

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Associated Schools Network: Teaching for Social Justice and Transformative Education

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Abstract

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Associated Schools Network is an international organization that can help teachers and students learn more about practical ways to apply social justice themes at an academic, personal, social, and global level. Learning processes are holistic and multi-dimensional within this context. Different strands of transformative learning theory that include individual perspective transformation, planetary-global transformative education, non-western ways of knowing, and emancipatory teaching reflect key UNESCO themes. Specific examples of perspectives of social justice held by teachers, administrators, and counsellors and adult learning centres from Winnipeg, Canada are highlighted. This article emphasizes the importance of extending ways of knowing and learning that have the potential to create more dynamic and culturally-inclusive learning environments. Implications for curriculum innovation and creative educational leadership will be addressed. This article is framed from the perspectives of a principal, teacher, and researcher.

Keywords: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); transformative education; critical literacy; educational innovation; teaching philosophies; interdisciplinary approaches to teaching and learning.

Being a UNESCO School: An Elementary School Principal's Perspective

Ira Udow

“What does it mean to be a UNESCO school?” is the question prospective parents will inevitably ask midway through the tour of our school. As we walk through the hallways decorated with children's artwork and visit the busy classrooms in action, I explain the philosophy of our school highlighting the relationship between best-educational practices and educating students to live sustainably with a strong moral and social consciousness.

I point out to these families the physical structures of our child-friendly classrooms in which trapezoid and round tables are arranged in groups to promote cooperate learning activities where learners work together productively in a positive, non-competitive environment; the wide variety of children's literature that captures and extends upon the children's inquiring minds; the assortment of math materials to support their mathematical computations; the many hands-on objects, both found and purchased, to further their scientific explorations.

I explain the paradigm shift in education towards a more learner-centered approach to teaching that acknowledges and supports students' individual needs and that celebrates diversity in an inclusive environment. It is an environment in which learners achieve success when the purpose for learning is known and meaningful; an environment in which students are empowered to be facilitators of their own learning, to take ownership of and actively participate in the learning process, as critical thinkers

and problem solvers.

This shift in educational practice directly supports our school's mission of encouraging active democratic citizenship within our student body. Developing and strengthening their basic numeracy and literacy skills are essential for future success. It is also important for our students to know how to use these skills as responsible members of their community. We want them to recognize and appreciate the culturally-diverse mosaic in which they live, to understand the environmental changes currently taking place, and to be aware of the social and economic issues facing marginalized segments of our society. We also want them to know that they have the power and responsibility to take action to affect positive change.

I tell these parents that being a UNESCO school is about developing a deep culture of peace. To further clarify, I provide some historical background. "The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization was established in 1946 with the purpose of contributing to world peace and security. The UNESCO vision promotes collaboration among the nations through education, science, and culture, and to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law, and for human rights and fundamental freedoms, which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language, or religion."

Canadian schools that join the UNESCO Associated Schools Network make a commitment to support the ideals of UNESCO through four **pillars of learning** and four **areas of study**, in order to contribute to a local, national, and global culture of peace.

Pillars of Learning*	Areas of Study
<i>Learning to know</i>	<i>World Issues and the Role of the UN</i>
<i>Learning to do</i>	<i>Peace and Human Rights</i>
<i>Learning to be all that one can be</i>	<i>Intercultural Learning</i>
<i>Learning to live together sustainably</i>	<i>Education for Sustainable Development</i>

(*Established by the UNESCO International Commission on Education for the 21st century.)

Expectations for membership in the Canadian Associated Schools Network has been established by the Canadian Commission for UNESCO and includes two levels: *Candidate Schools* and *Member Schools*. Candidate Schools are interested in joining the network and are working towards the deep cultural shift that signifies a UNESCO school. Member schools have demonstrated a sustained commitment to the ideals, values, work, and principles of UNESCO.

UNESCO Associated Schools are expected to build support and commitment to the values, work, and principles of UNESCO from the school administration, the school district administration, the staff, the student body, and the parents/community and establish partnerships with other UNESCO schools locally, nationally, and internationally.

