues as utilizing deeply engaging pedagogical practices. They both espouse ideals of fostering transformative learning. The courses observed focused on organizational theory; leadership and organizational development;

and schools, families & communities. They are exemplars of how these two professors engage transformative pedagogy. 25-30 students were enrolled in each course, representing a diversity of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Within each course, instructional approaches were similar for all students.

Data collection included participant observation, document analysis (syllabi, tentative agenda sheets, handout materials, students written works), and interviews with teachers and students. The senior author fully participated in the courses over a period of nine months, providing a sense of the continuity of classroom events across time. Multiple sources of data helped address issues related to potential bias arising from the researcher's participation in the context. In-depth 90-minute interviews were conducted after completion of the courses with each professor and a convenience sample of eight students engaged in the same experience at the time. All data were subjected to analysis using the constant comparative method. Data from each source were analyzed and compared across sources (i.e., interview transcripts, documents, and observation notes) to allow for identification of themes evident in the instructional approaches.

Findings

Five key themes characterize our observations of these instructional settings: (a) course content as a lens for problem posing, (b) exploration of new roles, (c) presence and processing of social conflict, (d) action and reflection on that action, e) drama as an instructional approach. In reality, these themes are all intertwined within the complex and dynamic environment of these instructional settings.

Using Content for Inquiry

The instructors used content to stimulate inquiry and exploration of problems related to the participants' own professional lives. In studying issues of leadership, learners named and explored complex relations within their work and how they related to themselves. Such inquiry occurred by questioning what has always been conventional: "The only way you can begin to extend your views", Dr. Malcolm believes, "is that you question what it is that you know. And you shift . . . Because learning only comes from yourself." In the class on organizational theory, dramatized situations and experiential exercises were used to introduce and study concepts of leadership. As explained in the syllabus, the pur-

pose of the course on communities, families, and children is "to thoughtfully link the information presented in (the course) with (students') professional practice expertise, and apply (students') thoughts to a pressing dilemma." Thus, concepts of leadership are introduced in "real-life" encounters. Such introduction of the course content was thought to foster the making implicit assumptions explicit. The problem-posing then lead to exploration of new roles.

Experiencing New Roles
The instructional context also provided participants with experiential opportunities to encounter and live through new roles. Dr. Malcolm describes experiential learning as "an isomorphic learning experience when one is placed in novel situation that may appear not to be even close to one's own professional position." For example, in one of the experiential exercises rigid rules left little space for making decisions in a collaborative way. Such an exercise was thought to enhance the understanding, through one's body, of the classical beaurocratic structural frame of the organization. Recalling this activity, a student remarked, "You can read about it, but it does not have the same real-world effect until you actually do it." Dr. Johnston believes that "in all instances, the real material of the class is as much the experience of the students as it is what their reading is."

Addressing Conflict
In these settings, experiencing and processing of social conflict was viewed as critical to transformative learning. Dr. Johnston is convinced that social and personal conflict promotes change in the structures of society, in organizations, and in the individual's psyche. According to Johnston, the responsibility of leadership is to surface conflict, deal with it, manage it, and make it productive. An arena for experiencing ambiguity and surfacing conflict in these settings was the Bone Game, adapted by Johnston from the Indian folk tradition. The interviewed students mentioned this game as one of the strongest experiences of the course. Many limitations of the game rules (e.g., separate location of the groups; communication between the groups only through a representative; one person talking at a time) engaged learners in a series of conflicts. Students recalled feeling exasperated and pushed by the rules to feel guilty for "every injus-

tice on the earth." One learner remarked, "It was a very powerful experience. We were forced really to work together, and there was no way to go around it, no way to hide from that... It was long, it was tedious, I was really embarrassed some times." The experience generated considerable anxiety. The same student suggested, "I was getting (at times) into frustration and, sometimes, anger... But I felt pride of accomplishment. My anger and my frustration were worthwhile." All the students interviewed described similar feelings elicited through this instructional approach.

Reflecting On and In Action.
A significant dimension of the learning experiences involved reflection on and processing of actions in which participants engaged. As Johnston put it, "educational leadership is about action." If educational leadership is about doing, than it has to have a pedagogy that provides learners with opportunity "to do" and reflect on their actions: "Do, think, write, and discuss" is a hallmark of the transformative pedagogy used by these teachers. During the Bone Game reflection on participants' action was done while *living through* that action. Every activity in class had a follow-up discussion by the whole class, orchestrated by the instructor in a way in which concepts of leadership *and* the particular contexts of students' lives and their real-life job situations were subjected to analysis. Journaling was also used. In Dr. Malcolm's view, "the journal is an opportunity to talk with yourself in multiple voices about what it is that you think. That needs to be sort of a spine of the activities of the class. It is the reflective journal… that allows you to space in time, to internalize, to think about what happened."

