

УДК 347.7

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DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING AS A THEORY OF ADULT EDUCATION

Summary. *The article deals with the theories of transformational learning, its formation and development, roles of participants in transformative programs, natural environments and instructional activities as they relate to transformational learning, and challenges arising for the educator teaching in transformational learning environments. This theory of J. Mezirow is considered as unique to adults and identifies the factors producing transformational learning in adult students. Principal differences between adult and child learners are the use of prior knowledge and life experiences, conscious decisions regarding the self-directed learning, learner's conscious responsibility for new learning for various conscious self-directed reasons. So, adult educators need to adapt their methodologies and roles to facilitate adult learners' transformational learning.*

Key words: *adult education, transformational learning, J. Mezirow, adult educator role.*

In the 21st century knowledge is constantly changing and expanding exponentially. As the concept of life-long learning has taken on a new meaning in the changing world of knowledge and technology and adults face a challenge to change by improving their knowledge and skills, this has created the need for a deeper understanding of how adults learn, how their learning can be facilitated, and how this process compares to children learning. In general, the adult education literature supports the idea that teaching adults should be approached in a different way than teaching children and adolescents. The assumption that teachers of adults should use a different style of teaching is based on the theory of andragogy, which states that adults expect learner-centered settings where they can set their own goals and organize their own learning around their present life needs. However, in the field of adult education, debate still is devoted to the efficacy of a separate approach for teaching adults.

One of the ways to approach the question of whether teaching adults is different is to examine the types of learning in which adults engage. Having analyzed the work of J. Habermas, J. Mezirow and P. Cranton, Susan Imel classifies adult learning into the following three categories: subject-oriented adult learning, consumer-oriented adult learning, and emancipatory adult learning [2]. Of these types of adult learning, the emancipatory one has been considered as unique to adulthood.

Emancipatory learning results in transformations of learner perspectives through critical reflection. The educator plays an active role in fostering critical reflection by challenging learners to consider why they hold certain assumptions, values, and beliefs [2]. By J. Mezirow, emancipatory learning emphasizes upon learner transformation, so it can take place only in adulthood because, only in late adolescence and in adulthood a person can recognize being caught in his/her own history and reliving it. In adulthood, rather than merely adapting to changing circumstances by more diligently applying old ways of knowing individuals discover a need to acquire new perspectives in order to gain a more complete understanding of changing events and a higher degree of control over their lives [4]. As J. Mezirow says, the formative learning of childhood becomes transformative learning in adulthood [5, p. 3]. As a result of the

research and theory-building efforts of J. Mezirow, fully described in his work «Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning» [5], emancipatory adult learning has become more commonly known as transformative learning [2].

So, the main objective of this paper is to review transformational learning in such areas: theories of transformational learning, roles of participants in transformative programs, including students and instructors, natural environments and instructional activities as they relate to transformational learning, and challenges for instructors who teach transformational material.

Thus, the study of transformational learning began with the work of Jack Mezirow (1981, 1994, 1997). Transformational learning can be defined as learning that induces more far-reaching change in the learner than other kinds of learning, especially learning experiences which shape the learner and produce a significant impact, or paradigm shift, which affects the learner's subsequent experiences.

Later many authors have published works on various aspects of transformational learning, and they have collectively identified factors which produce transformational learning in adult students. There have been discussed and examined numerous characteristics of the instructor, student, course content, learning environment, and instructional activities as they influence transformational learning. As E. Taylor considers, transformative learning in adult, higher and continuing education has been around for over 25 years and continues to be the most researched and discussed theory in the field of adult education. Theory by J. Mezirow is the most significant, is the preponderance of literature, conceptual and empirical, framed within the seminal work on transformative learning. Nowadays transformative learning theory continues to be a popular area of research in the field of adult education as indicated by an increase in the number of peer-review journal publications and the initiation of international conferences specifically on the study of transformative learning [7, p. 173].

Transformative learning of J. Mezirow offers a theory of learning that is uniquely adult, abstract and idealized, grounded in the nature of human communication. It is a theory that is partly developmental, but even more it is about where learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action [2].

As J. Mezirow emphasizes, transformative learning is rooted in the way human beings communicate, and does not link it exclusively with significant life events of the learner. Through this combination of reflection and discourse, the student was able to make shifts in his/her world view which produced a more inclusive world-view. One of the benefits of transformational learning was the development of greater autonomy as a person, a defining condition of adulthood.