The question remains, "What makes a UNESCO school distinct from other schools that involve their students in similar social justice activities as evident in the number of schools in attendance at the 'We Day' events?" UNESCO schools recognize that it is essential to develop innovative teaching and learning experiences that engage the learners in active and participatory learning while learning how to ask critical questions, and learning to clarify one's own values. They also understand the need for thinking systemically, and valuing the power of collaboration and dialogue involving multi-stakeholders from diverse backgrounds.

As an example of what this looks like in practice, I describe a Cultural Diversity Program in which five elementary UNESCO Associated Schools participate in a partnership of learning that extends across their school boundaries. Now into their seventh year, five Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada schools, Niji Mahkwa Aboriginal School, Al Hijra Islamic School, St Emile Catholic School, John Pritchard Public School and Brock Corydon School's Dual Track English and Hebrew Bilingual Program provide a rich learning context enabling Grades 5 and 6 students to engage in intercultural dialogue.

The Cultural Diversity Program is designed to recognize and give significance to the students' personal and cultural identities while encouraging knowledge, understanding, appreciation, and respect of other people's religions and cultures. Each June, Grade 5 students from the five schools,

participate in interactive workshops facilitated by the provincial representative of the Canadian Centre for Diversity and by high school students trained to take on leadership roles in this topic. These workshops are followed up with the same students, now in Grade 6, participating in a Pipe Ceremony, and visits to a Mosque, Synagogue and Church where they dialogue with the clerics in each of the houses of worship. Classroom discussions and exposure to cultural-diversity literature throughout the school year provide continued learning experiences. In addition, student representatives from each school come together to collaboratively develop action plans related to joint social justice and environmental sustainable initiatives.

Participation in the Cultural Diversity Program offers elementary students the opportunity to actively explore their own cultural identities and to begin the life-long journey towards understanding and respecting other cultures and religions. They are engaged in critically examining their own cultural traditions, values, and beliefs, becoming aware of the cultural and religious tensions and conflicts that exist in their community and in other countries, and collaborating with children from different backgrounds in dialogue and joint ventures to envision a sustainable peaceful coexistence. By examining current events, students are discovering the economic and social-cultural impact of decisions made. Intercultural dialogue and collaborative decision-making and planning engage the students in authentic, real-life contexts and create awareness of what they can do for themselves and with others to construct more sustainable futures.

The students are learning to work cooperatively with people from other cultural and religious backgrounds and to realize they have the right and the responsibility to take action as community and world citizens in developing sustainable plans that will impact on their own lives and the lives of others into the future. The intent is to have students develop the values, attitudes, and knowledge necessary for a healthy and peaceful coexistence.

Encouraging Transformative Learning: A Teacher's Perspective

Heather Syme Anderson

Integrating the areas of study of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) into a language arts or artistic classroom is one of the easier fits for innovative education. This section will begin with language arts and move to digital photography as the subject areas into which educators can achieve excellence through innovative programming.

First, though, I'd like to address what it means to be a UNESCO school. In theory, it means that the school where I work has successfully attained the accreditation as being officially recognized as a UNESCO school by meeting and sustaining specific standards over time. This designation is not, however, what it really means to be a UNESCO school. For me, it has everything to do with making specific and explicit connections between what happens in my classroom and school to the UNESCO areas of study. Those areas of study are (a) ASP.Net and UN priorities; (b) education for sustainable development; (c) peace and human rights; and (d) intercultural learning. While some of these areas might seem like seamless fits for language arts and the arts, to forge these connections in explicit ways, and ways that are conducive to social justice is not seamless. It is with these seams that I now wish to turn.

Teaching English Language Arts (ELA) affords opportunities to select texts for study that encompass the globe and all of its global concerns. Such a subject area is bursting at the seams with content and curricular fits with the UNESCO areas of study. Take, for example, one literature unit that I teach using the choice memoirs of *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* by Ishmael Beah; *As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who was Raised as a Girl* by John Colapinto; *I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* by Rigoberta Menchu; and *Angela's Ashes* by Frank McCourt. Students are asked to select one memoir and read it with an eye towards social justice concerns related to race, class, gender, and sexuality. We then take on the lenses of the UNESCO areas of study to probe the seams of these texts so as to expand the students' understandings of the world and our role as a UNESCO school in aiming for a better world. This kind of classroom activity is not limited to memoirs; it happens with fiction, interviews, film study, campaign production, and any other manner of text study.

