

“TRANSFORMING HEARTS AND MINDS TO SERVE THE WORLD” - WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

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Abstract

Rivier University is a Catholic institution of higher education dedicated to “transforming hearts and minds to serve the world.” This essay explores the meaning of that educational mission in light of two paradigms of transformative learning dominant in adult education today. First, Mezirow’s classic Transformation Theory and its description of transformative learning as a cognitive, rational, objective, and social process provides one explanatory framework for understanding the transformational process of a Rivier education. Second, transformative education viewed as an intuitive, imaginative, subjective, and personal process that addresses the deeper psychodynamic, spiritual, and contemplative dimensions of transformative change is examined. Six ways that Rivier University implements these two streams or frameworks of transformative learning and education through its curricular and co-curricular programming are described. While most efforts to bring transformative elements into higher education are initiated by individual faculty members in their classrooms, Rivier University is noteworthy for its transformative emphasis at an institutional level.

General Introduction

Ever since Rivier University was founded 80 years ago as an institution of higher education, it has regularly updated the language of its Mission statement. In 2006, the following prologue was formally adopted by its governing board: “Founded in 1933 by the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary, Rivier University is a Catholic institution of higher education dedicated to transforming hearts and minds to serve the world.” Today, the phrase “Transforming Hearts and Minds to Serve the World” serves as a concise statement of Rivier University’s educational mission that appears in all print and electronic publications and is posted in public locations throughout its Nashua, New Hampshire campus.

Ideally, the tagline “Transforming Hearts and Minds to Serve the World” is widely understood. But what does the phrase mean exactly? What sort of transformation are we talking about? Transformation from what to what? What are the hallmarks of such a transformation and how is it assessed? How does one know when a “transformed” heart and mind has in fact occurred and how is it distinguished from other kinds of change ordinarily expected as a result of any university education— changes in content knowledge and in intellectual and practical skills, for example? How do you teach for it and what philosophy of education is most supportive of transformative forms of teaching and learning, according to current theory, research, and practice? What evidence exists of Rivier University’s commitment to transforming itself to facilitate a transformation of hearts and minds to serve the world? What “world” is served and what sort of service is required? These questions cannot be answered simply for there are

many ramifications. Not all change is transformative, not all education leads to transformative learning, and not all transformations result in positive psychosocial growth and development.

This essay serves as my personal reflection on the meaning of the phrase, “Transforming Hearts and Minds to Serve the World” in hopes of initiating a campus-wide conversation about what constitutes transformative education and transformative learning at Rivier University, particularly in light of its new common general education curriculum (“Core”) entitled “Journeys of Transformation.” I speak as only one individual among many who were intimately involved with the original design of the Core during the summer of 2011. I also speak as a transpersonal psychologist who has a 28-year institutional memory of our beloved University and is deeply committed to spirituality in education and to understanding what it might mean to “reclaim the sacred at the heart of knowing, teaching, and learning” (Palmer, 1997, p. 10) in an educational environment “where people can support each other on the journey toward an undivided life” (Palmer, 2004, p. 11).

It is important to state at the outset that my comments are intended to be suggestive rather than a definitive or finalized conception of transformative education and transformative learning at Rivier University. My remarks are presented in the hope of broadening and deepening our understanding of the complexity of the process of human transformation and how Rivier’s educational mission, common core general education curriculum, and other contexts in which it engages in transformative education provide important starting-points for discussions that further our individual and collective understanding of the phrase, “Transforming Hearts and Minds to Serve the World.” My intention also is to draw attention to the national conversation about transformative education and transformative learning that has been happening since the late 1970’s and to connect our ongoing curricular and co-curricular efforts with that ongoing conversation—just as University faculty did in October 2011 when they voted to align the educational goals of our new Core curriculum with the *Essential Learning Outcomes* of the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU).

What are Transformative Learning and Transformative Education?

