

# **Transformative Learning versus Informative Learning in Facilitating Mission Studies**

---

GLORY E. DHARMARAJ

DOI: 10.7252/Paper.000033

## **About the Author**

Glory Dharmaraj served for a number of years as a staff member of the United Methodist Women's Division in New York City. Most recently, Glory Dharmaraj is the co-author with Jacob Dharmaraj of *Mutuality in Mission: A Theological Principle for the 21st Century* (2014).

In the first annual conference meeting on June 25, 1744 held in Old King's Foundry, London, John Wesley emphasized three key elements in his extensive conversation with the Methodist clergy and lay preachers: "What to teach, how to teach, and what to do" (Mason 1862, B). Adapted to this article's focus on facilitating mission studies, the Wesleyan key elements still remain the same, though this paper is not focused on doctrine, discipline and practices. Instead it seeks to examine what to teach, how to teach, and what to do in light of transformative learning. Drawing a distinction between transformative learning and informative learning, this article explores the process of how an environment for transformation can be created with the constructive role of "transformative spirituality" (Keum 2013: 12-14).

The roots of the United Methodist Women's mission studies go way back to the ecumenical Central Committee on United Study in 1900. Beginning in 1901, the committee published a mission study annually for the use of mission study groups of women in local churches (Robert 1997: 260-261). Ecumenical Schools of Christian Mission, with preparation for teaching, began in 1904 with the efforts of the Federal Council of Churches, and then the National Council of Churches in the U.S. In 1999, the mission studies for the United Methodists began to be published by the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, and now solely by the United Methodist Women.

Every year, the United Methodist Women National Office trains leaders in three mission studies covering three different areas. One focuses on spiritual growth, another on a geographical area in the world, and the third one on a specific issue. This year's mission studies are *How Is It With Your Soul?* by Priscilla Pope-Levison and Jack Levison, *The Roma of Europe* by Larry Beman, *The Church and People with Disabilities: Awareness, Accessibility, and Advocacy* by Peggy Johnson. The spiritual growth study is produced in English, Spanish, and Korean annually. In addition, there are youth and children's studies, also. All these studies are developed by the United Methodist Women National Office.

In facilitating the mission studies to the study leaders regionally across the U.S., intentional efforts are taken to create an environment for transformative learning with access to both transformative and popular educational methods. The learning community for the study selected for this article is comprised of adult learners, pastors, and laity who facilitate these studies in the various United Methodist conferences. Transformative and popular educational methods emphasize learner-centered education

over teacher-centered; awareness-raising education over depositing of information; empowerment for action over maintaining the status quo; and critical pedagogy over mere lecture method.

A key text which revolutionized adult education aimed at emancipatory knowledge in the late mid-twentieth century is *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire where he emphasizes education as a process which centers around critical reflection on one's personal and collective reality that leads to engagement in actions. Critical reflection is a component integral to transformative learning methods used in facilitating mission education.

## **Adult Learning as A Process and a Journey**

---

A key Scripture I have used at the beginning of facilitating mission studies for adults is Matthew 13: 1-23. From a popular educational point of view, as interpreted by Helene Castel, this parable can offer insight into a “process of the seed being mixed with the soil” and this process is “not a gentle journey” but “a journey that is actively engaged with all the elements in the system of the soil and not controlled by the sower (the teacher). It is a deep earthy interaction...” (Castel 1999:7). Castel invites her class to imagine the possibility of plowing being done after sowing in ancient Palestine.

Whether this practice in ancient Palestine was predominant or not, for transformative learning process today, it is helpful to look at the parable closely as something about an interaction between the soil and the seeds, the condition of the soil and the effect of the soil on the seeds. A key insight the story offers is how the elements of the soil interact deeply with the seeds in order to bring forth results. The interaction of the soil and the seeds is a process, a mutual process. Transformative learning is also a process.

It has been said that we learn only 10% by reading; 20% by hearing; 30% by seeing; 50% by both seeing and hearing; 70% by sharing and discussing with each other; 80% by experiencing, and 95% by facilitating the study for someone else or a group. Transformative learning takes this seriously into account.

## **What is Transformative Learning?**

---

In the language of the parable of the sower, transformative learning enables the learners:

- To move from being a mere seeing community to a perceiving community.
- To move from being a mere hearing community to an actively listening community.
- To listen to stories and share knowledge from both the heart and head levels.
- To name the resistant soils, systems that are hard and that choke lives at the margins of society.
- To understand with our hearts, align with the forces of transformation, God's reign in the world.
- Be moved to be difference-makers, bearers of fruit, a thirty-fold, a sixty-fold, and a hundred-fold.