J. Mezirow developed the concepts of «meaning perspectives», one's overall world-view, and «meaning schemes», smaller components which contain specific knowledge, values, and beliefs about one's experiences. A number of meaning schemes work together to generate one's meaning perspective. Meaning perspectives are acquired passively during childhood and youth, and are the target of the transformation that occurs through experience during adulthood. They operate as perceptual filters that determine how an individual will organize and interpret the meaning of his/her life's experiences [1].

Meaning perspectives naturally change and evolve in response to life experiences, especially those which induce powerful emotional responses in the individual. Often these life-changing events are personal crises such as divorce, death of a loved one, natural or man-made disasters and accidents, health crisis, financial upheaval, or unexpected job changes. It is these meaning perspectives which Mezirow saw as the raw material of the changes that occur in transformational learning. The author further states that we do not make transformative changes in the way we learn as long as the new material fits comfortably in our existing frames of reference.

The researcher S. Imel has distinguished three common themes, which characterized J. Mezirow's theory of the mechanism of transformational learning in the classroom:

experience, critical reflection, and rational discourse. The students' life experiences provided a starting point for transformational learning. J. Mezirow considered critical reflection to be the distinguishing characteristic of adult learning, and saw it as the mean by which one questions the validity of his world-view. He identified rational discourse as a catalyst for transformation, as it induced the various participants to explore the depth and meaning of their various world-views, and articulate those ideas to their instructor and class mates [2].

Although widely criticized for focusing too narrowly on individual transformation, J. Mezirow's theory of transformational learning, which explains how adult learners make sense or meaning of their experiences, has been widely applied to various groups of adult learners. This theory draws from Freire's ideas and is based on the critical theory; because of its critique of power structures and its emphasis on transformation and emancipation, transformational learning theory was classified as radical [8, p. 205].

As for the question of the learning environments and activities which promote transformational learning, J. Mezirow describes a learning environment as one in which those participating have full information, are free from coercion, have equal opportunity to assume various roles, can become critically reflective of assumptions, are empathetic and good listeners, and are willing to search for common ground or a synthesis of different points of view.

The scientist identified several ways to stimulate transformational learning, including journal writing, metaphors, life history exploration, learning contracts, group projects, role play, case studies, and using literature to stimulate critical consciousness. He believed that these could stimulate critical reflection and rational discourse, integral parts of the transformative process in his model. J. Mezirow strongly emphasized that transformational learning came about through discussion and exploration of concepts relating to these kinds of experiences, and was not an advocate of creating intense emotional experiences in transformational learning.

J. Mezirow's follower, T. Roberts offered visionary thoughts for the future of education, focusing on multistate learning consistent with transformational learning. He boldly states that the major intellectual error of our times is the failure to recognize the fundamental primacy of mind-body states, and that any cognitive science which omits them is incomplete [6]. T. Roberts cites examples such as imagery, relaxation, meditation, prayer and spiritual disciplines, martial arts, psychoactive drugs, yoga and body disciplines, breathing techniques, acupuncture, out-of-body experiences, biofeedback, dreams, suggestion and hypnosis, near-death experiences, psychoneuroimmunology and others. All these types of learning experiences could be activities in a transformational learning experience [6].

Though transformational learning has powerful potential for enhancing and accelerating students' self-actualization process, there are important considerations for instructors in such programs. According to L. Baumgartner, instructors are advised to consider ethical questions which may arise in the planning and delivery of transformational learning. Most basic is what right instructors have to encourage transformational learning [1, p. 21]. Author also discusses dynamics and the balance of power in the classroom, emphasizing the necessity of a trusting and caring relationship between students and teacher. Students who see the instructor as an authority figure may have difficulty to challenge conventional values, beliefs, and interpretations of facts. L. Baumgartner recommends a formal code of ethics be designed and implemented, and encourages adult educators to establish a learning forum in which they can create mutual support and exploration of the dynamics of transformational learning. She reminds instructors that transformational learning frequently elicits emotional responses from both student and instructor [1].

As many works state, if transformative learning is unique to adulthood, it requires the use of teaching approaches that are geared specifically to adults. Transformative learning requires that learners address problems through critical reflection. Some strategies used to facilitate transformative learning, e.g., such as journal writing, critical incidents, and experiential methods, are used in other types of learning as well.