There are many dimensions to transformative learning and there is no single model of transformative education (Duer, Zajonc, & Dana, 2003; Taylor, Cranton, & Associates, 2012). Two distinguishable streams or frameworks of theory, research, and practice in transformative learning and education, however, can be identified based on a review of the literature. As Valerie Grabove (1997) put it in her essay, *The Many Facets of Transformative Learning and Practice*:

Transformative learning appears to have two layers that work in tension. At the center is the person. The transformative learner moves in and out of the cognitive and the intuitive, of the rational and the imaginative, of the subjective and the objective, of the personal and the social. In seeming paradox, the value of the imagination and the power of emotion exist within the rational notion of transformation, and learners rely on analysis to make sense of their feelings, images, and intuitive descriptions. Within each perspective, we can discover other perspectives...

...Although these two stances appear to be distinct, we can see common elements: humanism, emancipation, autonomy, critical reflection, equity, self-knowledge, participation, communication, and discourse. (pp. 90, 95)

Framework 1: Transformative learning as a cognitive, rational, objective, social process

The work of Mezirow (1978, 1991, 1996, 1997, 2012) is representative of the first stream or framework of theory, research, and practice in transformative learning and education. Jack Mezirow, former director for adult education at Teachers College of Columbia University in New York City, is considered by many in the field of adult education to be the originator of the learning theory known as Transformation Theory and founder of the Transformative Learning movement. His Transformation Theory of adult learning was inspired by the women’s movement of the 1970’s and influenced by the paradigmatic concepts of Thomas Kuhn (1962), the notion of emancipatory learning of Paulo Freire (1970), the Freudian personality theory of Roger Gould (1978), and the concepts of communicative and instrumental learning of Jürgen Habermas (1984). Mezirow’s Transformation Theory is grounded in the liberal arts and science tradition of Western civilization and reflects the goals and values of the Enlightenment (i.e., rationality, social discourse, democracy, self-determination, social justice). Transformation Theory has been the subject of numerous books and articles (e.g., Cranton, 1994, 1996; Mezirow & Associates, 1990, 2000) and a prolific source of research for master’s theses and doctoral dissertations in the field of adult education up to the present day (Taylor, 1997, 2007, 2008, Taylor & Snyder, 2012).

Mezirow’s original Transformation Theory traces its roots to a 1978 study he conducted of adult women re-entering higher education (i.e., community college) and his discernment of a learning process that he called “perspective transformation” which occurred as a result of a 10-step process grounded in critical reflection, social discourse, and reflective action (Mezirow, 1978). According to Mezirow (2000), “by becoming critically aware of the context—biographical, historical cultural—of their beliefs and feelings about themselves and their role in society, the women could effect a change in the way they had tacitly structured their assumptions and expectations. This change constituted a learned transformation; the process resulting from it was designated transformative learning” (p. xii). Mezirow (1997) defines transformative learning in the following way: “The process involves transforming frames of reference through critical reflection of assumptions, validating contested beliefs through discourse, taking action on one’s reflective insight, and critically assessing it... . When circumstances permit, transformative learners move toward a frame of reference that is more inclusive, discriminating, self-reflective, and integrative of experiences” (pp. 5, 11).

The inherent logic, purpose, and goal of the perspective transformation process can be briefly described in the following way. Perspective transformation itself can be experienced as a difficult, uncomfortable, and even painful process, triggered under a variety of circumstances, sometimes by traumatic life events (e.g., divorce, death of a loved one, loss of a job). It is more often initiated by any “disorientating dilemma” that challenges the individual’s perceived abilities and taken-for-granted beliefs about the nature of the self, other people, and the world at large (Taylor, 2000). The disorienting dilemma forces the individual to reflect upon his or her taken-for-granted assumptions and expectations, including those beliefs about the nature of the self, others, and the physical and human cultural world that have been uncritically accepted and assimilated from culture and society and inculcated by primary caregivers during childhood. It is these consciously available but psychologically invisible beliefs (or schemas) that subconsciously influence the personality’s experience, understanding, and judgment. It is these assumptive beliefs that subconsciously filter, select, abstract, interpret, and organize the individual’s experience of personal reality and general knowledge of the world. Reflection, when it is in its critical mode, asks the further question: “What assumptions and suppositions am I making here in this particular situation that shapes my point of view and lead me to this conclusion?” “What assumptive beliefs am I taking for granted and presupposing to be true but that might reasonably be questioned?”

