

# Proceedings of the Roosevelt University Mini-Conference on Teaching

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the instrument in courses ranging from Liberal Studies to Biology to Education.

### Online SALG

In LIBS 201 (Writing Social Justice), one of the authors (P. Perkins) coordinated an end-of-course SALG assessment for students in all sections in order to compare student outcomes between campuses, and for a global evaluation of course quality. In BIOL 301 (Molecular and Cellular Biology), instructors administer pre- and post-course versions of an SALG that included questions on social justice and civic engagement. The results of these evaluations were compared to those from other institutions using the same version of the SALG.

### Mini-SALG

A smaller version of the full-scale SALG can be used to gather data on student learning even during a semester, rather than waiting until the end of term. Mid-term questions can be exactly the same as those in the full SALG, or designed for specific course components such as a midterm exam or project. One of the authors (R. Seiser) has used a one-page printed SALG in BIOL 355 (Biochemistry) as an informal survey of student impressions halfway through the semester.

### SALG-like Questions

The current course evaluation form, the SIR II document from Educational Testing Service, provides up to ten supplemental questions at the end of a standard evaluation. Some departments, including the Department of Biological, Chemical, and Physical Sciences, use this section of the SIR II form to include questions on student learning outcomes for all courses in the department. Faculty members and administrators can use the results of student responses to guide curriculum evaluation and identify effective teaching strategies.

### GETTING STARTED

Faculty members who are interested in assessing student learning as part of their professional development can get more information and register their own courses at the SALG Web site. It is maintained as a free service by the Wisconsin Center for Education Research. The following procedure to get started with the instrument is adapted from Seymour, Weise, Hunter, & Daffinrud et al. (2000):

- Register with the SALG web site at <http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/salgains/instructor/default.asp>
- Review the standard SALG format and questions
- Look for templates matching your course or choose the standard SALG form
- Add one or more of your courses to the web site
- Select options for student registration and access
- Add and change questions to the instrument that suits your course
- Invite students to participate and give them a time frame (Note: be sure to tell students whether their responses will be anonymous)

- Monitor responses and analyze data after all responses are submitted

Alternately, instructors may choose to use existing SALG questions to make up their own versions of a student assessment instrument. In either case, the inclusion of student assessment of learning gains material will provide an opportunity for reflection—both for students to look upon their educational experience and for teachers to evaluate the efficacy of their work in the classroom.

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### SALG home page - Faculty

<http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/salgains/instructor/default.asp>

### More information on SALG

<http://www.flaguide.org/cat/salg/salg7.php>

### Instrument templates

<http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/salgains/instructor/TemplateViewOptions.asp>

## Can Transformative Pedagogy Change the Way You Teach?

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Consider the following challenges related to college teaching:

- Do your students know how their own experiences and values shape how they define important issues in your content area?
- Do they realize how their beliefs guide their decision-making about preferred solutions or courses of action?
- Do your students understand how or why other people (especially those dissimilar to them) approach issues differently?
- Can your students analyze an issue from multiple perspectives to generate different solutions?
- Do your students feel that they can take action to make a difference? Are they engaged in their communities in ways consistent with your content area?

These challenges reflect the important educational objectives of promoting students' critical thinking, fostering self-examination, encouraging a tolerance of difference, and

facilitating civic engagement. Many professors, however, may be uncertain about how they can accomplish these goals in their own teaching. The paradigm of transformative pedagogy (Mezirow & Associates, 2000) can provide faculty with a useful theoretical perspective to guide their efforts toward this end. In this article, I summarize core principles of this approach to teaching and learning, and provide a series of concrete steps for its implementation.

## **WHAT IS TRANSFORMATIVE PEDAGOGY?**

Descriptions of transformative pedagogy originated in adult education literature. Mezirow (1991) argued that students experience personal and intellectual growth when they grapple with disorienting dilemmas in class, 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 goes beyond the focus on oneself by encouraging students to critically examine their experiences in light of social issues, and then by facilitating action to create broader change (Cummins & Sayers, 1997).

In more specific terms, professors who teach from this perspective provide students with information that contradicts their current knowledge frameworks (Cranton, 1994). Often, this material focuses on societal inequalities, such as racism, classism, or sexism (Friere, 1970; hooks, 1993). In the context of a supportive and open classroom environment, students then collaboratively examine relevant issues, reflect on their assumptions and biases, weigh evidence, and consider solutions (McAuliffe, 2001). An emphasis on transformative learning does not replace subject-oriented learning, but it complements and enriches more traditional approaches to college teaching (Cranton, 1994).

## **HOW DO I IMPLEMENT TRANSFORMATIVE PEDAGOGY?**

In my roundtable presentation at RUMCOT, I offered the following series of steps for faculty members to implement transformative pedagogy: (a) create a safe environment in class; (b) encourage students to think about their experiences, beliefs, and biases; (c) use teaching strategies that promote student engagement and participation; (d) pose real-world problems that address societal inequalities; and (e) help students implement action-oriented solutions.

