



# **XV BIENNIAL INTERNATIONAL TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING CONFERENCE**

11TH - 13TH SEPTEMBER 2024  
UNIVERSITY OF SIENA (ITALY)

**Getting Transformation into Good Trouble:  
Making new spaces of possibility  
with community and in practice**

# **PROCEEDINGS**

Loretta Fabbri, Monica Fedeli, Pierre Faller,  
Dyan Holt & Alessandra Romano, Editors

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# Getting Transformation into Good Trouble: Making new spaces of possibility with community and in practice

Proceedings of the XV Biennial International Transformative Learning  
Conference

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# GREETINGS

## Welcome Letter for the Conference Co-Chairs XV International Transformative Learning Conference 2024

Warm greetings to everyone!

As conference co-chairs and on behalf of the Steering Committee we welcome each of you to the XV Biennial International Transformative Learning Conference (ITLC). This is our first in-person conference since the XII Biennial conference hosted by Teachers College, Columbia University in 2018. Though the Covid-19 Pandemic interrupted our face-to-face gathering in 2020, in 2022 the International Transformative Learning Association (ITLA) hosted a successful virtual conference co-chaired by Dr. John. Dirkx and Dr. Frank Conner that brought our community together in a new way for the first time. As Co-chairs we draw inspiration and courage from the conferences that have come before us and are excited to host you here in Siena, at the University of Siena in 2024.

The conference theme *Getting transformation into good trouble: Making new spaces of possibility with community and in practice* provokes new lines of inquiry breaking conventional frames of intellectual discourse on the topic of transformation. We gather as a community aware of the many troubles that are active in the contexts we come from and that we cannot ignore. Our collective hope is that transformative learning has a part to play in making society able to respond to trouble in conscientious ways. Our inspiration for this conference has come from animators of ethical action such as Donna Haraway ecofeminist whose work criticized anthropocentrism, Rosi Braidotti interdisciplinary feminist philosopher whose work on how to think difference positively, and American Civil Rights activist, John Lewis who insisted in getting into necessary good trouble. Through participation in this conference, we explore what is revealed when *We* trouble transformative learning into necessary good trouble. We invite you to envision transformation and transformative learning anew through putting our (self)understanding of transformation at risk. Getting ourselves into good trouble, together.

We are thrilled that you have traveled to join us in making space to “disentangle ourselves” as researchers, practitioners, and members of a community whose ongoing inquiry is to seek new understandings of transformation and transformative learning, troubling our explicit and implicit assumptions by getting into good necessary trouble.

We wish you surprise encounters, joyful entanglements, and meaningful disentanglements that reveal new directions and deep connections between us allowing transformation to show us new pathways for being and becoming.

Dr. Claudio Melacarne  
University of Siena  
ITLC 2024 Co-Chair

Dr. Aliko Nicolaidis  
University of Georgia  
ITLC 2024 Co-Chair

## **Welcome Note from the President of International Transformative Learning Association (ITLA)**

Greetings and a warm welcome to you!

Deep gratitude for making the journey to Italy and the University of Siena to participate in our community gathering for the XV Biennial International Transformative Learning Conference. My name is Dr. Aiki Nicolaides, I currently serve as ITLA's President and it is my great delight to welcome you to this conference.

*Getting transformation into good trouble: Making new spaces of possibility with community and in practice* is the theme of our conference and reminds us that getting into necessary good trouble is holy and hard work. We are always living in a time of evolution, and in such times, there are periods of grace and times full of grit. In this current time grace and grit, holy and hard, and messy and magic are tugging at us from all directions. A dynamic time that is felt differently in our being and becoming. How we feel this dynamic and our response, is the action of transformation.

ITLA was a dream that began in conversation over drinks and dinner ten years ago. Now, many conversations later, ITLA is a living space for the evolution of the theory of transformative learning. It is a space for a diverse community of scholars, educators, practitioners, and activists whose intention is to make learning transformative and our commons a place for mutual flourishing. The ten years of building ITLA has included many hearts, hands, and commitments to making a dream real. I am one of many who is committed to the essence of transformation through learning that is transformative. I offer gratitude and acknowledge the lineage from which ITLA emerged.

We define Transformative learning as the process by which we call into question our taken for granted frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more justified as a guide for action. Although this definition of transformative learning originates from Jack Mezirow's theory of adult learning, this Association embraces the wide array of disciplines that explore learning that cultivates fundamental change in human systems—individual or collective—in how they perceive themselves and take action in the world.

