Transformative Reshaping: A Teaching and Learning Practice

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ABSTRACT

Transformative Reshaping is a novel, research-based strategic approach to teaching and learning that aims to promote academic and professional success and enhance retention among students. This practice encourages providing students with opportunities to learn how to learn (metacognition), develop technical skills, and acquire essential non-technical abilities or soft skills. The cultivation of competent academicians, professionals, and life-long learners is the ultimate goal. Transformative Reshaping is a SoTL practice that was developed by Albert A. Pearsall III, Assistant Professor of Business at the University of the District of Columbia Community College (UDCCC), and Laurence Covington, Instructor of English, UDCCC from discussions with several college professors, reviews of literature, and classroom trial and error. It is based on the ACUE framework for college-level instruction (ACUE's effective practice framework).

Keywords: SoTL, Teaching, Learning, Practice

1 Introduction

The primary duty of colleges and universities is to effectively prepare all students for academic and professional life. Continuous commitment to Improving the ancient and noble craft of teaching and learning is essential for the advancement of the United States and all the great nations of the world. Committed educators are exploring the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) for knowledge, inspiration, and fuel for innovation. Most educators base their instructional strategies as a result of experience —their observation of student reactions and learning in the various classroom environments (face-to-face, online, remote instruction, and hybrid) to their teaching. However, a growing number of college educators are consulting the increasingly rich reservoir of knowledge provided by SoTL, which is the merging of practice and research in higher education that brings a scholarly focus on fostering positive and effective teaching and learning.

Transformative Reshaping is a SoTL practice that was developed by Albert A. Pearsall III, Assistant Professor of Business at the University of the District of Columbia Community College (UDCCC), and Laurence Covington, Instructor of English, UDCCC from discussions with several college professors, reviews of literature, and classroom trial and error. It is based on the ACUE framework for college-level instruction (ACUE's effective practice framework).

2 Methodology

2.1 A Research-Based Practice

Transformative Reshaping is a novel, research-based strategic approach to teaching and learning that aims to promote academic and professional success and enhance retention

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among students. This practice encourages providing students with opportunities to learn how to learn (metacognition), develop technical skills, and acquire essential non-technical abilities or soft skills. The cultivation of competent academicians, professionals, and life-long learners is the ultimate goal.

2.2 Metacognition, Mindfulness, Critical Thinking

Metacognition of learning enables students to become self-regulated learners such that they no longer fool themselves into thinking they know something they don't. Developing our metacognition is what leads to expertise but can only be developed in the context of learning something else.

Mindfulness (a UDC focus in recent times), may not be metacognition, but they seem to be related to each other such that mindfulness possibly improves metacognition. We use reflective writing in our classes to focus students' orientation on mastery of skills and theory instead of on grades. Professor Pearsall and I believe students must learn the facts while learning to use them to make decisions about what they understand or what they should do. Learning makes little sense unless it has some sustained influence on the way the learner subsequently thinks, acts, or feels. We teach facts in a rich context of problems, issues, and questions.

Here are the key concepts we found in applying transformative teaching (Bain, 2004):

1. Knowledge is constructed, not received.
2. Mental Modes change slowly
3. Questions are crucial.
4. Caring is crucial.

Common Principles

1. Create a natural critical learning environment.
2. Get their attention and keep it.
3. Start with the students rather than the discipline.
4. Seek Commitments.
5. Help students learn outside of class.
6. Engage students in disciplinary thinking.
7. Create diverse learning experiences.

2.3 Critical Thinking

If you are to develop as a thinker, you must learn the art of clarifying your thinking. Here's what you can do to begin. When people explain things to you, summarize in your own words what you think they said. When you cannot do this to their satisfaction, you don't truly understand what they said. When they cannot summarize to your satisfaction what you have said, they don't truly understand what you said.

The idea of clarifying thinking is almost so easy it is hard. It is like watching the ball while playing tennis. It is easy to deceive ourselves into thinking we are doing it when we are not (sophistry). The difference is that in tennis we get immediate feedback that tells us we

were not watching the ball (the ball does not go over the net). In thinking, we do not have the luxury of instant feedback. So, we can remain self- deceived most of the time.

3 Results

3.1 The Pillars

Transformative Reshaping is based on pillars that guide the practice and allow instructor-wide flexibility to adapt the learning environment to the specific needs of students. These pillars are study skills, progressive rigor, progressive grading, effective communications skills, civility, and intangible skills. Each pillar will be explained.

3.1.1 Study Skills

Too many students don't know how to effectively study for college-level work. Too many students think reading a document once is all they need to do to study for assessments. They often don't understand the importance of effective notetaking, and that the act of study is intentional and requires repetition. Under Transformative Reshaping faculty teach students how to study.

