

Reviews / Comptes rendus

Creative Expression in Transformative Learning: Tools and Techniques for Educators of Adults

Edited by Chad Hoggan, Soni Simpson, and Heather Stuckey
(Krieger Publishing Company, 2009, 177 pages)

I believe in the timing of all things: “Life is all about timing . . . the unreachable becomes reachable, the unavailable become available, the unattainable . . . attainable. Have the patience, wait it out” (<http://thinkexist.com/quotations/time/>). *Creative Expressions in Transformative Learning* is a book I needed to read at this time; the message was right and I was ready to hear it. I did not necessarily or completely understand the whole book but the gist of the message seemed clear to me: when adults are involved in creative learning experiences, the process (with some help from the strategies used) can facilitate transformation of one’s self. Transformation, a often-vague term that is sometimes hard to apply, is used here to refer to knowing more about the self, understanding how we construct meaning, and finding new ways to make sense of the world by imagining new possibilities (p. 2). The creative learning strategies presented here are said to, and are even shown to, foster change at this level.

The chapters are written by people who have intentionally aimed to foster personal or individual change for adult learners. The authors use a variety of methods to inform their particular practice and to show how inner change was fostered—methods such as personal experience, reference to the literature, and sometimes the results of their own study. I found this use of “proof of evidence” quite helpful as I admittedly discovered myself somewhat cynical in the first few chapters, but their sharing of the process and the outcomes gave me confidence by the book’s end.

The first two chapters ground the book in some of the theoretical underpinnings and associations between the key concepts of transformative learning, learning theory, multiple ways of knowing and creativity, while the following six chapters (Chapter 3–8), provide examples of how those ideas and concepts have been applied and show how the meshing of these concepts can work to transform. Chapter 3 explores embodied learning. Heather Stuckey presents the idea that the body holds an inner knowing through our senses, our perceptions, and the connection between our mind and our body, and suggests that guided imagery, meditation, and drama can help to invite the body’s inherent system of knowing to the surface. Chapter 4, by Chad Hoggan, one of the book’s three editors, describes how story can “lead to transformational experiences because it touches the soul, the spirit, the emotion of being” (p. 51). Chapter 5 focuses

on the role or impact of using collage for creative expression. Here, Soni Simpson describes her experience of using collage with adults as a catalyst for the deep understanding of their inner creativity. Most profound for this reader was the story of Amar, whose use of electronic collage “transformed his entire life’s perspective” (p.84). As a music lover, I found Chapter 6, written by Colleen Weisner, most inspiring. Although I, too, am not a musician by any means, just someone that Weisner says can be transformed if I engage with the music. I loved being reminded about Sweet Honey in the Rocks, an acappella ensemble, whose music moves one’s soul toward deep reflection and action with their lyrics and their incredible harmonic arrangements. When you hear their music, you cannot be still; you must move!

In the Chapter 7, Randee Lipson Lawrence reminds us that intuition is about the ability to perceive or know things that transcends conscious reasoning. This way of knowing, as she explains, has the force to heal and transform through our dreams. Also interesting is Pamela Meyers’ chapter about the use of improvisation and creativity and the significance of a shared learning space. The book’s final chapter synthesizes its key ideas and practices. In the end, *Creative Expressions in Transformative Learning* suggests that transformative learning practices, in a context of creative learning, can cultivate the following types of transformation: the ability to imagine new possibilities, deep learning for course content, self awareness, purposeful change, and social change.

I very much enjoyed this book. Although it is not a highly academic book heavy in theory or scholarly thinking, it does blend story, experience, and concept well. As a result, I was reminded that learning can be a deeply powerful experience and that the methods used to facilitate such an experience matter. Although it is said that the outcome is not what matters most in transformative learning but rather the learning process itself, this book is a testament to the fact that the practices described here, such as music, meditation, and imagery, have latent possibilities for change within them. Because of the perfect timing of this book in my own life, I am looking forward to using poetry and story about community in a new course I am designing. I am not sure what might be attainable for deep learning with my adult student learners, but it is my hope that something within them will shift towards something different, even something better—something perhaps transformative.

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