Transformational Learning and Critical Reflection
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Transformational Learning

Transformational learning precipitates deep and lasting personal change, and often involves a paradigm shift in perception of self in the world.

How Does Transformation Occur?
Perspective transformation involves a sequence of learning activities that begins with a disorienting dilemma and concludes with a changed self-concept that enables a reintegration into one’s life context on the basis of conditions dictated by a new perspective. (Mezirow, 1998).

Transformational learning as described by Cranton (1994) occurs through critical reflection and enables individuals to revise and develop new assumptions and ways of seeing the world.

Critical Reflection

Critical reflection is the process of creating or clarifying the meaning of experience (present and past) in terms of self (self in relation to self and self in relation to the world). (Boyd & Fales, 1983)

It’s All About Uncovering Assumptions
“One way to think about assumptions is that they are the taken-for-granted beliefs we have about reality. Another is to see assumptions as the (often unacknowledged) rules of thumb that guide our actions. A third way is to see assumptions as the common sense beliefs and conventional wisdoms that we invoke when asked, “why did you do this?” “Why do you think that?” If our reply to these questions is something like “Well, it’s common sense that…” (Brookfield, 1992).

Benefits of Critical Reflection

- frame and reframe the problem or challenge accurately, since complex issues are seldom what they first seem
- identify, clarify, and test one’s personal insights and ‘theories’ about the problem or challenge
- continually learn how to learn, both individually and when naturally interacting with others in groups and teams
- increase transfer of learning from the class to the ‘real world’

Levels of Reflection:
I. Critical Reflection: takes account of the socio-political context in which events take place and decisions are made (roles, relationships, responsibilities, gender, ethnicity, etc.)
II. Dialogic Reflection: discourse with oneself, mulling over reasons and exploring alternatives (I wonder...? Maybe...?)
III. Descriptive Reflection: provides reasons (often based on personal judgement), although only in a reportive way (I did x because y)
IV. Descriptive: merely reporting events with no attempt to provide reasons (I did x; he said y) (Hatton & Smith, 1995)

Three Types of Critical Reflection
1. Content reflection – reflection on what we perceive, think, feel or act upon
2. Process reflection – concerned with the manner or method in which we think
3. Premise reflection – higher level. Involves us becoming aware of why we perceive, think, feel or act as we do. (Mezirow, 1998)
Techniques for Fostering Critical Reflection

- private reflection
- journals
- portfolios (dossiers, statements of philosophy)
- mentor/peer relationships
- peer/peer relationships
- conferences, seminars, etc.
- group discussions

Reflective Approaches

Four stage reflection process:
I. Articulation of a problem or challenge
II. Analysis of the problem or challenge

Seven Proactive Reflective Questions:
- What happened? (What did you see, what were you feeling, what was the most important thing?)
- What is the fundamental likeness of this problem or challenge to others?
- What is the fundamental difference?
- Why was that significant to you?
- Why do you think it happened?
- How can you do it differently next time for different results?
- How can you use this information? (What concepts and principles will guide you future approach?)

III. Tentative theory to explain the problem or challenge
IV. Action to be taken in the future

In Vella’s discussion of Praxis (action with reflection), she suggests four open-ended questions move through these steps:
1. What do you see happening here? (Description)
2. Why do you think it is happening? (Analysis)
3. When it happens in your situation, what problems does it cause? (Application)
4. What can we do about it? (Implementation)

Description of Experience:
- Describe the ‘here and now’ experience
- What essential factors contributed to this experience?
- What are the significant background factors to this experience?
- What are the key processes (for reflection) in this experience?

Reflection:
- What was I trying to achieve?
- Why did I intervene as I did?
- What were the consequences for my action for myself? Others?
- How did I feel about this experience when it was happening?
- How did others feel?
- How do I know how others felt?

Influencing Factors:
- What internal factors influenced my decision making?
- What external factors influenced my decision making?
- What sources of knowledge did/should have influenced my decision making?
Alternative Actions:
- What other choices did I have?
- What might the consequences be of these choices?

Learning:
- How do I now feel about this experience?
- How have I made sense of this experience in the light of past experiences and future practice?
- How has this experience changed my ways of knowing?

Bibliography


