This is a short introduction to the learning approach we will be using in this class, Transformative Learning.
No, not Transformer Learning!
Before we start discussing Transformative Learning, let’s briefly talk about what learning is. Learning is defined as a relatively permanent change in thought or behavior due to experience. Learning is about change; you will either know or be able to do something new as the result of some experience you have.
But how does this kind of transformation happen? When you enter into a new learning situation, the current knowledge you hold on some topic will generally match how your learning environment gave you the information. This cognitive equilibrium (or balance) is a very comfortable state. As learners, we want to stay in this state. But then...
...you encounter new information that does not match what you already know. In this course, you will be exposed to some information that may not match the knowledge that you have acquired in the past. These “triggers” are a necessary part of the Transformative Learning process. In other words, you will be thrown into what is called “Cognitive Disequilibrium.” This state can be challenging, but it will drive you to make sense of the new information (because you want to get back to equilibrium again). You may find yourself saying things like, “But how can that information be true?”, “I don’t think that can be right”, or “That’s not the same as what I’ve learned before.”
As you wrestle to return to cognitive equilibrium again, you will enter into the “reflective” state of the Transformative Learning process, where you will question your prior knowledge. At some level, you may start to ask yourself if your prior knowledge is still important to you, and what it would take for you to change.

Steps in the Transformative Process

**Step 3: Reflect on prior knowledge**

As you match the new information with your existing knowledge, you may find yourself questioning yourself in several ways:

- How did I acquire my existing knowledge?
- How important is it to me?
- What will it mean for me if I change my knowledge?
- What knowledge do I seem reluctant to change?
- Do I want to make the effort to change?
- Do I have the courage to change?
As you attempt to move back toward cognitive equilibrium, you may be tempted to adjust the new information so it matches what you already know, or even ignore the new information completely. This method of returning to cognitive equilibrium is called “Confirmation Bias.”
Another way to get back to cognitive equilibrium is to change your preexisting knowledge to match the new information you encounter. This shifts your knowledge about the ways of the world—it is “transformative.” When this happens, you may experience what is referred to as a “light-bulb-over-the-head” moment because you see things in a different way, or gain completely new insights about your world. You may feel “euphoric” about these new insights. You may think, “I never realized that before”, “How can I use this in my life?”, or “I wish I would have known this before.”
You have transformed, and your cognitive world is once again balanced.
You may be thinking, “I already do this when I learn.” Are you guilty of Confirmation Bias, or did you truly transform?
How will you tackle this course? Will you accept the challenges of Transformative Learning offered to you through the activities in this course? Are you willing to wrestle with new information, and develop new ways of understanding and experiencing your world? Your instructor will be there to help guide you in this process. Let’s begin the journey!