Chapter 2
Learning through Teaching:
A Narrative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The authors of this chapter explore how educators learn through teaching based on a transformative learning theoretical framework and a narrative analysis of teaching stories and teaching journals. They selected segments from teaching journals and recorded oral stories or stories exchanged in letters and e-mails and analyzed them to look for transformative learning about teaching. Four interrelated themes emerged: becoming aware of meaning perspectives about teaching, both those that are ideal and those that act as obstacles in practice; learning to make judgments and decisions; developing relationships with students; and using power. These themes are described and illustrated with data from the narratives.

INTRODUCTION

In the adult education literature, a great deal has been written about adult learning. We have, for example, Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner's (2007) 500-page volume in its third edition on learning in adulthood. We have Taylor and Cranton's (2012) 600-page volume on transformative learning. The *Journal of Transformative Education* and the *Adult Education Quarterly,* in spite of their titles, mainly contain articles about learning. Similarly, in K-12 education, the focus is primarily on increasing learning, achieving better results on standardized tests, and new strategies for meeting the needs of more students.

Little attention has been paid to how practicing educators at all levels learn through their teaching. There is a literature on pre-service teacher education; the work that is done to "train" teachers to go into the classroom, and some attention is paid to teacher development and professional development for teachers (activities that generally take place outside of the classroom). Teacher conferences and classes taken for Educational Units (EUs) are generally about units of instruction that work for accomplishing a specific task. These units rarely include anything transformative; they offer techniques for achieving behavior. Much of what teachers learn about teaching has to do

with altering and manipulating student behavior physically and even mentally. Such things not only leave the teacher untouched and strangely uninvolved, it also gives the teacher a chance to develop more defensive teacher position power which keeps teachers safe from the danger of learning, critically reflecting and perhaps, finding the transformative in the classroom.

In higher education, the one area that pays attention to teachers learning about teaching is the area of faculty development, but this literature is mainly a "how to" literature with little in the way of a theoretical framework. The Professional and Organizational Development network holds a yearly conference for faculty and administrators and publishes a yearly volume; most of the papers presented and the chapters in the volume, *To Improve the Academy,* provide resources and strategies for faculty to "improve" their teaching. Weimer's (2002, 2012) use of learner-centered teaching as a foundation for higher education faculty learning how to teach in different ways comes closest to a theory-based faculty development that occurs as a part of the process of teaching.

In adult education, the scene is also discouraging, though there may be the most potential for learning about teaching by teaching as adult education is the least regulated of the areas of education. Several years ago, Cranton (1996) wrote *Professional development as transformative learning: New perspectives for teachers of adults;* Taylor, Marienau, and Fiddler (2000) include a Part Three in their book on developing adult learners which pays attention to educator development, but these offerings are few and far between. It is as though a person "gets trained" (or not, as is the case in higher education and much of adult education) to be a teacher, and that is the end of the story. Even when faculty development and more generally, educator development is available to practitioners, the percentage of people participating is very low and the activities are removed from the classroom.

It is our goal in this chapter to explore how educators learn through teaching based on a transformative learning theoretical framework and a narrative analysis of teaching stories and teaching journals. We provide an overview of transformative learning theory, with an emphasis on a unified approach to the theory. We discuss some of the empirical and conceptual work on learning through narratives, and then give our backgrounds as educators in a narrative form. One of us has kept personal teaching journals over a number of years, and one of us tells teaching stories from his practice in a variety of contexts. These narratives will form the basis for our analysis of how we have learned and can learn about our teaching practice.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

When we learn in traditional forms, that learning serves to accentuate that which we already believe, the meaning perspectives that we already have. When we enter the transformative learning process, it leads us to critically reflect on our essentials of knowing and often brings us to affirm a very different kind of knowing. The opportunity for the first kind of learning comes as a natural part of education and of life. The opportunities for the transformative also come along in the ebb and flow of education and living, sometimes even at the same moment as the other. Mezirow's (1975) interest in transformative learning was sparked when Edie, his wife returned to college as an adult student and saw the changes that re-entry women were experiencing all around her. Mezirow's original work focused on what he called "perspective transformation," with an emphasis on the personal changes he observed in his first study. By 1991, he presented a fully developed theory to the field, based on an interdisciplinary consideration of concepts coming from sociology, psychology, psychoanalysis, and social philosophy. Although the wording of his definition has changed somewhat over time, and although he has

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