The action of critically reflecting upon one's taken-for-granted beliefs and expectations is not a solitary enterprise but a socially interactive one that unfolds in the context of dialogue with others whose assumptive beliefs are also brought to the light of awareness and examined objectively in public discussion. Transformative learning begins when one's subconscious belief systems and unexamined frames of reference are made conscious and critically evaluated by the intellect in the public forum of *social discourse*. Through this process, a prior existing frame of reference or world view that was limited, indiscriminating, closed, and fragmented becomes transformed into "a more fully developed (more functional) frame of reference... one that is more (a) inclusive, (b) differentiating, (c) permeable, (d) critically reflective, and (e) integrative of experience" (Mezirow, 1996, p. 163). If the transformed frame of reference proves valid after being put to the test of *reflective action* and is legitimized through the process of consensual validation, then a perspective transformation has occurred.

Transformative education as a rational, cognitive, objective, social process

What instructional methods and learning environments facilitate the "transformation of hearts and minds to serve the world" when approached as a cognitive, rational, objective, and social process?

Education that fosters critically reflective thought, imaginative problem posing, and discourse is learner-centered, participatory, and interactive, and it involves group deliberation and group problem solving. Instructional materials reflect the real-life experiences of the learners and are designed to foster participation in small-group discussion to assess reasons, examine evidence, and arrive at a reflective judgment.... Learning contracts, group projects, role play, case studies, and simulations are classroom methods associated with transformative education. The key idea is to help the learners actively engage the concepts presented in the context of their own lives and collectively critically assess the justification of new knowledge. (Mezirow, 1997, pp. 10-11)

From this frame of reference, "transforming hearts and minds to serve the world" is fundamentally a social process in which discourse (i.e., discussion, dialogue, conversation, communication, expression) is an essential element of the meaning-making process of becoming aware and critical of one's own and other's beliefs so that the personality is *moved* (or transformed) in the direction of becoming a more autonomous agent, socially responsible thinker, and self-directed learner (Kegan, 2000; Pilling-Cormick, 1997).

Framework 2: Transformative learning as an intuitive, imaginative, subjective, personal process

The works of John Dirkx (2012), Parker Palmer (1993, 1998, 2004), and others (e.g., Rowe & Braud, 2013; Scott, 1997) are representative of the second stream or line of theory, research, and practice in transformative learning and education. This second framework explores transformative learning from what may be termed a humanistic and transpersonal (beyond "*trans*"- ego "*personal*") point of view. Transpersonal psychology is an approach to psychology that studies human exceptional experiences as a context for the development of an integrative and holistic framework for understanding and cultivating human transformation (Friedman & Hartelius, 2013). Rosemarie Anderson and William Braud (2011), in *Transforming Self and Others Through Research*, offer a characterization of transpersonal psychology that aligns itself in significant ways with Rivier University's educational mission to transform hearts and minds to serve the world: "Transpersonal psychology is the study and cultivation of the highest and most transformative values and potentials—individual, communal, and global—that reflect the mystery and interconnectedness of life, including the human journey within the cosmos" (p. 9).

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When transformative learning is approached in this way—as an intuitive, imaginative, subjective, and personal process—individuals are encouraged to recognize and *unlearn* those uncritically accepted beliefs that stress the existence of danger, minimize the purpose of the species or any member of it, strain the individual's sense of biological integrity, and shrink the area of psychological safety, which contribute to a divided state within the personality (e.g., body vs. mind, self vs. others, humanity vs. nature, inner self vs. outer ego, subject vs. object) (Wilber, 1979). As Parker Palmer and Arthur Zajonc (2010) put it in *The Heart of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal*, “The healing of this divide is at the heart of education during the college years, rightly understood” (p.10).

By encouraging the individual to focus upon those innate, constructive attitudes, feelings, and beliefs that improve one's sense of well-being, strength, and fulfillment, this approach to transformative learning offers a transrational counterpoint that facilitates exploration of other potentially effective frames of reference so that usual ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving may be challenged and an alternative approach to life itself may be recognized and used. On this view, by opening up avenues of expression that increase their sense of worth and power, individuals become better able to assess their abilities so as to be *consciously wise* enough to choose from the myriad possibilities those most promising actions that will add to the value fulfillment of oneself and other people. There are many promising actions that could be taken to facilitate “the transformation of hearts and minds to serve the world” but one in particular underlies all others: Practicing one's ideals in everyday life as they exist in one's own impulses, feelings and abilities. To serve the world, individuals must practice their idealism (i.e., their understanding of excellent performance) in the acts of their daily life.