Although learners must decide on their own to engage in transformative learning, educators who wish to promote transformative learning have the responsibility to set the stage and provide opportunities for critical reflection. When educators are operating in the domain of transformative learning, they help learners examine their beliefs and how they have acquired them by creating situations in which they can debate how their values, assumptions, ideologies, and beliefs have come to be constructed. Instead of congratulating themselves for having made their point when a learner says, «I never looked at it that way before», educators can help learners engage in transformative learning by responding with, «How did you see things? What made you see things like that?» and then «If we can understand how you came to have a set of ideas and attitudes then, let's look at how you come to have the ideas and attitudes you have now» [2].

In this context, the role of adult educators as facilitators of transformational learning must be redefined and their prevalent humanistic and progressive philosophies must be reexamined. By V. Wang and L. Sarbo, adult educators need to adapt their philosophy and roles to facilitate adult learners' transformative learning. Adult learners possess different needs, interests, and experiences. As teachers modify their roles and methods in response to their students' diverse individual characteristics, they must also adapt their philosophical perspective [8].

The authors have proposed a contextually adapted teaching philosophy that illustrates how adult educators adapt both their beliefs and their roles to accommodate adult learners' needs, interests, and experiences, which helps adult-learning professionals will gain a better understanding of how their beliefs, associated learning objectives, and learners' needs interact to impact the process of student transformation and emancipation, particularly in the practice of andragogy. By them, if J. Mezirow's radical theory of transformational learning is meant to transform adult learners, then adult educators may need to adapt their philosophy and roles as adult educators in light of this new understanding.

In practice, adult-learning professionals may assume different roles and use different methods. In fact, a contextually adapted teaching philosophy plays a major role in determining what adult educators do to help adult learners achieve transformation and emancipation. Although philosophies of adult education, situational roles of adult educators, and transformational learning theory differ, both the belief systems adult educators embrace and the situational roles they adopt either facilitate or inhibit critical reflection of adult learners. Inherently, a contextually adapted philosophy places adult educators in situational roles.

The dynamic interaction of the following factors contributes to a determination of how adult-learning professionals help adult learners achieve transformative learning.

1. Philosophies of adult education define the purpose for educating and training adults. They provide the guiding principles for teachers of adult learners. These philosophies are internal and aid action.

2. To teachers of adults, learner needs, learner styles, learner experience, and learner motivation may be external. Together with teachers' philosophies, they are the «what» factors that determine how teachers of adults will go about helping adults learn and hence assume their roles and select their methods for teaching.

3. The roles of adult teachers and their methods of teaching refer specifically to how teachers of adults help adults learn. Without the «what» factors, the process of «how» cannot be realized in helping adults learn. Therefore, change in learners cannot be achieved.

4. For learners to shift to a more inclusive, integrative perspective or to «liberate» them, learners' critical reflection is key to transformational learning.

5. Although the roles of adult teachers and their methods may be determined by other factors, the essential roles contextually adapted philosophies play in determining the roles of teachers and their methods. The role of teachers and their subsequent method determine the way they interact with learners. Therefore, learners' critical reflection is greatly impacted by these factors [8, p. 208].

This contextually adapted philosophy helps define the role of adult educators by providing a conceptual framework for incorporation into their teaching methodologies. Above all, understanding this complex, interactive process helps teachers maximize their effectiveness.

By J. Mezirow, adult educators' roles are directly influenced by their philosophical perspectives and related educational purposes. If the objective of adult education is to promote the adult learner's transformation and emancipation, then the role of adult educators is to enhance the critical reflection process, which is embedded in the transformational learning theory [5].

Some papers maintain that transformational learning is a natural process of learning. In this learning process, knowledge is distributed in a circular and reciprocal way through a collaborative sharing of experiences, centered on real life situations, and learners are responsible for their own learning [3].

The adult learner comes to the learning process with life experiences and prior knowledge that is used by the learner to make connections to the new learning. The difference is the adult learner has more life experiences and prior knowledge than the child. The environment in which the learning takes place needs to be risk free and one in which the learner feels safe and secure and supported to engage in new learning. The occurrence of learning taking place is provided by the responsibility of the learner. The self-directed nature of the process determines what will be learned. There appears to be a difference in the responsibility and self-directedness between the adult learner and a child. The adult appears to have an awareness of the self-directed nature of the process and makes conscious decisions regarding the learning by formulation of learning goals.