Transformative learning is a “deep structural shift in one’s consciousness, mindset, feelings, and actions” (O’Sullivan, Morrell and O’Conner 2006: xvii).

In the language of theological education for engagement in mission, as summarized by the conveners of the session on “Theological Education and Formation” at the World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh 2010, education is geared towards wholeness:

- The ear to hear God’s word and the cry of God’s people;
- The heart to heed and respond to the suffering;
- The tongue to speak to both weary and arrogant;
- The hands to work with the lowly;
- The mind to reflect on the good news of the gospel;
- The will to respond to God’s call;
- The spirit to wait on God in prayer, to struggle, and to be silent, to intercede for the church and the world (Kim and Anderson 2011:158).

Though mission study methods to be outlined in the article are not the same as theological education methods, there are key outcomes which relate to both.

## **Key Steps in Transformative Learning**

Using the spiritual growth study for 2012, *Immigration and the Bible* by Joan M. Maruskin, as an example, let me examine the ways in which I facilitated this spiritual growth study. Transformative learning starts with sharing stories from our different backgrounds and identities, relating to the issue under study. As stories from the mission study texts unfold, and concepts evolve, stories are shared from the different contexts of the learners.

The pedagogical strategy further includes reading the Bible through the eyes of the migrant, immigrant, and refugee. In fact, Maruskin’s central thesis is that the “Bible is the ultimate immigration handbook. It was written by, for, and about migrants, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers” (Maruskin 2012: 3). Enabling reading through the perspectives of people at the margins offers a range of insights into the pain and cry of the least of these. Reading the stories from the Bible, as a community of people

from different cultural backgrounds inside a class setting, and reflecting on what God is saying in specific contexts is both an individual and collective learning process.

Braiding the stories of immigrants, along with the insights from reading the biblical stories, the adult learners are led to further reflection. As reflections unfold, the participants identify patterns, similarities, and differences in the stories they hear from each other. The facilitator makes sure that while reflection takes place, voices of those not present at the table are included, since in analyzing the relations of power in the interconnected structures of class, race, gender etc., it is vital to include a diversity of voices. This part of the learning process is often known as critical reflection or critical thinking.

In this, self-examining one's presuppositions and social locations, as a study leader, is important. Elaine Enns and Chad Myers suggest that persons engaged in transformative work map their social power in light of race, class, gender, educational achievement etc., (Enns and Myers 1970:36). They name such an exercise "testing the soil of power and privilege" (1970:28). In a "Social Power Inventory and Worksheet for Individuals and Groups in the United States" that Enns and Myers have developed, on a scale of four in their mapping of social identities, four stands for the most powerful, three somewhat powerful, two not powerful, and one least powerful. This social mapping is based on perceptual realities. In the social mapping, as posited by Enns and Myers, the score of people with a graduate degree will be four and people with no high school education will be one; skin color white will be four; black one (1970: 36). The mapping includes attractiveness, professional status, gender, citizenship, language etc., and can be extended to include age, disability etc.,

Being aware of the social locations of the participants as well as the complexity of social realities can be helpful to the facilitator, since participants respond from their own social locations, assumptions, and perspectives. In order to lead the class in the critical reflection process collectively, such a tacit understanding is valuable, since the class members struggle with key issues in the mission study, as they name the issues, contradictions, as well as the systemic barriers.

Diagrammatically, the process of critical reflection can be represented by a spiral, starting with sharing one's experiences relating to the issue, reading the Bible through the eyes of the migrant and immigrant, locating patterns of similarity and dissimilarity, naming the barriers and

resistance to change, discerning God's voice in the readings and at work in the world, looking for clues of transformation, and coming up with actions. The process is repeated again with the cycle of experience, reflection, and action. The spiral image captures the flow of the transformative method as it involves experience, reflection on experience, social analysis, strategies for transformation, and action.

## **Intersectionality**

---

In the critical reflection, a key component is social identity and location of the person doing the analysis. Often social identities are connected to each other, and they are not isolated entities. The reality of interconnectedness or intersectionality of class, gender, race, national origin, language, disability, and so on cannot be dismissed in the critical reflection.

The term “intersectionality” is both a revealer of the layered and complex nature of the issue at hand, and also a tool available to address the issue. The term intersectionality was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. A lawyer by profession who worked among battered women, Crenshaw named an experience which several of the women whom she encountered embodied. These women underwent multiple layers of oppression due to their race, class, sexuality, language, locality, etc. In their daily lived existence, these multiple oppressions intersected. Crenshaw has identified the site of multiple oppressions and named the place of such an experience. A woman of color, with no education, and who speaks a language other than the dominant language, and who has difficulty living above the poverty line embodies the impact of many strikes against her. (Crenshaw 1989: 1241–1299). It is important to address the convergence of these knotted oppressions as a whole using a holistic approach to solve the problem. Therefore it is of value to put on the lens of intersectionality. It is a tool for understanding and application for persons engaged in mission.