Use of Art and Drama
Participants drew pictures, sculpted with clay, or engaged in some sort of a performative act - a play - to represent meanings associated with the their own experiences at work or the new roles they were experiencing in the courses. Such representation often involved particular problems and conflicts that the students were facing in both contexts. Image and symbol are central to these experiences. For example, Dr. Malcom used an approach described in the literature as "organizational stories" (Ochs, Smith, & Taylor, 1990), a process, which focuses on *how* stories are told and on the meanings, identities, and ideologies that emerge in the process of telling

them. The stories can be told both verbally and non-verbally, so that myths and rituals can be created within the space and time of a session. In one experiential activity, learners simulated communities within a multicultural society. Within their assigned "culture," the participants had to understand the language of artifacts (daily agendas, rituals, tasks), language of time (e.g., living with reference to the values of the past versus an orientation to the future), and language of space (physical kinesthetic relationships). Representation of this sort aims to push students to understand organizational culture beneath all the structures of the cultural environment and to present their understanding as a metaphor to the rest of the class in a creative way. Part of the story involved exploring how things work in different cultural context, in order to get some perspective on how "to assess the cultural/symbolic tenor of the organizations where students work" (excerpt from course syllabus). Words and expressions, such as "ritual," "symbol," "the use of space and time," and "time passages" were observed in a variety of course materials, such as the tentative agenda and assignment descriptions.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of the text in transformative learning and how processes of meaning-making are generated through the interaction of the text with other elements of the instructional environment. The process of making sense of the text or content within these three instructional environments were characterized by a dynamic interplay of inquiry, experiential role-playing, conflict, reflection-on-action, and art and drama. The content of each of the courses had been introduced in a way that involved participants in performative action (Turner, 1986). A drama, with its conflict, inherent power of metaphor, and reflection on the "here and now" of experience, has a potential to foster the learners' explorations of the *Self* and, by virtue of this inquiry, a more intensive inquiry into the issues and controversies of the course content. The performative action within the formal learning setting mediates participants' reflection on their real-life contexts. As a mediator, it possesses certain characteristics, particularly of conflict and metaphor of a "lived in" experience. In the instructional environments observed, participants experienced considerable stress around the diversity of perspectives, feelings and desires,

spelled out in 'different languages' around the meanings of the particular words and situations. This process made the familiar problematic.

In other words, the content, lived through the experience of performaive action, becomes a starting point for a learner to explore his or her own assumptions about the self, to begin to argue with the self, to begin what Palmer (1998) calls an "inner journey." The instructors foster work on this inner journey by significantly involving participants' feelings, which become part of their performative action and relates to crossing of their comfort zones.

In addition to the experience of crossing comfort zones, the inner journey was further facilitated by the learners' imagination. The myths and rituals emerging within these dramatic episodes generated powerful images or "arresting metaphors" (Stein, 1998, p. 41) associated with both leadership concepts and revelation of self. This process helped shape the meaning of the learners' performative experiences. While the students explored organizational culture or specific leadership issues, they were also developing novel meanings *between* them. All players of the drama were exposed, in a metaphorical way, to a controversial situation, such as, for instance, a school board meeting. Focus on this situation illuminated complex issues involved in the exercise of educational leadership. Working through the situation of the school board meeting would be an example of a dilemma, which students may face in their real work organizations. The teacher by means of a performative act that involves much of the participants' imagination and metaphoric thinking models this process.

The inner journey provoked by the lived experiences of the performative act and its symbolism generates, in turn, a series of new symbols and images associated with the play itself, both at the individual and collective levels. Taking into consideration the mediating function of the content, the emotional life of the group, and the role that image and symbol play in the sense making process together, we suggest that transformative pedagogy involves the construction of a *metatext.* It is this metatext, rather than the formal text, which serves to mediate the transformative experiences within the setting. The new symbols and images generated within performative action seem to be critical for building bridges between participant's self and others, and self and content. The use of stories, myths,

and rituals provides the basis for participants to engage with this "content" in their own terms, yet within a "vocabulary" that is common to the group. The metatext provides further focus for both individual and collective inquiry into the meaning of the experiences being derived. Finally, its imaginative construction provides the means for engaging in the difficult but necessary inner work involved in deep personal change (Quinn, 1996). The images, which make up the metatext represent a projective system, which functions as a pedagogic tool, providing for further problem-posing and reflection.

The metaphor of metatext represents *the process*, *the media*, and *the means* for exploration of self. It reveals a critical instructional shift in transformative pedagogy: from structure to *process*, from enforcing students' competence to engaging them into performance that fosters a deeper understanding of the dialectics of socio-cultural processes - the ongoing processes of interpersonal and inter-group relationships in all kinds of communities of practice. Approaching transformative pedagogy as symbolic action helps make visible the particular situations and experiences that learners live through during the class meetings and their life contexts beyond the classroom.

1 Although our oral agreement with the professors did not include a pledge of confidentiality or anonymity, we are using pseudonyms as the professors' names. We are also using direct quotes from the interviews.

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