This view of transformative learning as an intuitive, imaginative, subjective, and personal process posits that human beings (and all creatures for that matter) have a strong inner impetus leading to action and expression and a unique, natural, native way of dealing with the universe, and of relating to inner and outer reality. When this natural give-and-take is accepted and expressed and not repressed, the individual is happy, healthy, and feels at one with the universe itself. If anything impedes this natural smoothness and coordination, then all aspects of expression are in one way or another impeded. People yearn toward freedom naturally, as plants do toward the sun, and without a healthy dose of freedom and exuberance, life itself seems to lose meaning.

Transformative education as an intuitive, imaginative, subjective, personal process

What instructional methods and learning environments facilitate the “transformation of hearts and minds to serve the world” when approached as an intuitive, imaginative, subjective, and personal process? Forms of teaching favored by this approach encourage engagement with one's inner self, or *soul*, through imagination, creativity, and intuition (Hart, Nelson, & Puhakka, 2000; H. Palmer, 1998). John Dirkx (1997), in his essay *Nurturing Soul in Adult Learning*, states that

Constructivist, active, and experiential forms of teaching and learning, marked by high levels of uncertainty, ambiguity, contradiction, and paradox, invite expressions of soul, [by addressing] the wholeness of learners' lives—not just their heads [so that] memories, images, fantasies, spontaneous thoughts surface [in] an appreciation of the multiplicity of selves that makes up who we are... .To nurture soul is to recognize what is already inherent, to acknowledge its presence within, [and] to provide it a voice through which to be heard.... Learning through soul occurs most readily in environments rich with metaphor, story, images, art, music, film, and poetry.

Works [that] focus in imaginative and poetic ways on numerous spiritual and profoundly moral issues of our times represent powerful ways of arousing soul to life.... Nurturing soul also involves attending to the physical aspects of the learning environment.... Caring for the physical space is as important to nurturing soul within a learning group as our physical bodies are to nurturing soul within our individual lives. (pp. 82-87)

Journaling

Keeping a daily journal (“journaling”) is a powerful transformative teaching/learning practice that unites the two frameworks of transformative learning and education, providing a rational approach to an intuitive process. In journaling, key themes (values, meanings and purposes) are recognized, basic assumptions about one’s ways of thinking identified, and the beliefs that shape experience of personal and social reality made explicit (Baldwin, 1990; Klug, 1993; Rainer, 1978). “Through a review of the entries, one engages in dialogue with oneself by commenting on one’s entries—questioning one’s motives and underlying assumptions, making suggestions, connecting various entries with the other, noting underlying themes—one responds to the text as one would to a valued friend” (Wilcox, 1997, p. 27).

Contemplative practice

There is an andragogy (i.e., “the art and science of teaching adults to learn”) (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005) that is not identified by AACU in their list of “high-impact” practices that I’d like to briefly mention here as worth serious consideration, despite a certain suspicion by some faculty and administrators of its utility in an academic setting (e.g., What is it good for? It wastes time. How do you grade it?) and that sometimes meets with resistance by students because they are not used to it. It is a form of transformative learning called *contemplative practice* (Miller, 1994, 2000, 2001, Miller, Karsten, Denton, Orr, & Kates, 2005). There is nothing wrong with critically reflecting on one’s consciously available beliefs and engaging in critical social discourse about them, and there is much good to understanding and receiving such information, but this is not all we as educators of adult learners should be concerned with.

Contemplative practice offers a necessary counterpoint to critical reflection and social discourse characteristic of the rational approach to transformative learning in the classroom. Contemplative practice requires us at a certain point to stop asking questions of the universe and simply listen to what it has to say to us and in the silence of our own thoughts to listen *uncritically*, not trying to judge the information that we get in the terms in which we are used to judging it, but leaving ourselves open for fresh experience of what is now. It is learning to settle ourselves within the moment as it exists for us and simply watch the sensations, the thoughts, and the judgments that we have, to listen to the inner chattering that is going on in our head as we go about the day and become aware of what we are telling ourselves about our experience. By doing so, the personality discovers a pathway that it may not have been aware of before to those psychologically invisible but consciously available beliefs about the nature of the self, other people, and the physical world that lie beyond the margins of consciousness and which program our daily waking experience.