In facilitating the mission study, the reality of intersectionality is discussed, and its impact analyzed, as the clues and actions for transformation are geared towards the mission work of shalom, fullness of life for everyone. Since intersectional oppressions and shalom are mutually exclusive, in order to engage in the work of shalom, fullness of

life for everyone, it is helpful to shape our tools for greater engagement in God's mission by naming the intersectional and fluid nature of identities, and not compartmentalize the various categories.

## Transformative Spirituality

---

Equally important is the spiritual identity of the adult learner as a child of God. Recalling one's baptism, naming one's baptismal identity as a child of God, and claiming it as a call for all the baptized believers to "resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves..." (*The United Methodist Hymnal* 1989: 34).

Transformative spirituality includes addressing personal sins as well as corporate sins and systemic evil. Raymond Fung from Hong Kong bemoans the fact that often the churches today have "no notion of sinned-againstness," and goes on to say, "The gospel should not only call on the people to repent of their sins but also must call on them to resist the forces that sin against them" (Fung 1980: 332-333). The hall mark of transformative spirituality is addressing sin as well as *sinned againstness*, the systems that perpetuate poverty, war, conflict, and that constantly push people to the margins of society and living.

*Edinburgh 2010 Common Call* includes a call for critical reflection saying, "Disturbed by the asymmetries and imbalances of power that divide and trouble the church and world, we are called to repentance, to critical reflection on systems of power, and to accountable use of power structures." This is reinforced in the official statement of mission and evangelism, approved by the central committee of the World Council of Churches in 2012, in its specific discussion on transformative spirituality (Keum 2013:12-14). Transformative spirituality undergirds transformative learning in addressing the cry of the needy, the sinned against people here and elsewhere.

The Bible has been and can be interpreted in a narrow way to support the oppressive systems. Transformative spirituality disturbs those of us comfortable with the injustices and imbalances of power that divide people, and offers us the courage to stand in solidarity with the least of these. Transformative spirituality or mission spirituality enables us to read



the Bible from the perspectives of the least of God's children—be it the migrant, the poor, and the least of these with the God of Shalom, as they name the systems and barriers. As faith community, the class struggle to be in alignment with the values of the reign of God, the kingdom of God, the Shalom which is everyone's right, and which Jesus came to embody and make open to everyone.

As the class works on action plans, stories of struggle in the Bible, reading the Bible through the eyes of the least of these, reclaiming our baptismal identity and the sustenance of Holy Communion, walking in solidarity with the least of these, respecting their being change agents, are part of the transformative spirituality part of being the church in the world.

Feeding the roots of transformation today includes seeding justice, love, and peace, and identifying allies who are engaged in addressing the same social justice issue. This is the pedagogical core then; the basics of this kind of learning. Facilitating mission studies is learner-centered. Learners themselves are agents of change and interveners in places of injustice to transform them. Study leaders are not unquestioned authorities. They examine their own presuppositions and social locations. They are enablers and creators of safe environments for trust and sharing. The learning process may be messy sometimes but it is like the soil and seed which exist in a womb of mutuality. Mission education venue is like a seedbed where seeds are sown and saplings nurtured that will sprout into transformation.

## **Use of Social Tree as an Informal Method of Analysis**

---

The lecture method is only minimally effective in facilitating the mission study. Intentionally the leader is called a facilitator, not a conveyor of mere content, as a teacher. Discussions, role play, panels, simulation exercises, and skits are some of the methods used in facilitating the study. I will share two examples, one the use of social tree and another, a dialogue on informative and transformative learning. The use of a social tree is a method often used and adapted by popular educationists (Barndt, 1989: 31).

In this exercise, the participants are seated in small groups, and asked to imagine a socially-well tree and a socially-ill tree, and draw these two trees both side by side on newsprint. The facilitator invites each group to imagine if an ideal community were a tree, what could be the roots, trunk, branches, leaves, and fruits? In other words, the facilitator invites the participants to communicate what an ideal community looks like pictorially or in words using different colored pencils. The naming is done through picture as well as words, as the case may be. The adult learners use post-its to move their concepts on the tree from one part of the tree to the other, as in small groups, they come up with an alternative vision.