### **Create a Safe Environment**

One cornerstone of transformative pedagogy is the creation of a supportive learning community in the classroom. This climate of acceptance is a prerequisite for the self-reflection and implicit challenges to students' ideas that are integral in this teaching approach (Cranton, 1994). More specifically, professors create safe environments by validating students' contributions and opinions, remaining attentive to students' reactions and emotions, establishing a norm of cooperation, facilitating positive peer interactions in class, mediating conflicts when they occur, and remaining open and available (Taylor, 1998).

In my own classes (in my syllabus and throughout class), I emphasize the necessity of students' participation, mutual

respect, and tolerance for differences. To promote cohesion, students introduce themselves to their classmates on the first day. In subsequent weeks, students regularly participate in collaborative discussions. I also place students in stable, small groups to allow for in-depth dialogue. Students develop mutual trust as my course progresses; they share their opinions and experiences with greater ease.

### **Encourage Students to Think About Their Experiences, Beliefs, and Biases**

Transformative pedagogy involves critical questioning that raises students' awareness of their assumptions (Cranton, 1994). This process marries contemplation about the subject matter with self-scrutiny. I accomplish this objective primarily through weekly written assignments and in-class activities that help students to self-reflect, to connect their experiences with social issues, and to reach a collective understanding of course material. I choose topics that purposefully encourage the clarification of students' values and beliefs to allow them to articulate their opinions. One core element of transformative pedagogy is to help students become increasingly aware of others' perspectives. Thus, discussion topics and activities explicitly direct students to consider different aspects of an argument and weigh the merits and limitations of each side before stating their own opinion.

### **Use Teaching Strategies that Promote Student Participation and Engagement**

Transformative pedagogy assumes that students are active learners in the classroom. Professors who teach from this perspective frequently use strategies such as collaborative learning, problem-based instruction, discussions, or role-plays (Cummings & Sayers, 1997). This differs from the "banking model" of teaching (cf., Friere, 1970), in which instructors rely mostly on lectures and consider students primarily to be recipients of information in the educational process. Instead, transformative learning occurs when students feel a responsibility to contribute to the class, become empowered, and believe that their ideas matter (hooks, 1993).

One of the most compelling ways to engage students is through service learning, in which they volunteer and connect their site experiences to coursework while also meeting the site's needs. As a pedagogical tool, service learning has a positive impact on reducing stereotypes, facilitating cultural and racial understanding, and enhancing civic responsibility (Astin & Sax, 1998; Eyley, Giles, & Braxton, 1997). Most of my undergraduate classes require a significant experiential component. Students work with children who experience adversity. In the absence of fieldwork, advocates of transformative pedagogy have emphasized the utility of case studies and reading other narrative accounts that maximize students' engagement and enhance their interpersonal empathy (Russo, 2001).

### **Pose Real-World Problems that Address Inequalities**

Transformative pedagogy not only focuses on developing students' understanding of alternative perspectives and experiences on an individual basis, but also aims to expand their awareness of how societal forces impact people (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006). This analysis often includes

consciousness-raising and acknowledging the existence of oppression (Brookfield, 2000; Cranton, 1994). Connecting course content to sociopolitical issues may be straightforward in some disciplines (e.g., sociology, political science, cultural studies), but parallels may be relatively less apparent in others. In general, professors address inequalities by critically questioning the subject material (e.g., Who benefits from this approach to knowledge? Who or what is excluded from what is known? Whose experiences have been studied in this subject area?) (Byars-Winston et al., 2005). Instructors can also systematically consider the influence of culture, race, social class, gender, and sexual orientation on the material to be covered, and can ultimately ask the question: “What are the implications of this information for society and the disenfranchised?” (Meyers, in press).

### Encourage Action-Oriented Solutions

Finally, transformative pedagogy is characterized by a cycle that alternates between promoting students’ reflection and helping them take action in the service of the common good (Daloz, 2000). Professors encourage students to develop the skills needed to participate in a democracy and to become agents for social justice (Cummins & Sayers, 1997).

Social action can take many forms for college students. For example, Palmer and Standerfer (2004) described an exercise in which their students chose a social issue, connected their interests with a civic group, participated in a local project, created a speech forum to educate others, and finally analyzed their project in a class presentation. Other activities that generate social action include writing advocacy editorials to local or university newspapers, creating or participating in relevant co-curricular activities, conducting campus-wide education projects, or organizing demonstration activities on campus or in nearby communities (Meyers, in press).

### CONCLUSION

At its core, transformative pedagogy encourages professors to aim for more than transmitting information. This approach to teaching seeks to fundamentally and respectfully change students’ attitudes and analytic skills to facilitate their growth. At its best, students leave these classes not only more knowledgeable about course content, but with an expanded world view, greater compassion, heightened self-awareness, and a commitment to produce change.

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### NOTE

Contact me to request a more detailed version of this article that presents qualitative data about my implementation of this approach in one of my classes (e-mail: [smeyers@roosevelt.edu](mailto:smeyers@roosevelt.edu)).

## A Year with Ken Bain: Teaching as Distinctive Scholarship

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### INTRODUCTION TO KEN BAIN

My year with Ken Bain began in the summer of 2005 when I attended his lecture, “Thinking about Learning: What the Best College Teachers Do,” at the Kaneb Center for Teaching and Learning at the University of Notre Dame. His lecture was based on his recent book, *What the Best College Teachers Do*. While driving home, I knew a professional transformation was on its way for me; little did I realize that his words would