The universe speaks in many voices. It can indeed speak through a leaf or in the silence of a room if we have the patience to listen and realize that beneath the sounds that we hear are other sounds. Then we can learn much and will have facilitated a primary condition under which a perspective transformation occurs—openness to self-knowledge (Miller, 2002). A transpersonal approach to transformative learning and education assumes that the whole Self wants the egoic self to become

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familiar with its own greater identity. As teachers, we need not be so impatient in our efforts to “transform hearts and minds to serve the world,” for we are opening channels that may have been closed for a very long time, clearing them up, opening doors to students’ own perception of the voice of the universe when it speaks, so that a clearer message can be received, and in some cases trying to redefine the very definition of personal identity. This is not an easy task in usual terms.

Transformative Education and Transformative Learning at Rivier University

Mission Statement

Rivier University’s mission statement provides an *operational definition* of “transformative education” that identifies the actions to be performed and the internal and external conditions to be established in order to transform hearts and mind to serve the world. It combines the two paradigms of transformative learning into a creative synergy that includes:

- Educating the whole person;
- Cultivating critical thought, sound judgment, and respect for all people;
- Offering opportunities for social, cultural, moral, and spiritual development;
- Searching for truth through the dialogue between faith and reason;
- Creating an environment in which integrated learning is the shared responsibility of all and is pursued in all curricular and co-curricular programs;
- Striving for academic excellence;
- Taking responsibility for ourselves and for others;
- Engaging in dialog about basic human issues facing society, especially the plight of the power and the powerless, and
- Extending to the greater community an invitation to join in intellectual inquiry and dialogue.

In this Mission statement, we see articulated all of the key elements that characterize the national conversation regarding transformative learning and transformative education today—holistic learning, critical reflection, reflective action, spirituality in education, integrative learning, personal and social responsibility, critical social theory, social discourse, and a rational-cognitive-analytical-social approach to an intuitive-affective-creative-personal process. Under the leadership of its President, Sister Paula Marie Buley, IHM, Rivier University transforms itself to facilitate a transformative emphasis within the context of its commitment to the faith heritage, intellectual tradition, and social teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.

As a Roman Catholic institution of higher education and a people who know the sacred, it becomes incumbent upon us as faculty to help our students recover a sense for the *otherness* and precious *inwardness* of the things of the natural world that they study in the Sciences, and to regain the sense of *community* with one another and all of creation that Thomas Merton (1974/1989) referred to as “the hidden wholeness in all things” (p. 506) through their academic studies in the Liberal Arts. Fundamental to this effort is reclaiming the capacity for humility, wonder, and surprise before the mysterious—the fundamental emotion that Albert Einstein (1954) said “stands at the cradle of true art and true science” (p. 11). Each action identified in Rivier’s mission statement represents a journey toward recovering the sacred and living a divided life no more. Each mission-related action has the potential to encourage

authenticity and spirituality in education and make transformative learning not only a theoretical possibility but a practical reality (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006; Tisdell, 2003).

Common Core Curriculum

A second example of transformative education and learning at Rivier University is its common (“Core”) general education curriculum. Most efforts at bringing transformative/spiritual elements into higher education nationwide exist primarily among individual faculty within classrooms rather than at the departmental or institutional levels (Duerr, Zajonc, & Dana, 2003). Rivier University’s common Core entitled, “Journeys of Transformation,” is noteworthy in this regard because it implements the two frameworks of transformative learning and education as an *institutional* strategy.

By exploring questions such as “Who am I and what is the world?” in the freshman year, “Who is my neighbor?” in the sophomore and junior years, “How shall we live?” and “What, then, shall we do?” in the junior and senior years, Rivier’s new Core offers a transformative education that educates for personal and social change within the context of the Liberal Arts and the Sciences. Through an exploration of these “big” questions and additional co-curricular programming, the Core invites students and faculty to discover together the habitual and conditioned patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving that have been inherited in the past which have become dysfunctional for our present circumstances and to devise new patterns of being, having, doing, and interacting that satisfy the deepest needs of the human community and the fundamental needs of the larger earth community of which the species is a part. As old assumptions and ways of thinking and behaving are examined and unlearned, new frames of reference, points of view, and habits of heart and mind are taken on.