Applying the UNESCO areas of study into digital photography is an area where additional

innovation was needed. One direct entry route was through the study of award winning photojournalism photography including such Pulitzer Prize winning shots as Kevin Carter's harrowing image of the Somali toddler being eyed by a vulture of the same size. This approach to education has significant impact when combined with discussions about ethical photography and photography for social justice. Without question, my students come to see their own photography work differently because they have considered the role of the United Nations (UN) and education for all in the context of global and local conflict.

My aim with such tasks in language arts or photography is to have students recognize the seams that bind our world together socially, environmentally, and politically are on the verge of tearing. I want students to think critically and ethically about whether the next steps are to repair those seams, or to have them split entirely and allow something new to emerge as a social reality. My job, as an innovative educator, is not to answer that question for them, but to help students see the intricate and intertwined ways in which the world is sewn together and their duty in directing the needle of the future.

Connecting Educators' Conceptions of Social Justice with Transformative Learning Dynamics: A Researcher's Perspective

Karen Magro

My current qualitative research explores the way two UNESCO Associated Schools' teachers and administrators view social justice themes and the way their students can connect personal, social, and global issues in meaningful ways (Magro, 2012). I used semi-structured interviews lasting one to two hours to record the teaching and learning perspectives about teaching social justice within the UNESCO framework over a one-year period (January, 2012-May, 2013). The educators' conceptions of social justice and their approach to teaching were then compared to different strands of transformative learning theory.

Theoretical Background on Transformative Learning Theory

Parallels between the teachers' perspectives on social justice, their approach to curriculum design and assessment, in addition to specific teaching and learning strategies applied in the classroom, reflected many of the themes drawn from transformative learning theory. Theories of transformative learning have been applied extensively in different educational contexts such as literacy development, counselling, health education, planetary sustainability, cultural adaptation and intercultural awareness, and professional development. (Merriam & Grace, 2011; Mezirow & Associates, 2000; O'Sullivan, 2002). Transformative learning is rooted in significant personal and social change. A key difference among the applications of transformative learning theory is the emphasis placed on psychological and individual change in comparison to transformative social activism, political change, and critical global awareness. Edward Taylor (2008) writes that the multiple theoretical conceptions of transformative learning theory have "the potential to offer a more diverse interpretation of transformative learning and have significant implications for practice"(p.7). Culture, ethnicity and race, the role of spirituality, planetary sustainability, positionality, emancipatory teaching, and non-Western ways of knowing, represent new themes or strands that have emerged since Jack Mezirow's (1981) initial description of perspective transformation. Common themes shared by these perspectives include critical reflection; creativity; self-knowledge; the reverence for life; democratic discourse; and the balance of attaining collective and personal goals. In essence, a fundamental shift takes place in the way they see themselves and the world (Mezirow & Associates, 2000; Merriam & Grace, 2011). Taylor (2008) points out that despite the advances of transformative learning theory, more research is needed into the way it is applied and translated into the classroom.

The UNESCO themes of social justice can be linked in several ways to the different strands of transformative learning. Edmund O'Sullivan (2002) and Bud Hall (2006), for example, present a more global and planetary perspective of transformative learning. Systemic and structural barriers that reinforce poverty, racism, sexism, war, work degradation, human rights' violations, and ecological

devastation need to be examined from a critically reflective stance. Alienation and dispossession, note O'Sullivan (2002), are the fallout of globalization. Alternative lifestyles and ways of thinking are needed to counteract the negative impact of planetary devastation and rampant globalization:

Transformative learning involves a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feeling, and ...such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and the natural world; our understanding of power in interlocking structures of class, race, and gender; our body-awareness; our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of the possibilities for social justice and peace, and personal job. (p.11)

