Introduction:

This lesson plan introduces participants to Transformative Learning Theory, exploring history and applications. Participants will be encouraged and challenged to analyze the theory with a critical eye in addition to considering new applications of the theory.

Facilitator Notes:

This activity was facilitated in a graduate course and may need to be adapted for other audiences.

Objectives:

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Describe the purpose, values, and goals of Transformative Learning (TL) Theory.

Time:

1 hour 15 minutes.

Group Size:

Small Group.

Materials:

Participant Instructions and PowerPoint slides in Downloads.

Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Acceptance

AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:

Cultural Self-Awareness

- To articulate insights into own cultural rules and biases (e.g., seeking complexity; aware of how their experiences have shaped these rules, and how to recognize and respond to cultural biases, resulting in a shift in self-description).

Knowledge of Cultural Worldview Frameworks

- To demonstrate sophisticated understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs & practices.

Other Skills:

Mentorship & Leadership.

Activity Instructions:

1. Instruct participants to read the following articles and blogs prior to the activity facilitation:

- Acheson, K., Dirkx, J. M., & Shealy, C. N. (2022). High impact learning in higher education. In E. Kostara, A. Gavrielatos, & D. Loads (Eds.), Transformative learning theory and praxis: New perspectives and possibilities (1st ed., pp. 172–196). Routledge.

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https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429450600

- Washburn, A. (2021). Whither transformative education? Taking stock well into the twenty-first century. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 19(4), 306-338.

- Willard, J. (2022, December 3). *Transformative learning 101*. Big Think. https://bigthink.com/plus/transformative-learning/

2. Introduce Transformative Learning Theory and facilitate a discussion based on each of the articles/blogs.
   - Willard (2022)

     o Let's co-construct a shared understanding of what TL entails…how would you describe it to people who have never heard of it before (or educators who apply the term transformative to learning experiences without knowledge of TL theory)?
     o Where did TL theory come from? Is this the only context in which it is applicable? Where else do you think it does a good job of explaining human experience?
     o What language or terminology do you think is most important in TL theory? (Disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, self-efficacy, others?)
     o What causes disorienting dilemmas (external vs. internal events)? What is it like to experience a disorienting dilemma (sudden vs. gradual, cognitive dissonance vs. embodied discomfort)?
     o A big TL debate: Are changes to the deep structures of the self necessarily visible to others?
     o TL is most often applied at the individual level – to one learner, or to a cohort of learners. What did you think about the application of TL in the blog at the organizational level? Does this work? What would it take to make it happen? What would be the challenges?

   - Washburn (2021)

     o Is TL theory too ambitious? How can we distinguish between change and TL? Is any change transformative, and if not, what makes a change transformative? Is transformative learning just good learning? What advantages does the TL theoretical framework provide educators? Learners? HEI administrators? Informal mentors?
     o How does the characterization of TL as a move from the socialized mind to a self-authoring mind (Kegan, 2008) strike you? Does that fully capture the pro-social aspects of TL theory?
     o What are your thoughts about the challenges of assessing TL, including determining WHAT transforms? Identifying HOW the transformation occurs? Documenting to WHAT EXTENT it transforms? Which of these do you see as the most problematic?

   - Acheson et al. (2022)

     o How does Hoggan's typology help us understand what we are trying to measure?

- o What is your evaluation of how well the BEVI aligns with TL? What about the AAC&U VALUE rubrics? What about other assessments you are familiar with – how would they line up with TL theory?
- o If you were tasked with measuring TL in learners or mentees, how would you choose to go about it? Would you prefer quantitative or qualitative methods, for instance? Why? One point of data collection or more than one (and at what intervals)?

Activity created by Kris Acheson-Clair, PhD, CILMAR.
Acheson, K., Dirkx, J. M., & Shealy, C. N. (2022). High impact learning in higher education. In E. Kostara, A. Gavrielatos, & D. Loads (Eds.), *Transformative learning theory and praxis: New perspectives and possibilities* (1st ed., pp. 172–196). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429450600
Mezirow, J. (2009). Transformative learning theory. In J. Mezirow, and E. W. Taylor (Eds), *Transformative learning in practice: Insights from community, workplace, and higher education* (pp. 18-32).
Washburn, A. (2021). Whither transformative education? Taking stock into the twenty-first century. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 19(4), 306-338.
Willard, J. (2022, August 18). *Transformative learning 101*. Big Think. https://bigthink.com/plus/transformative-learning/

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