“Journeys of Transformation” is an apt name for our Core because it recognizes that we as a species are living in a period of human and earth history that is itself in a state of radical transformation. It acknowledges that each person alive is embarked upon the same kind of journey, dealing with it, according to his or her own characteristics and situation. According to Edmund O’Sullivan (2002), professor and director of the Transformative Learning Center at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto, Canada,

The pathos of the human being today is that we are totally caught up in this incredible transformation, and we have a significant responsibility for the direction it will take. What is terrifying is that we have it within our power to make life extinct on this planet. Because of the magnitude of this responsibility for the planet, all our educational ventures must finally be judged within this order of magnitude. This is the challenge for all areas of education. For education, this realization is the bottom line. (p. 2)

It is a challenge that Rivier’s common Core has embraced under the leadership of Dr. Brad Stull, Dean of Undergraduate Studies. As Parker Palmer (1997) writes: “Education at its best—these profound human transactions called knowing, teaching, and learning—is not just about information, and they’re not just about getting jobs. They are about healing. They are about wholeness. They are about empowerment, liberation, transcendence. They are about reclaiming the vitality of life (p. 10).

The definition of transformative learning established through the research and writing of Edmund O’Sullivan (1999, 2002, 2012; O’Sullivan & Taylor, 2004) conveys what the phrase “Transforming Hearts and Minds to Serve the World” means to me in light of my understanding of Rivier University’s mission and what its new Core curriculum seeks to accomplish.

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Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feeling, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structure of class, race, and gender; our body-awareness; our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of the possibilities of social justice and peace and personal joy. (O’Sullivan, 2002, p. 11)

No matter how this essential human process of evolutionary growth may unfold, individual transformation of hearts and minds is a prerequisite to positive transformation at familial, societal and global levels. As the number of individuals who are consciously attempting their own self-transformation increase, it becomes natural for them to want to apply their insights in service of the unfolding destiny of twenty-first century humankind in a way that is personally satisfying while simultaneously promoting the value fulfillment of others.

Travel Abroad Service and Teaching-Learning Trips

It is not only minds that we seek to transform, but hearts as well, and my third example of transformative education at Rivier University illustrates why all truly transformative learning is at its root emotional learning. I have had the privilege of hearing some of the narratives of students who have returned from their travel abroad service trips to Senegal and field-based experiential learning trips to Haiti, Costa Rica, and Puerto Rico that have been facilitated under the leadership of Dr. Mark Meehan, Associate Vice President for Global Engagement. These trips have provided students an opportunity to analyze and solve problems in the community, apply what they are learning in real-world settings, and have direct experiences with basic human issues facing society, especially the plight of the power and the powerless.

The transformation of hearts and minds that has occurred at the emotional and spiritual levels of some of these students and faculty as a result of their travel abroad is of a deep sort that requires the use of metaphors and symbols to adequately convey the kinds of “deep” transformations that have been actually experienced—Awakening from the Dream of “Reality;” Uncovering the Veils of Illusion; Purification by Inner Fire; Journey to the Place of Vision and Power; Returning to the Source; Dying and Being Reborn; Unfolding the Tree of Our Life, and so forth (Metzer, 1986). The term “transformation” in this context implies the occurrence of significant changes in a student’s psychosocial development and perhaps even a significant personality change. The metaphors, symbols, and analogies that have been used to describe the process of inner transformation emphasize the fluid processes and individual uniqueness of the experience of self-transformation.

Conversations with Remarkable People

The meaning of transformative learning for personal and social responsibility is conveyed in my fourth example of transformative education at Rivier through its focus on the spiritual and profoundly moral issues of our times, particularly the sharing of remarkable experiences and personal stories of transformation. I am speaking, for example, of individuals such as Father Marcel Uwineza, S. J., a survivor of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, whom I heard speak as a part of University chaplain Br. Paul Demers’s Challenge of Peace class on February 17, 2014. Fr. Uwineza described the struggle of his own heroic journey of transformation of heart and mind from fear, anger, and sadness to forgiveness and

reconciliation and helped me better understand how individual self-transformations can cumulate to produce the collective transformation of an entire society and how the value fulfillment of one individual promotes the common good of many.