Recognizing the urgency of addressing global issues, Hall (2002) explains that over 100 million people are refugees, forced to flee their homeland and living against their choice in countries in which they were not born (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 1995). People are losing a vital connection to each other, the natural world, and themselves. In his paper "The Right to a New Utopia", Hall (2002) captures the tension of our world today:

In fact, the kinds of lifestyles and consumer patterns that fuel the global market utopia are a cancer for the planet. In the insightful work entitled *Our Ecological Footprint*, William Rees outlines a method for determining the percentage of the world's resources that we use as individuals, as communities, or as whole nations. His complex formula points out that if the entire world were to achieve the same levels of growth and development that characterize most lives in rich countries, we would need four entire planet's worth of energy resources to satisfy these demands. Clearly we are on an ecological collision path between a Utopia of the rich and the carrying capacity of a still-fragile planet. (pp. 38-39)

Hall (2002) emphasizes that a transformative education can encourage the "release of our creativity and imagination" and help us to become as Paulo Freire noted, "agents in our own history" (p. 44). A "new utopia" is inspired by indigenous knowledge and can be found in local community gardens, in individual and family choices to live more simple lives, and in the still growing "green economic development movement" (p.45). Reinforcing this perspective, Miller (2002) suggests that a "meaning-centered curriculum" would not only address the needs and aspirations of students, but it would examine ways to reduce problems like poverty, conflict, mental illness, homelessness, racism, and social injustice. Learning cannot be compartmentalized and viewed solely from a cognitive process. "From a spiritual perspective, learning does not just involve the intellect; instead, it includes every aspect of our being including the physical, emotional, aesthetic, and spiritual" (p.243).

In "The Project and Vision of Transformative Education" Edmund O'Sullivan (2002) further suggests that educational institutions at all levels need to play a pivotal role in fostering a sense of community. For instance, educational initiatives can focus on bioregional studies that would help students develop a greater awareness of place. Bioregional studies would involve a study of the land, the history of the community that has occupied a particular region, and the histories of the people in each bioregion. O'Sullivan explains that "education for the purpose of cultivating a sense of the history of an area enables people to have loyalties and commitment to their place of their dwelling" (p. 9). Creating an awareness of a sense of locality and place can correct and transform global inequities and a lack of resources. It can also encourage human ingenuity and self-direction. From this perspective, personal change and progressive social change are interwoven.

Non-Western Ways of Knowing and Learning

Transformative teaching and learning from a non-Western perspective enables educators to extend their teaching practices and perspectives with creativity and a sense of cultural inclusion. This perspective of transformative learning theory examines the relevance of race, class, gender, and [dis]ability

identity in relation to education (Johnson Bailey & Alfred, 2008; Dei, 2010; Ntseane, 2007). The common characteristics of indigenous knowledge include recognizing the interdependence of humans and the natural world; a reverence for elders and their wisdom; a respect for the community and for future generations; and a sense of sharing

responsibility, wealth, and resources within communities, both locally and globally. This holistic view embraces spiritual values, traditions, and practices. Making the connection to formal educational contexts, George Sefa Dei (2010) explains that a school system that fails “to tap into youth myriad identities ... is shortchanging learning. Identity is an important site of knowing. Identity has in effect become a lens of reading one’s world...the role and importance of diversity in knowledge production is to challenge and subvert the dominance of particular ways of knowing” (pp. 119-120). Sefa Dei (2010) further highlights this point when he states that a “pedagogy of language liberation” would empower learners to tell their stories and learn about their heritage, history, and culture in interconnected ways. Spirituality “is about a material and metaphysical existence that speaks to an interconnection of self, community, body, mind, and soul” (Dei, 2010, p.120).

Johnson-Bailey and Alfred (2006) developed a framework for transformative teaching that is rooted in teacher self-awareness, social justice, consciousness raising, and developing a safe classroom climate that encourages connection, creativity, dialogue, and respect:

Each class we teach has varied instructional modes (printed materials, audio, WebCT (Course Tools) components, video presentations guest lecturer, collaborative and individual projects) and a range of other ways in which students can participate...Perhaps the most often used and most successful building block of our transformational teaching is the use of dialogue, an informal conversational approach for verbal exchanges and discourse—a more formal, linear, and directive methodology. It has been our experience that multiple voices, whether ordered as discourse or free flowing dialogue, produce a symphony of ideas and lay groundwork that supports an environment where change is possible. (p. 47)

Empancipatory teaching and empowerment (whether it be in the form of helping students develop greater self-confidence or helping them gain the academic and social skills needed to succeed in college and in a career), self-direction, and lifelong learning were overall educational goals.

