

Title: From Karamzin to Putin: Transformative Learning in Practice

Authors: Paulina De Santis, DLIFLC

Oksana Willis, Harvard University

Abstract:

Transformative learning theory, an important educational development of the 21st century, provides an instructional strategy for self-reflection and learning focusing on individual growth and development. Transformative learning is the process of recognizing, analyzing and making deliberate changes to the assumptions that cause us think, act, and behave in certain ways.

Within the transformative learning theory, education does not stop in the classroom but touches all aspects of a learner's life.

Research has demonstrated the importance of dealing with social issues in the classroom as it teaches students to actively participate in a democracy (Bomer, 2004); promotes reflection and high levels of critical thinking (Johannessen, 2003); encourages the transformation of social realities (Cummins, 2000); refines cognitive abilities to deal with complex issues (Angell and Avery, 1992), and prepares them for authentic dialogues (Harwood and Han, 2000). Based on Mezirow's (1995, 1998, 2000) revised theory of transformative learning, this presentation addresses the practical application of the transformative theory in foreign language teaching focusing on critical reflection and rational discourse in light of students' own beliefs.

Specifically, the objective of the transformational experience was to see the Crimean problem through the light of Russian history and contemporary political and polemic discourse. The students debated the connection between historical figures and contemporary politicians, reflected on their learning processes, and shared the ways the reading materials affected their understanding of current events, Russian culture and history. The final product of their experience was an argumentative essay where they expressed their insights on their transformative experience which itself involved elements of sharing and further reflection. The presenters share students' reflection on their learning processes, the discoveries they made along the way, and how the reading materials affected their understanding of current events, Russian culture and history within the transformative learning theory.