In the same fashion, the participants are invited to imagine a socially-ill community. If it were a tree, what could be the roots, trunk, branches, leaves, and fruits. The participants communicate a broken-down community in the picture and in words. What the pictures are supposed to convey are the interrelated nature of the parts. The ideal tree is an alternative vision. These two contrasting pictures are used to demonstrate how issues need to be addressed at the root level, while offering charity measures as a temporary solution to problems.

The facilitator enables the participants to do critical reflection using the named parts of the socially-ill tree and leading them to envision action steps taken towards an alternative vision imagined by the groups. The various components of the critical-thinking process come into play in a pictorial way. For the basic data about the economic and social conditions in a particular community in the U.S. the participants are encouraged to visit *The American Community Survey* at [www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs).

## **Cross-Cultural Contextualization**

---

Cross-cultural contextualization in the United Methodist Women Mission educational settings is a challenge and opportunity to the study leaders. Rightly done, the mission study becomes a gift to the margins.

Often non-Hispanic and non-Korean study leaders are called at the regional level to equip themselves for facilitating the conference-level Hispanic and Korean study leaders etc., The spiritual growth texts are translated into Spanish and Korean annually, and they are aimed to provide methodology that is culture-specific.

Contextualization is the freedom to learn the text from one's own respective cultural context. It is also the freedom from seeing the world in a contextually-homogenized setting. Context of the learner is a key element in transformative learning. The context is fluid, dynamic, and it is constructed constantly. It is not static. Images, symbols, language, objects, worldviews and identities are some of the elements that shape one's context. Culture defines contextualization as it "attempts to see a culture not as a static system, but rather a system that is always in the process of change because of stimuli from within and from without" (Neely 1995:8). A key question for contextualization then is the ability to see through the lens of the respective cultural readership: seeing it from the underside versus seeing it from the location of privilege.

## **Regional Mission Study Leader as Connector**

---

Facilitators of the study at the regional levels do have Hispanic and Korean leaders in their classes who teach the study in their respective languages. Often the facilitators have a conversation with them in an informal setting, discussing methods of teaching that might make meaningful connections between the key themes of the text and the living experience of the participants in the respective cultural groups.

- What is the Korean/Hispanic experience that provides the framework within which the text can be understood and experienced fully?

- Among the particular target group, how do the daily experiences of the women vary from those of men? Help the participants claim their daily experience of struggle in the Hispanic context, and the daily experience of the Korean context.
- What are some of the cultural components of the target group?
  - » Immigration in Korean/Hispanic contexts
  - » Hybridity (belonging to two or more identities)
  - » Diaspora (living in more than one world, the locality of one's country of origin and the country of their residence)
  - » Ritual and other symbols
  - » Use of stories
- What are some of the contextually-oriented methods that can be added as options when facilitating this mission study?
- Designing a learning environment to suit diversity within the target group.

## **Serving Contexts Within the Context**

Max Stackhouse once asked the question, “How do we know a context when we see one?” He himself responded to his question by asking other questions such as “How big is a context? How long does it last? Who is in it? Who is out of it? And how do we know?” (Neely 1995: 8). Geography, language, ethnicity, political systems, economic systems, social systems, class, gender, age, language, values, identity etc., form the larger context.

As for the Hispanic and Korean participants, they often function in their respective cultural contexts within the larger context of the dominant culture. A context within the context speaks of a layered existence. The language study leaders serve the contexts within the context. The regional mission study leader is encouraged to be aware of this context of the language groups within the larger context, and facilitate spaces for such contexts within the context to flourish. That is, the regional mission study leader equips language study leaders to enable their participants to see their different stories and multiple belongings, from their different social sites against the backdrop of larger systems and structures. The language study leaders enable the participants to tell their stories in their own respective contexts, against the backdrop of the narratives of the dominant stories and systems. Mission study class rooms facilitate the space for interconnectedness for the language group leaders to serve a context within the context.

Mission education class prepares the way for the church to be in the world in new ways with a contextual communication and constant conversation between the center and the margins. The center creates and facilitates spaces for multiple voices and the margins shape and influence the center. In summary, facilitating mission study is more than the act of studying; it is study that leads to action in order to make a difference. A story in the Babylonian Talmud captures this timeless truth. Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarfon debate the question, “Which is greater, study or action?” Rabbi Tarfon answered saying that action is greater. Rabbi Akiva answered saying that study is greater. The listening elders agreed with Rabbi Akiva that study is greater than action because it leads to action (*Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin* 40b). At the end of facilitating the mission study, I have made use of the following dialogue which I wrote to drive home the summary of the distinction between informative and transformative educational methods.