Research Findings

The teachers and administrators who have participated in my study express a need for learning to extend beyond the traditional classroom and the acquisition of “functional literacy”. Their approaches are also consistent with emerging critical literacy areas such as inter-textual studies, cultural studies, and ethnography (Magro, 2012). The educators’ perspectives speak to a need for educators to connect with the larger community of learners, not only in the Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada locale, but internationally. Transformative education, from the perspective of these educators, involves responding to the economic, technological, political, and social changes that have taken place in recent years in ways that are relevant and potentially empowering for their students. The participants in my ongoing study spoke of the importance of education to change lives along individual, local, and global dimensions. Learning is seen as holistic and multi-faceted. When I asked the participants to describe their role in the school, they identified themselves as a “problem solver”, “guide”, “advocate”, and “cultural mediator.” One principal associated the image of a “key” to his own role as a facilitator who “opens doors” to potential projects and new ways of thinking and learning. He further explained:

While our teachers are at different stages in their learning and their careers, they have valuable skills, patience, and creativity. They may not directly state it, but most value the ideals outlined in the UNESCO Earth Charter. I look for qualities such as commitment, caring, and the ability to connect with challenging students. It is important to have most of the teachers ‘on board’ when a school decides to embark on a project such as growing a community garden and then donating the food to a local charity. The success and planning of so many of our UNESCO initiatives have started with teachers who come to me with great ideas. I help them organize the parameters in realistic ways that will be acceptable to all the students, the teachers, and the parents in the communities.

This principal emphasized a transformative vision of education:

Education is not information; rather, I see it as the formation of positive beliefs, values, and attitudes that will empower individuals to participate in society. Education is a powerful agent of change but learning must move beyond the four walls of a school. I provide

opportunities for the teachers and students to become aware of the link between peace and justice. Peace is just a word without justice. We engage our learners in community projects that are linked to environmental protection and intercultural appreciation. I think that more reflection among educators is needed: What are schools for? What is really going on? Diversity is a fusion of horizons but this process does not occur automatically. Teachers, administrators, and students need to be more involved in experiential learning that links social problems with solutions.

This administrator emphasized that his school was actively involved in activities that promoted a greater awareness of diversity and social justice for specific occasions such as International Women's Day, International Day to Eliminate Racism, National Aboriginal Day, International Human Rights Day, and the International Day of Disabled Persons.

The approach to learning and teaching that the educators in the following interview excerpts hold is holistic; the UNESCO themes are embedded in the mission of the school, in the curriculum, and in the specific teaching and learning practices applied:

The UNESCO themes of social justice are embedded in our school and in the curriculum for all subjects. It is not an "add on" nor is it simply about "fund raising" to build a school in another part of the world. Without helping students respect themselves and care for each other, initiatives such as food drives and building a new school in a developing country will be limited. At our school, we start with an emphasis on self-awareness and a developing of basic interpersonal skills like listening and empathy. We also encourage the value of local initiatives like community gardening and helping students meet and dialogue with children and elders from communities that they might be very unfamiliar with.

We are also living in a world that is rapidly becoming smaller and many people live in conflict. The UNESCO themes provide a more creative means of dialoguing that enables students to see beyond themselves in more reflective ways. For instance, social media like Facebook may have many benefits, but it is also a Pandora's box. How can we help students navigate the dangers? Emotionally and cognitively, we are bombarded with images and "information" that many people do not question.

This creates anxiety and confusion. I try to encourage students to question and critically examine what they see and read. The quote that best sums up my approach to integrating the UNESCO themes is from Mahatma Gandhi: 'Become the change you want to see.'