For learning to take place, adults need to be immersed in what is being learned. This is needed to help insure that the new knowledge is internalized to the point where the knowledge can be transferred into appropriate situations. Since adults have more prior knowledge and more life experiences to bring to the learning situation, internalization and transfer may take less time than the new learning of a child.

Due the natural learning process, adults need to use the learning or employ the knowledge gained. The more the knowledge is used, the closer the approximations come to the conventions and become internalized. Once the learning has been internalized, the knowledge is transferred into new situations by the adult learners. A major characteristic that impacts the natural learning process is engagement of adult learners. The more actively engaged in the learning process, the faster the knowledge is obtained and the better the knowledge is learned. Active engagement is influenced by a risk free environment, self-directed learner characteristics, alignment with life experiences and prior knowledge, immersion, demonstrations, feedback, and learner responsibility as well as motivation for the adult learner.

According to D. McDonough, moving through the natural process of learning, adult learners need: 1) a risk free environment for safety and support for the new learning; 2) to be immersed in the new learning; 3) demonstrations of the new learning; 4) intrinsic and extrinsic motivation; 5) to actively engage in the learning process; 6) opportunities to use the new learning; 7) to be given the responsibility for their own learning; 8) to use approximations until the new learning becomes internalized and transferable; 9) feedback to help the learning

become internalized and help move approximations to conventions, and 10) to connect the new learning to prior knowledge and life experiences [3].

Transformational learning occurs when it is integrated with experience. The whole notion of transformative learning is to make sense of experience. Therefore to some extent, the purpose of adult education is to give adult learners an opportunity to engage in the problem-solving process, which is squarely in line with Paulo Freire's concept of problem-posing education. Transformative learning can be maximized when self-direction is encouraged among adult learners. The end results of critical reflection in transformational learning are transformation and emancipation (radical philosophy). Experience is key to critical reflection. Hence, a progressive approach to adult education complements radical theory in transformational learning among adult learners. If the objective of adult education is only to transmit culture and social structure to promote social change and to develop individuals open to change and continued learning, then it is appropriate for adult educators to be humanistic and progressive. With these two ideologies in mind, they can serve as learning facilitators because they assume that adult learners tend to be self-directed. In reality however, the educational purpose of adult education encompasses all objectives of adult education [18 p. 208].

Thus, due to the efforts of the founder of transformative learning J. Mezirow, this theory is considered as unique to adults. It has identified the factors which produce transformational learning in adult students. J. Mezirow understood transformative learning as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action. Researchers maintain that fostering transformative learning demands a different approach by the educator. Principal differences between adult and child learners are the use of prior knowledge and life experiences and learner responsibility: adult learners make conscious decisions regarding the self-directed learning in which they participate, and consciously take on responsibility for new learning for various conscious self-directed reasons. So, adult educators need to adapt their methodologies and roles to facilitate adult learners' transformative learning.

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РОЗВИТОК ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЙНОГО НАВЧАННЯ У ТЕОРІЇ ОСВІТИ ДОРΟΣЛИХ

Василенко Олена Вікторівна – кандидат педагогічних наук, доцент, старший науковий співробітник відділу андрагогіки Інституту педагогічної освіти і освіти дорослих НАПН України

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У статті розглядаються становлення і розвиток теорії трансформаційного навчання, зокрема теретичні підходи, роль учасників трансформаційних програм, природне середовище і навчальні заходи, пов'язані з трансформаційним навчанням, проблеми, що виникають у педагога в умовах трансформаційного навчання. Ця теорія Дж. Мезіроу вважається унікальною для навчання дорослих і визначає фактори, що створюють умови трансформаційного навчання дорослих студентів. Основними особливостями навчання дорослих є використання попередніх знань і життєвого досвіду, свідоме рішення щодо самостійного навчання, усвідомлена відповідальність учня за навчання з різних свідомих причин. Виходячи з того, педагоги, що навчають дорослих, повинні адаптувати свої методи і ролі для сприяння трансформаційному навчанню дорослих.

Ключові слова: освіта дорослих, трансформаційне навчання, Д. Мезіроу, роль педагога дорослих.

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