# Dialogue Between Information Education and Transformative Education

---

## Two Study Leaders and One Mission Study

I am a study leader.	I am a study leader.
I teach in the conference Mission u this year.	I teach in the Mission u this year.
My name is INFORMATIVE education.	My name is TRANSFORMATIVE education.
Mine is a banking model of education.	Mine is a transforming model of education.
I deposit knowledge.	Learners and the leaders together produce knowledge.
Mine is a top-down model.	Mine is learner-centered.
I am the “sage on the stage.”	I am a “guide on the side.”
I transmit <i>authoritative</i> knowledge.	I facilitate <i>emancipatory</i> knowledge.
I thrive on an auditorium-style class room.	I prefer a class room suited for small-group discussions.

<b>I am a study leader.</b>	<b>I am a study leader.</b>
I control knowledge production.	I work with critical pedagogy.
I provide information and expertise.	I create space for collaborative learning.
I add to the already existing-structures of knowledge.	I lead the leaders <i>out</i> from an established habit of mind.
Learners are consumers of facts.	Learners are agents of change.
I want my learners to imitate me.	I empower my learners to reflect on their experiences.
Are not learners “received knowers?” Deepening an individual’s reserach base?	Aren’t they “connected owers?” Connecting themselves and their stories to structures of domination and marginalization?
Invest in information. That is a starting point.	Broadening collective knowledge by listening to the voices from the margins. Learners bring their experiences, diverse gifts, and identities. Reflection of experiences and understanding other worldviews. That is a starting point.
Research + reading = Accumulated knowledge.	Critical reflection & collective analysis = <i>Conscientization</i> .
Is not our goal to cover the content of the study?	Is not our goal to change people from being consumers of content to transformers of lives?
You use big words like the United Methodists who talk about <i>transformation of the world</i> .	Transformation is the key word.

<b>I am a study leader.</b>	<b>I am a study leader.</b>
Isn't reality being-in-itself?	Isn't reality being- in-community?
Living out of oneself.	Living out of relationship.
Between God and me.	Between God-to-human, human-to-human, human-to-creation.
Isn't reality being-in-itself?	Isn't reality being- in-community?
Living out of oneself.	Living out of relationship.
Between God and me.	Between God-to-human, human-to-human, human-to-creation.
The core relation of human beings is to God.	The core relation of human beings is to God and neighbor.
Who is my neighbor?	Transformative learning is all about "Neighborology."
<i>Plain truth.</i>	<i>For a plain people.</i>
Called Methodists.	Called United Methodists.
Who strive for personal holiness.	Who strive for both personal holiness as well as social holiness.
My name is INFORMATIVE education.	My name is TRANSFORMATIVE education.



## Works Cited

---

Anonymous

- 1744 *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, from the First, held in London, by the Late Rev. John Wesley, in the year 1744*, vol. 1. London: John Mason, 1862.

Barndt, Deborah

- 1989 *Naming the Moment: Political Analysis for Action*. Toronto, Canada: The Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice.

- 1989 *Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 40 B*. <http://on1foot.org/text/babyloniantalmud-kiddushin-40b>.

Castel, Helene

- 1999 "Reflections on How Adults Learn and Change in Justice Education: "Taking Learners as Seriously as the Issues." Unpublished paper presented to the National Seminar of the Women's Division, General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church. August 1983. Updated June.

Enns, Elaine and Chad Myers

- 2009 *Ambassadors of Reconciliation: Diverse Christian Practices of Restorative Justice and Peacemaking*. Vol. 2. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press.

Fung, Raymond

- 1980 "Human Sinned-Againstness." *International Review of Mission*, 69(275): 332-333.

Kim, Kirsteen and Andrew Anderson, eds.

- 2011 *Edinburgh 2010: Mission Today and Tomorrow*. Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International.

Kimberlé Crenshaw

- 1989 “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6):1241-1299.

Keum, Jooseop, ed.

- 2013 *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes with a Practical Guide*. Geneva: WCC Publications.

Maruskin, Joan

- 2012 *Immigration and the Bible: A Guide for Radical Welcome*. New York: Women’s Division, General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church.

O’ Sullivan, Edmund, Amish Morrel, and Mary Ann O’Conner, eds.

- 2002 *Expanding the Boundaries of Transformative Learning: Essays on Theory and Praxis*. New York: Palgrave.

Neely, Alan

- 1995 *Christian Mission: A Case Study Approach*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press.

Robert L. Dana

- 1998 *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice*. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997. Reprint.

United Methodist Church

- 1989 *The United Methodist Hymnal*. Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House.