



Teaching That Transforms: Engaging the Mind and Capturing the Heart

One of the inherent outcomes of teaching and learning is the facilitation of change and growth in students as they demonstrate (a) increases in knowledge, (b) the acquisition and refinement of skills, (c) an analysis of personal beliefs and values, and (d) renewed or refined motivations to pursue personal goals and purposes. These desired changes are often viewed primarily as products of the student's intellect, but might also be extended beyond the mind to encompass matters of the heart (e.g., values, beliefs, purposes, dreams, hopes, fears). A study on college students' search for meaning and purpose provides interesting insights into the nature of today's students and the level at which they engage their minds and hearts in their college learning experience:

Students coming to campuses today are a diverse group ethnically, socio- economically, religiously, and politically. While they have high ambitions for educational and occupational success, and college success, and college is the means by which they believe they can realize their goals, they are also actively dealing with existential questions. They are searching for deeper meaning in their lives, looking for ways to cultivate their inner selves, seeking to be compassionate and charitable, and determining what they think and feel about the many issues confronting their society and the global community. (Astin, et al., 2005, p. 22)

This identified search for deeper meaning, one that moves beyond the bounds of the intellect, provides a strong source of encouragement and insight about today's college students and supports an assertion by Parker Palmer (1987) that the mind and the spirit are inextricably bound as the learning process evolves. Additionally, these data require a definitive response from the higher education community. Imagine if you will, the power and energy that could emerge from classrooms in which faculty engage students to learn discipline-specific knowledge and skills (i.e., the mind), but then intentionally move one step deeper and bolster that instructional content by helping students make a personal connection with their dreams, purpose, and passions (i.e., the heart). It behooves faculty and administrators to seriously consider ways in which the mind and the heart can be effectively and actively engaged as tools for enhancing the power of college learning. Even in the midst of a growing acceptance for this position, and as an additional challenge, it is also necessary to develop a wide range of instructional practices that faculty can easily transport into the classroom.



"My thesis is a very simple one: I do not believe that epistemology is a bloodless abstraction; the way we know has powerful implications for the way we live. I argue that every epistemology tends to become an ethic and that every way of knowing tends to become a way of living. I argue that the relation established between the knower and the known, between the student and the subject tends to become the relation of the living person to the world itself. I argue that every model of knowing contains its own moral trajectory, its own direction and outcomes."

(Palmer, 1987, p. 22)

Meyers (2008) summarized the work of Mezirow (1991) and the concept of *transformative learning* as a means for meeting the need for instruction that engages the mind and captures the heart:

... students experience personal and intellectual growth when they grapple with disorienting dilemmas because they examine their assumptions related to the contradictory information, seek out additional perspectives, and ultimately acquire new knowledge, attitudes, and skills in light of these reflections. Transformative learning also helps students examine their experiences in consideration of social issues and then take action to effect broader change. (p. 219)

Tolliver and Tisdell (2006) expanded upon this definition to emphasize the manner in which transformative learning embraces every aspect of the learner's being to create wide-ranging consequences and benefits:

We believe that learning is more likely to be transformative if it permeates one's whole self, which has a spiritual component, rather than being confined to the rational realm of critically reflecting on assumptions. Transformative learning is best facilitated through engaging multiple dimensions of being, including the rational, affective, spiritual, imaginative, somatic, and socio-cultural domains through relevant content and experiences. While higher education has traditionally confined itself largely to the rational dimension, we believe that it is possible to engage multiple aspects of being in the adult higher education classroom, including the spiritual dimension to facilitate transformative learning. (p. 38)

These results also provide a template for thinking about the variable concerns and issues that are prominent in the thinking of today's college students. Until the range of usable teaching techniques is expanded and made readily available, it is suggested that growth and development in this area will be slow in showing progress and results. What is needed across the spectrum of higher education is a *pedagogy of spirituality* that promotes transformative learning experiences for all students. The purposes of such a model would include:

- Creating a safe learning environment where students and faculty can explore, share, discuss, personalize, and make meaning of instructional content
- Intentionally fostering explorations of personal values, beliefs, dreams, goals, and life purpose as they relate to specific coursework and to the total college learning experience
- Assisting students in clarifying and communicating what they believe
- Making purposeful connections between instructional content and the lives of students and the world in which they live
- Engaging students in a dialogue that focuses on understanding the perspectives of individuals with differing religions, spiritual traditions, and/or backgrounds
- Integrating learning activities, discussion topics, and the processing of instructional content into the flow and process of the instructional process

What follows are two examples of teaching strategies that encourage students to connect content-based learning with their own life experiences and personal narratives.