Rivier Institute for Senior Education (RISE)

My fifth example of transformative education at Rivier University is the Rivier Institute for Senior Education (RISE), which is a part of the Institute for Learning Retirement (IRL) movement in the United State and Canada. Rivier University does not see the transformation of young adults as its only institutional responsibility, but extends that invitation to members of the greater community who are in the later decades of their lifespan by providing opportunities to develop new skills and roles through which to remain active in the workforce and in society itself. RISE, currently with over 400 active members, recognizes that the needs, potentials, integrity, and wisdom of mature retirement-age learners are different from those of the young adult and provides academic programming and content different than programs developed for college-age students. Under the leadership of its Director, Diane Winter, and its President, Louise O’Connell, RISE represents an alternative process for education of an emerging and underserved population whose continued vitality, creativity, and wisdom is vital to society’s functioning in this time of incredible transformation (Miller & Cook-Greuter, 1994, 2000).

Undergraduate Studies Conference on Transformative Learning

A sixth and final example of transformative education at Rivier University is its Undergraduate Studies Conference on Transformative Learning that is designed to inform all of its members about transformative learning in progress and the impact of transformative education in individual lives. Under the leadership of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dr. Deborah Vess, and in collaboration with the entire Rivier University faculty, the conference offers many examples of transformative learning that serve to anchor future discussions of what it means to “transform hearts and minds to serve the world” in concrete observations and thus avoid unwarranted claims.

Conclusion

Rivier University—by virtue of its Mission, its general education Core curriculum, its travel abroad service and teaching-learning trips, its co-curricular programming, its Institute for Senior Education, its Undergraduate Studies Conference on Transformative Learning, and other contexts in which it combines the two frameworks of transformative learning and education into a synergistic whole—has transformed itself to facilitate a transformative emphasis to “transform hearts and minds to serve the world.” The transformational process takes no linear path and may be abrupt or gradual, temporary or lasting, externally or internally induced, invisible to others or openly manifested, progressive or regressive/digressive, intentionally sought for or unexpectedly occur through the grace of God.

Given the depths of the personal struggles that may be brought forth and the complexity of interpersonal relationships given expression by events of a transformative education, not all transformative learning can be expected to lead to a positive expansion and integration of an individual’s personality. Nevertheless, the expansion of consciousness, personality integration, critical insights and fundamental understandings necessary for “recovering the sacred at the heart of all things” can only occur through such transformations in some people. People who have had powerful transformative experiences and have succeeded in applying them in their everyday lives show very distinct changes in

their values (Miller & C'de Baca, 2001). I echo the observation of Parker Palmer and Arthur Zajonc (2010) in *The Heart of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal*, when they say, “Collectively, as students, teachers, and administrators, we have the wisdom and experience we need to meet the challenges of the century ahead—if we are brave enough to name what we care about, share what we know, and take the risks that transformation always requires” (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, p. 17).

Rivier College, now Rivier University, began its own journeys of transformation 80 years ago as an all-woman’s College serving the women of the immigrant families in the region that worked in the textile mills. Today, we are a doctoral granting institution of higher education which has transformed itself to facilitate a transformative emphasis that extends to all of its members and to the greater community an invitation to explore the idea of God’s relationship to humans and to the non-human world and that behind the apparent disarray of random events, there is a deeper harmony and pattern that connects basic reality to its originating Source in which all of being is lovingly supported and forever couched. It is a transformative emphasis grounded in the faith heritage, intellectual tradition, and social teachings of the Roman Catholic Church that encourages us to trust our impulses and explore their meanings, practice our idealism in the acts of our daily life, and insist that each step we take be worthy of the ideals we pursue. Critical reflection on the nature of personal and social reality—as well as exploring in discourse with others such questions as Who am I and why am I here? Who are these other beings with whom I share this planet and why should I care? What is the true nature of human personality and basic reality? Is this all there is?—can help foster personal self-transformation. Such personal self-transformation provides the foundational originating impulse for the creation of those transformed social, cultural, economic, and political structures necessary to meet the complexity of human needs in a way that honors the diversity of peoples in non-dominant and egalitarian ways while simultaneously holding a sense of communion and intimacy with the natural world.

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time
(T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*)

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