



Resource Review

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Editors:	Beth Fisher-Yoshida; Kathy Dee Geller; Steven A. Schapiro
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Review:

Innovations in Transformative Learning is published as part of the Counterpoints series, 'Studies in the Postmodern Theory of Education'. The Counterpoints series is underpinned by the principle that 'scholarly work matters only to the degree it affects consciousness and practice at multiple sites'. This broad principle is signalled by the editors' aim at the outset, to connect transformative learning theory as espoused and practiced in the academy with non-formal educational settings such as the workplace (p.1).

'Transformative learning' has been used in different ways and in the introductory chapter the editors present a vital overview of the major streams of theory and practice. In this respect, this volume provides an accessible starting point, as well as bringing novel perspectives orientated towards developing the field. Transformative learning can be briefly identified as changes in how one experiences the world when pursuing learning that are, 'personally developmental, socially controversial or requires personal or social healing' (Yorks and Kasl, 2006 cited p.10). As the editors note, the focus on transformative learning has taken place primarily within formal adult education. This review will attempt to signal diverse realms of application and broader potential engagements. Towards this end, the focus will be less on potential

value within teaching programmes and more on the volume as a resource for teachers and their practices.

This volume consists of several chapters by the editors and eleven contributors, and is organised into three themes or sections: 'creating space', 'looking through the lens of culture', and 'animating with the expressive and performative arts'. Each section closes with a concise summary from an editor.

The opening introductory chapter by the editors provides a comprehensive overview of Jack Mezirow's formative contribution to Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) and latter developments in the field. They outline four major approaches and three recent approaches building on elements of these. This situating task is absolutely essential given how TLT has been translated across different contexts and the readiness by researchers in the field to develop models and approaches. Indeed, one of the potentially difficult aspects of this volume is that many chapters offer different models (for example, 'Enriched Dialogue Model' in chapter seven, 'The Model for REAL Dialogue and Engagement' in chapter eight, and the 'relational leadership model' in chapter in nine). Whilst these models may offer specific guidance that allow for close application, I relied on the end-of-section summary by an editor to make sense of these. This stands both as indicator of the strength of this as an edited volume and the challenges that those unfamiliar may find with the individual chapters and making connections across them.

The first section on 'creating space' opens with Leahy and Gilly's clearly structured exploration of collaborative learning within a doctoral programme. Working towards a doctorate can often be seen as an isolating process, and Leahy and Gilly's account of designing collaborative working arrangement around TLT is suggestive. Especially given that the authors described their own 'laboratory learning', this is a chapter that could be passed to doctoral students as a catalyst for exploring collaboration more broadly, and transformation as it is bound up with it.

In opening with a discussion of 'update models' of education (i.e. when learning is limited to advancement related to a professional role) compared to transformative learning, Meyer's chapter offers a fresh and timely perspective on issues of employability. By foregrounding the importance of transformative learning in organizational spaces, Meyer potentially offers a valuable counterpoint to the extension of work-based models of learning into higher education to prepare students for the 'world of work'.

The following chapters in this section had slightly less resonance for me, but nonetheless were insightful and well articulated. Fisher-Yoshida discusses personal identity transformation in a non-profit organization engaged in participatory action research (PAR). Schapiro in the next chapter develops a model of transformative graduate education for adult learners. Again, those with a firm grasp of existing debates would be able to appreciate and engage with the articulation and refinement of different models. Schapiro's end of section summary brings together these articles and draws out five common themes; this is a potentially useful starting point as well as a summary.

Section two on 'culture, diversity and difference' opens with Green Fareed's discussion of the Culturally Responsive Transformative Model and its application to 'communities of color'. When brought into conversation with other models, Green Fareed's work is useful for foregrounding cultural responsiveness and the associated embedding of it within learning design. In the following chapter, Davis' 'culture' focus is on transforming worldviews. A clear account of transformative learning as, 'the process of calling into question one's self view and worldview' (p.151) is linked with identity. It is with these broader connections that I was able to draw more on my

existing disciplinary understandings and approaches. In a sense, greater efforts to locate some of these questions and debates outside of transformative learning may have been helpful. For instance, du Gay's 2007 *Organizing Identity* both overviews influential work on identity and develops an approach attentive to particular 'regimes of conduct'. Notably Michel Foucault's notion of problematization that du Gay explores, could sit in conversation with transformative learning. Similarly, Wasserman and Gallegos' chapter on disorientating dilemmas and the workplace could have instructively made connections beyond transformative learning to the field of Organization Studies. Whilst appreciating the specific focus of this volume and not suggesting that it move in other directions, Geller's account in the next chapter of using 'art as a means to learn about the self' may be revealingly connected with Gauntlett's (2007) explorations of identity using Lego and some of the existing literature on identity he surveys. The summary section by Geller successfully manages to marshal the huge array of models, concepts and perspectives into a useful coherency.

The final section on 'animating with the expressive and performative arts' provides approaches that 'engage the rational mind and cognitive focus with the extrarational body, spirit, and emotion/feeling' (p.290). Within this section there seems to be all manner of sociological, philosophical and psychological debate being underplayed. There are nevertheless some interesting and stimulating accounts offered that could be adopted and translated by the reader. In her discussion of storytelling, Nelson suggests that, 'teachers and facilitators can use stories to help listeners gain emotional resiliency and teach people to find helpers in their lives to transcend adversity' (p.219). Adair Nagata in the following chapter presents the practice of 'bodymindfulness', 'a discovery made while engaged in a mindful inquiry' (p.242). Von Emmel then describes the 'Dreamscape' method. In this, close engagements with transformative learning goals are evident, but the account of Dreamscape as a social project and open source group collaboration is widely accessible. Indeed, my aim to point to broad applications would be, I imagine, encouraged by von Emmel who suggests the Dreamscape tools 'are not be refied but remixed freely to suit the particular needs of a given situation' (p.264). Williams' final chapter presents a fascinating account of embodied transformative education from the 'dual consciousness' of a scholar-practitioner. I would highlight that all these chapters present a thorough account and offer insights and elements of practice that could be translated into a transformative learning process, or as an extension or nuance to ones own repertoire of teaching and learning practices.

As with the introduction chapter and section summaries, the conclusion provides an excellent digest for the reader. In this respect, this volume is an important contribution to those working in the field, and also proves accessible for those unfamiliar, through well-documented studies and perspectives that could be adopted and adapted.

References

du Gay, P. (2007) *Organizing Identity*. London, SAGE.

Gauntlett, D. (2007) *Creative Explorations: New approaches to identities and audiences*. London, Routledge.