

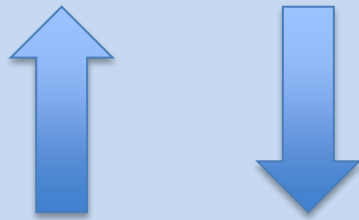
# Transformative Learning in International and Multicultural Education

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# Overview of our position

- Quality learning experiences in study abroad are intended to deeply engage the self of the learner
- Transformative learning theory:
  - Informs the design and facilitation of these learning experiences
  - provides theoretical framework for identifying and measuring learning outcomes

Need for international/intercultural  
experiences in higher education



Arise from perceived needs  
in society and among learners

Charles Hopkins, 2016  
From the forward to

# Desired outcomes for global learning

- Increased global or intercultural competence, social responsibility, and readiness to act
- Increased awareness of self, self-understanding, and self-other relations
- Reconstruction of one's self identity
- Development of change agents – e.g., Contribution to UN's Sustainable Development Goals

# Learning theory and assessment

- Assessment of learning outcomes implies a theory of learning
- Transformative learning is a theory that can guide assessment of learning outcomes in study abroad and international education

# Two brief stories of student experiences in study abroad

Younger, undergraduate student, not married,  
majoring in agricultural economics

Mid-level manager of IT in university, doctoral  
student, married, mother of three young children

“. . . what students describe as ‘life-transforming’ is, at root, the experience of seeing themselves, their culture and values, in some new way, perceived through the lens - that is, feedback, of the host culture”

Selby, 2008



# Learning and change in study abroad:

- Challenges our existing frames of reference – the beliefs, assumptions, and values we hold about ourselves, others and the world
- Often evokes potentially powerful feelings and emotions within the learning experience
- May result in dramatic shifts in our sense of self and self-other relationships

# Transformative Learning Theory:

A way to better understand the  
meaning of these experiences

# Focus of transformative learning theory

“ . . . .

”  
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(Mezirow, 2012, p. 76)

# Defining transformative learning

- More than just learning something new
- More than change
- Dramatic and profound shifts in one's sense of self and world view

# Early work

- Paulo Freire (Late 1960s, early 1970s)
  - Focus on development of critical consciousness and awareness of oppression through critical self-reflection
  - Understanding of self and self-other relations
- Jack Mezirow (mid to late 1970s)
  - Focus on transformation of meaning perspectives through critical self-reflection
  - Analysis of assumptions about self, knowledge, and social and cultural contexts

# Influence of developmental psychology

- Robert Kegan (early 80s - present)
  - Identifying and naming hidden commitments
  - Focus on the self-transforming self
- Laurent Daloz (mid 80s)
  - Focused on developmental transitions in learners negotiating these developmental shifts
  - Restoring meaning in life through new ways of being in the world

# Influence of developmental psychology (continued)

- Robert Boyd (late 80s, early 90s)
  - Bound up with processes of individuation or realizing our authentic selves
  - Developing consciousness
- Others –mid 90s to present
  - Mary Belenky et al – Ways of knowing
  - Tisdell – cultural spiritual realizations
  - Dirkx – imaginative engagement or work with emotional-laden experiences
  - O’Sullivan – planetary consciousness
- European developments (2000 – 2019) ESREA Network on transformative learning

Running through this tradition are  
two primary stories of the self



# The critically reflective self

- The self as critically reflective of itself, its experiences, and society
  - The self as a meaning making entity
  - (Mezirow, Cranton)

# The expressive imaginative self

- The self as an expressive, imaginative creative entity involved in the elaboration of a story or myth for one's life
  - The self as expressive of inner, often unconscious relational and emotional demands
  - Struggle for authenticity
  - (Boyd, Yorks & Kasl, Dirkx)

These various stories demonstrate a deeper dimension involved in transformative learning

Adapted from Dean Elias, 1997

# Goals of transformative learning

- ‘Foster a deeper sense of self-awareness and self-understanding
- Establish Increasingly authentic relationships with one’s self and the “other”
- Gradually transition from a more individually oriented sense of self to a more transcendent or communal sense of self

# Process of transformative learning:

- Calls into question one's beliefs, assumptions and values
- Implies an ongoing meaning-making process - construction, and reconstruction of one's sense of self and self-other relationships

# Study abroad environments informed by transformative learning help students:

- Identify and critically reflect on beliefs, values, and assumptions that are problematic
- Constructively engage and work through powerful emotion-laden experiences that can arise in international education

## In summary – process:

- Study abroad experiences can disrupt our ways of making sense of our selves, others, and the world around us
- These experiences often evoke powerful emotions, affect, and images
- Working through these experiences involves processes of critical reflection and imaginative engagement

# In Summary – outcomes

- Expansion of consciousness – greater awareness and understanding
- Transformation of basic world views – beliefs, assumptions, values – perspective shifts
- Transformation of capacities or structures of the self – becoming who one is intended to be



# Summary - outcomes

Meaning perspectives that are more:

- Open
- Inclusive
- Discerning
- Reflective and
- Emotionally capable of change

In other words, a profound shift in our:

Sense of self

Being in the world

# Conclusion

- Self as central construct in transformative learning theory & global learning
- More holistic theoretical understanding of the self and its transformation
- Transformative learning represents powerful learning theory for conceptualizing outcomes of global learning

So,

- Our theoretical understanding of a transforming self has evolved
- We need empirical studies of transformative changes in the self

Shealy, 2016