Notetaking

There are many notetaking strategies (Good Notes). One approach is for the student to record the information as completely as possible. The Dartmouth Academic Skills Center website offers several notetaking digital tools. Research generally suggests that writing notes by hand generally improves understanding memory retention of the material because it involves deeper cognitive processing of the information over typing (Effectiviology).

Students should be taught to record the information as complete as possible; read the course content daily by focusing on graphics, keywords, headings, definitions, problems, discussion, and summaries; recite the information in their own words without notes; reflect or think about what they think or feel about the information; review their notes, including main ideas and important details for meaning. We have found this simple method to be useful in building understanding, retention, and critical thinking leading to a readiness to learn new content.

3.1.2 Progressive Rigor

The academic rigor of college is overwhelming for some, especially for students from underserved communities. We have found that pacing the delivery of course content and work in steadily increasing increments of challenge over the course of the semester can discourage frustration and help students learn and see themselves as successful college students. Instructors should apply Bloom's Taxonomy to guide students in producing high-quality work that achieves the highest level of "Creating" on the taxonomy pyramid. (Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching, Bloom's Taxonomy)

3.1.3 Progressive Grading

Students need wins. Grading can be used to motivate, encourage persistence and build confidence. Steadily increasing assignment weights and points over the course of the semester can be an effective strategy. ACUE training supports that assigning higher points and greater weights later in the semester when students have become accustomed to the

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course and instruction approach can lead to better results, along with student self-assessments.

3.1.4 Effective Communication Skills

Communication skills are essential to being a successful academician and professional. Instruction and assignments that build and develop effective written, oral, and nonverbal are requisite components of Transformative Reshaping. Students will exercise writing and speaking "muscles" often. They will understand the fact that most communications are nonverbal and learn cultural competency to understand how a cultural misreading of behavior can affect communications. Students will build critical thinking, teamwork, creativity, and competence.

Communication between students and the instructor is critical to fostering a positive teaching and learning environment. It is important that educators clearly outline expectations, learning objects, course requirements, and other essential information to students timely. Cultivating and maintaining open and circular feedback loops between students and instructors are characteristics of quality courses. Educators should use student feedback as a means to modify all aspects of the course to ensure student success.

3.1.5 Civility

Civility is positive behavior that results in the good treatment of others. Student behavior/speech which disrupts an educational setting is disrespectful to the instructor and students; it cannot be tolerated. May include:

- Rude or disrespectful behavior
- Unwarranted outbursts
- Failure to follow directions • Vulgar or obscene language
- Slurs or intimidation
- Physically or verbally abusive behavior

Educators must build a culture of civility by establishing and communicating norms and acceptable behaviors while modeling, guiding, training, and coaching students on those behaviors are vital to effective teaching and learning. Providing incentives for positive behavior and penalties for negative behavior is a longstanding method that works.

3.1.6 Microaggressions

Educators must train & coach against microaggressions, which can be intentional but are often unintentional slights, snubs, hostility, and hostile and derogatory messages directed to individuals and groups. Microaggressions marginalize the targeted person(s) and poison the teaching and learning environment. Educators must be vigilant against microaggressions and quickly stop them as soon as they are detected. They should:

- Reward civility
- Punish incivility

3.1.7 Intangible Skills or Soft Skills

Hard skills or technical abilities such as reading, math computation ability, and writing will get students jobs, but it will be the intangible personal traits, such as punctuality, tact, and diplomacy, ability to work well with others that will enable the student to keep and progress in

a job. Soft skills are intangible personal traits vital to success in life. People with desired soft skills are desired by employers and valued beyond their technical abilities. Likewise, those lacking soft skills may be negatively misperceived and hampered in achieving success in academic and professional environments.

4 Conclusion

Educators should design instructional strategies to develop important soft skills among their students to build:

- Work ethic
- Communication skills (non-verbal)
- Critical thinking
- Time managementTeamwork
- Leadership
- Tact
- Diplomacy

5 Instructional Strategies

Transformative Reshaping expects educators to:

- Teach students how to study
- Use resources: online writing labs/Grammarly etc., to provide exemplars
- Don’t assume students know until assessed
- Understand that students don’t know what they don’t know
- Develop personal/professional relationships
- Be a goal model and role model
- Be honest
- See all students as scholars & treat them that way
- Encourage, encourage & encourage in & out of the classroom

Transformative Reshaping encourages flexibility and variety in the instructional strategies employed. The following are some of the approaches recommended:

- Technology
- Limit lecture
- Require engagement
- Intensive writing
- Intensive speaking exercises
- Use guest speakers
- Use teams or group assignments
- Progressive rigor
- Progressive grading
- Use exemplars and rubrics
- Praise, praise & praise, in & out of the classroom

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