Many of our students come from disenfranchised backgrounds. They have experienced hardship in some form or other. They may be from a war-torn family or they may have had a traumatic childhood just growing up here in the city. A piece of their lives is missing in some way. They have just been divorced, they just got out of jail, or they are getting off drugs. You meet amazing students here who have been excluded from society in some way and they see our school as having a key to living a more purposeful life. Beneath each jacket, there is a hidden treasure, and you have to be able to see the potential in each student. I have seen students' lives transformed in different ways. You will see students who start at a basic level of literacy and then a few years later are graduating from Grade 12 and ready to start a university program with confidence and hope.

The teachers and administrators emphasized the need to create a school climate that empowered students to take personal initiatives. They linked the curriculum to the students' diverse backgrounds, and they created opportunities for students to be involved in decision-making, evaluation processes, and specific learning projects.

Mirrors and Windows: Developing a Transformative Curriculum

One of the UNESCO Earth Charter tenets highlights the application of art, poetry, fiction, and non-fiction that reflect social justice and planetary sustainability (Arias, 2008; Gruenwald, 2004). These courses can be both a "mirror and window" that have the potential to empower students personally and academically. Anna, an English teacher at a large secondary school in Winnipeg, explained that social change begins with personal change. In the "Perspectives of War" unit, students examine the nature of war from different voices, the voice of a child, and a soldier. Anna explained that reading memoirs like Khalid Hosseini's (2007) *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Mende Nazer's (2004) *Slave* can encourage a greater awareness of human rights and democracy voices of children in war, soldiers, the struggle against

oppression, and the concept of “freedom fighters”. The work produced by the students at the UNESCO Schools reflected a balance of individual and global awareness. One student at an adult learning centre was generously sharing recent writing projects he had developed. Roger designed a comprehensive research proposal to create a “dedicated, volunteer-based storm/flood planning emergency response agency in Manitoba.” Another research paper he completed focused on the topic: “Fear is the primary barrier against a true global community.” He referred to J. Rifkin’s *The Empathic Civilization*. Analyzing the way North American society has responded to living in a post 9/11 world, this student argued that fear is a basis of racism, gated-communities, organized crime, and acts of terrorism. He emphasized that “we need to find ‘global’ solutions if we are to refer to the ‘residents of Earth’ as a single-unified people in search of peace and universal values.”

Personal narratives, memoirs, and journalistic accounts as part of English curricula provide opportunities for students to broaden their global and cultural perspectives. “No longer is the curriculum simply the novel or facts to be learned, but rather, the students and their teacher together using books, other authentic resources, and their own opinions and experiences create a ‘living curriculum’ as a true community of learners”(Wolk, 2009, p.667).

Reimagining the Curriculum: Expanding Voice and Vision

An interesting observation in my research is the way in which content in curriculum areas such as English Language Arts (ELA) and Social Studies is being reconfigured and reconceptualized in more creative ways to address personal and global issues. Ecoliteracies and inter-textual studies are among the emerging areas in critical literacy (Bruce, 2011; Glasgow & Baer, 2010). Texts become powerful vehicles for students to explore contemporary issues that impact their lives. Interdisciplinary approaches and experiential and place-based learning are ways to promote critical literacy and transformative or deeper-level learning. Through self-directed and collaborative learning projects, students are encouraged to make connections between the perspectives they read about and the perspectives they have about issues in their own lives: poverty, discrimination, human rights, and planetary sustainability. Heather Bruce (2011) emphasizes that ELA teachers need to re-

imagine and redirect the focus of teaching classic and contemporary texts in a way that promotes:

Empathy for both human and nonhuman species, for the soil, water, and air in which all of life depends...English teachers specialize in questions of vision, values, ethical understanding ... Our expertise in addressing the aesthetic, ethical, and sociopolitical implications of the most pressing human concerns of our time enable us to reach toward and embrace environmental problems.(pp. 13-14)

Along similar lines, Shamsher, Minnes Brandes, & Kelly (2008) identify a range of strategies to address diversity and social justice across the curriculum. Some of these strategies include:

- Spotlight or make visible the perspectives of marginalized and disenfranchised groups;
- Brainstorm reasons for omissions in textbooks or other resources. Whose voice is heard? Whose voice is absent? Why? Who is represented? Why?;
- Challenge assumptions in books, films, advertising, music videos, etc. through critical questioning;
- Link discussions and assignment choices to students’ diverse backgrounds;
- Create opportunities for students to find and share their own personal narratives and histories;
- Identify the challenges and barriers that the students are currently experiencing and explore solutions to these barriers;
- Connect assessment to students’ experiences of social justice (assessment for learning); and
- Role model critical thinking by challenging taken-for granted oppression and encourage students to question problematic assumptions. Help students to learn to recognize situations where some individuals are privileged and others are disadvantaged and marginalized (adapted from Shamsher, Decker, Minnes Brandes, and Kelly, 2008, pp. 17-18).

The *Teaching for Social Justice* curriculum framework developed by Shamsher, Decker, Minnes Brandes, and Kelly (2008) provides educators with both a practical and theoretical base to apply social justice themes to their teaching. Shamsher et al. (2008) emphasize

that “social justice is a philosophy that extends beyond the protection of rights. Social justice advocates for the full participation of all people, as well as for their basic legal, civil, and human rights” (p.2). In their document “Making Space,” Shamsher et al (2008) emphasize that educators in all content areas should be able to find ways to promote:

- awareness and understanding of the diversity that exists within our society—differences that are visible (e.g., race, ethnicity, sex, age, physical ability) and differences that are less visible (e.g. culture, ancestry, language, religious beliefs, sexual

orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic background, mental ability);

- support for the achievement of social justice for all people and groups—particularly in ensuring that people’s backgrounds and circumstances do not prevent them from achieving the full benefits of participation in society, and in addressing injustice faced by those who historically have been and today frequently continue to be marginalized, ignored, or subjected to discrimination, or other forms of oppression. (p. 1)

Conclusion and Discussion

The different perspectives of transformative learning theory presented in this paper have the potential to provide educational practitioners and researchers with a creative foundation for reflecting on curriculum content, teaching and learning strategies, and the preparation and professional development of teachers. The conceptions of learning among educators that emerge suggest a more inclusive and broader understanding of learning that balance personal and social change. The educators in my studies conceptualize the classroom as more than a place that conveys knowledge. Education can “awaken and renew... transform and deepen life” (Wilhelm and Novak, 2011, p.8).

While the capacity for transformative change exists, it is not always inevitable. Edward Taylor (2008) stresses that transformative learning is much more than a series of activities (e.g., reflective journals, experiential learning); it involves “educating from a particular worldview, a particular educational philosophy” that may or may not be shared by other colleagues (p.55). He further writes:

One area in particular is the student’s role in fostering transformative learning. What are the student’s responsibilities in relationship to the transformative educator? Second, there is a need to understand the peripheral consequences of fostering transformative learning in the classroom. For example, how does a student’s transformation affect peers in the classroom, the teacher, the educational institution, and other individuals who play a significant role in the life of the student? Furthermore, there is little known about the impact of fostering transformative learning on learning outcomes (e.g., grades, test scores). Definitive support is needed if educators are going to recognize fostering transformative learning as a worthwhile teaching approach. (p. 13)

The readiness of the learner, the philosophy of individual teachers, “unwritten” policies, and institutional norms and expectations, in addition to assessment protocol impact transformative learning. Teachers and counsellors, in particular, can play a vital role in assisting learners to become more critically reflective and open to choice and change. Rather than viewing themselves as an “enforcer of institutional norms,” teachers might begin to see themselves more as an advocate for students (Taylor, 2008). The challenges we face as a world today place a greater urgency on educational systems to provide new direction and focus. The voices of the teachers, administrators, and counsellors in my studies indicate a strong interest and commitment in bridging schools with the community at many different layers. Their voices speak to an *intentionality* among educators to build stronger bridges between themselves, their learners, and both the local and global communities. Alternative education contexts are being created as rigid boundaries between schools as the sole site of learning and learning experiences in the wider community are breaking. These shifts offer potential new opportunities for transformative learning. Further research in this area will deepen our understanding of the important role of education as a catalyst for transformative change.

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