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Interactive Journaling

Journaling is a popular means of encouraging or requiring students to systematically reflect on their learning and the connections between newly acquired knowledge and skills with their prevailing knowledge, skills, and experiences. The interactive journal adds an additional feature to this practice.

Instructional Process

In interactive journaling, students

- Maintain a journal over the course of the semester. The format for this journal is a spiral-bound notebook.
- Make a minimum of three entries per week. Entries can be general responses to the course, assignments, topics of discussion, or articles they have seen in newspapers, magazines, or on the Internet that connect with the topic of the course.
- Are encouraged to be creative and spontaneous in the manner that they maintain their journals (e.g., including graphics, cartoons, or other visuals that enhance the message or the thoughts they are sharing)
- Allow for a wide margin to incorporate comments as they make their journal entries

What makes this interactive is that students

- Partner with a classmate who will become their journal reviewer for the semester
- Exchange their journals with their reviewer partners every two weeks. The reviewer reads the entries and makes comments (e.g., questions, requests for clarification, affirmations, challenges) in the margin of the journal.
- Turn in their journals at the end of the semester for review and further comment by the instructor

Responses to this activity have been very favorable. Students readily acknowledge how the content they are learning in class and through their assigned readings connect directly with their opportunity to participate in the interactive journaling process.

Windshields and Rear-View Mirrors

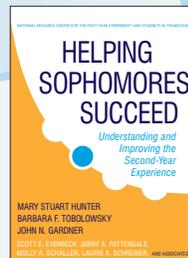
Imagine for a moment that you are on a road trip traveling by car. As you pull out onto the highway, you simultaneously find yourself looking out the front windshield while also glancing into the rear-view mirror. The windshield provides a vision of what lies ahead; the rear-view mirror provides a perspective on people and things that are behind you. Traveling through life, it is not uncommon to experience a sense of what lies ahead while remaining keenly aware of the experiences and events that are part of your history.



This lesson is designed to help students put the past, the present, and the future into a linear perspective. Your students are where they are today because of what they can see in the rear-view mirror. This vision of the past



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will impact and inform the future (i.e., the windshield view), but it does not control the nature or the outcome of the journey that lies ahead.

Instructional Process

It is helpful to begin this lesson by sharing the imagery of the rear-view mirror and the windshield. As a way of illustrating this example, share some examples of people who have experienced challenges in the journey to achieving their dreams and purpose. The web site entitled "But They Did Not Give Up" (<http://www.des.emory.edu/mfp/efficacynotgiveup.html>) provides a list of inspiring quotes and illustrations that can be used to begin this dialogue. For example, the class could have a discussion about the meaning and implications of quotations that connect to the tension between hope and perseverance (e.g., "A life spent making mistakes is not only more honorable but more useful than a life spent in doing nothing" – George Bernard Shaw). Finally, ask students to respond to the inscription that is generally found on rear-view mirrors: "Objects in mirror are closer than they appear." What are the implications of this message for the role of the rear-view mirror in our lives?

After this introduction, arrange the class into small groups. Ask students to process the following questions from the windshield viewpoint:

- Where do I see myself in five years?
- What are the challenges that I can anticipate on the path to this goal?

Then, ask students to reflect on three rear-view mirror perspective questions:

- Who are the people that have been most influential in helping me get to where I am today?
- What are some of the potholes that I have encountered on my journey?
- Are there objects in the mirror from my past that are significantly impacting my current decision making and choices?

After the small groups have been given an opportunity to discuss these questions, reconvene the class and engage them in a discussion about their individual responses, the conversations in their groups, and the types of conclusions that can be drawn from relying exclusively on a windshield or a rear-view mirror as a point of reference for decision making.

~ Closing words to share and discuss ~

Learn from the past (in the rear-view mirror)
and look to the future (through the windshield)

It is a question of maintaining balance.

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