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STORIES OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

Michael Kroth and Patricia Cranton. Sense Publishers, Rotterdam, 2014, 117 pages.

In *Stories of Transformative Learning*, co-authors Michael Kroth and Patricia Cranton focus on the engagement of transformative learning for personal change. Its primary audience is adult educators, adult learners, facilitators, human resource personnel, and those responsible for faculty development in higher education. The main purpose of the book is to present a unified account of the various theories of transformative learning. Kroth and Cranton point out that although many transformative learning theories have been developed, stories of transformative learning from individuals are rarely presented in the academic literature. Kroth and Cranton have collected stories of transformative learning from 10 individuals to present an integrative view of transformative learning theory.

Stories of Transformative Learning consists of 10 chapters. The first chapter provides a brief overview of three approaches to transformative learning, emphasizing the work of Mezirow, Dirkx, Kegan, and Tennant, among others. Kroth and Cranton state that an integrated theory of transformative learning has practical implications for practitioners: “a unified theory of transformative learning would allow educators to draw on those aspects of the theory that fit with their context and their goals” (p. 9). Chapters 2 and 3 discuss narrative learning and storytelling and their methodological value in making sense of transformative learning experiences.

Chapters 4 through 8 explore individual stories of transformative learning. The fourth chapter portrays how a sense of hope develops from confronting psychological dilemmas. Art, a Mexican man, overcomes the challenges of a troubled childhood, and Susan, an American woman, develops renewed optimism after a debilitating accident. Chapter 5 describes transformation in response to loss and trauma: a woman vividly depicts how her mother, who has recently lost her husband, is reborn after grieving her loss, while a young man who has had a lifelong incurable disease changes his way of thinking about the world by altering his diet. Chapter 6 describes how educational opportunities and relationships are important for transformative learning through the vignettes of a Hispanic man and a young North Korean refugee. The former, who has repeatedly been sentenced to prison, integrates back into society thanks to an educational opportunity and the support of his wife and mentor. Hearing the stories of North Korean refugees who have encountered adversities similar to his own during a summer camp in South Korea, Sung gains a new sense of confidence and self-esteem. Social changes and the role of adult educators are introduced in the seventh chapter through the experiences of a Nigerian female activist and veteran soldier of the Iraq War. Through workshops and public speeches, both, as adult educators, try to foster empowerment among those who have been socially stigmatized. In the eighth

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chapter, with vivid illustrations of the natural environment, a female scholar colourfully describes how her mindset changes through a spiritual pilgrimage from southern France to northern Spain, an example of transformative learning through spiritual journey.

In Chapter 9, Kroth and Cranton propose an integrated theory of transformative learning by drawing on eight essential commonalities found in the stories: optimism and hope; the webs of death and loss; educational experiences; relationships; social changes; the role of the adult educator; a journey; and developing agency. The diversity of people living in a variety of contexts helps readers better understand the authors' proposed non-linear model of transformative learning. These stories not only let readers relive the life experiences of the people profiled in the book, but also lead them to a starting point of transformative learning. In the final chapter, Kroth and Cranton conclude with a discussion of their learning journey in writing the book and highlight implications for practice, theory development, and research.

In my view, Kroth and Cranton have succeeded in the development of a unified view of transformative learning in this book. First, the integration of various transformative learning theories helps researchers shift from conventionally categorizing and researching human lives to the development of a more inclusive transformative theory reflective of human diversity and agency. Second, Kroth and Cranton disrupt the assumption that transformative learning is only for adults. They have revealed that transformative learning, in fact, happens for youth, too, as shown in the case of the North Korean adolescent refugee. Third, while theories of transformative learning have traditionally employed a linear model, Kroth and Cranton have proposed a non-linear model by way of analyzing the eight essential commonalities of transformative learning through the lens of 10 life examples. This approach serves as an alternative framework of transformative learning for people who have been excluded from the former linear model. In my view, this book would appeal to all people who have ever experienced adversity similar to the 10 individuals in this book.

Despite this strength, Kroth and Cranton could have enriched their analyses if they had included the perspectives of other social minorities who have historically been systemically and socially marginalized, such as First Nations people in Canada or Native Americans in the United States, and demonstrated how transformative learning runs up against patterns of colonialism and imperialism. For future research, it may be helpful to include the stories and storytelling techniques of Indigenous communities in North America and the implications for transformative learning. This critique is not meant to undermine the strengths of the book, but it is something to consider for future iterations.

In sum, Kroth and Cranton have marked a milestone and opened new potential for transformative learning in *Stories of Transformative Learning*. Their arrangement of stories as a means to unify the scattered theories of transformative learning is indeed helpful for established and emergent scholars.

Hayato Nakabayashi,
University of Manitoba