I believe that we are living in a time of dynamic evolution. This illuminates for me that creating generative spaces where we openly communicate our perspectives, listen to each other's points of view, explore ways to imagine new pathways for learning that makes a difference in the world are in desperate need. It is my intention to make ITLA such a space for transformation.

Wishing you an auspicious conference!

Aiki Nicolaides, ITLA President

## A brief overview of ITLA

This year ITLA has focused its energies on making the shift from the past three years start-up creation mode to a sustaining grounded systems of action that facilitate ITLA's mission. In what follows I offer a brief overview of ITLA's mission, leadership, governance, and association aims.

### ITLA Mission:

The mission of the ITLA is to promote critical scholarship, research, teaching, application, and praxis of the social, scientific, artistic, and humanistic principles of transformative learning theories and praxis.

The ITLA, a not-for-profit organization, exists for educational and scientific development of its members, research and practice collaborations, and literary purposes only. No part of the Association's net revenues may be used for the private benefit of any individual or group.

### Governance:

ITLA adopted sociocracy as a governance model and organized the ITLA structure into linking semi-autonomous circles. Simply described, Sociocracy is *a system of governance that seeks to achieve solutions that create harmonious social environments as well as productive organizations*. You can read more about our [Dynamic Governance Circles](https://www.intertla.org/) here: [kumu.io/intertla/itla-dynamic-governance-circles](https://www.intertla.org/) and out work overall here: <https://www.intertla.org/>

### Organizational Aims of the ITLA:

- 1) Educate ITLA members and the public about transformative learning theory and theories about transformation through webinars, videos, articles, research briefs, and courses
- 2) Host and facilitate conversations with and between ITLA members to conceive of, understand and evolve the living theory of transformative learning through in-person gatherings (at regional and global conferences and meetings) and virtual meetings.
- 3) Guide, empower and promote research into transformative learning theory by offering feedback on research proposals; mentoring; providing opportunities for researchers to present their findings in an ITLA webinar, e-book or special journal issue; and granting awards to emerging researchers and research projects
- 4) Nurture community by hosting formal and informal networking events and Communities of Practice
- 5) Co-host conferences for researchers, scholars, practitioners, and scholar-practitioners from around the world to gather, share and discuss the living theory and praxis of transformative learning.

Leadership:

ITLA President:

Dr. Aliko Nicolaides, The University of Georgia

ITLA Leadership Circle with the aim is to carry out the association's aims in alignment with the mission. Its members are:

Dr. Marguerite Welch, Saint Mary's College of California

Dr. Alexis Kokkos, Hellenic Open University

Dr. Claudio Melacarne, University of Siena

Dr. Renee Owen, Southern Oregon University

Wilhelmina Wilson, M.A. Healthy Black Families, Inc.

Ann Marie Foley, M.A. (Project Manager)

Mission Circle with the aim of holding ITLA true to its mission. Its members are:

Chair: Ellen Scully-Russ

John Dirkx, Professor Emeritus, Michigan State, USA

Chad Hoggan, Professor, North Carolina State University, USA

Elizabeth Kasl, Independent Scholar

Constance Khupe, Academic Advisor, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Victoria Marsick, Professor, Teachers College, Columbia University, USA

Gloria Mbokota, Senior Lecturer Gordon Institute of Business Science. University of Pretoria

Misawa Mitsunori, Associate Professor, University of Tennessee, USA (Treasurer of ITLA)

Tanuj Negi, Assistant Professor, FLAME University, India

Eunice Nyamupangedengu, Associate Professor, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Steve Schapiro, Professor, Fielding University

Libby Tisdell, Professor Emeritus, Penn State University, USA

Linden West, Professor Emeritus, Canterbury Christ Church University, UK

Secretary:

Dr. Marguerite Welch, Professor Emeritus, Saint Mary's College of California

Sociocracy Facilitator:

Dr. Renee Owen, Assistant Professor, Southern Oregon University

Awards:

International Transformative Learning Association gives three awards presented at the biennial conference:

- The Jack Mezirow Living Theory of Transformative Learning Award
- The Patricia Cranton Distinguished Dissertation Award
- The Community Leadership Award

***The Jack Mezirow Living Theory of Transformative Learning Award*** is inspired by Jack Mezirow's efforts to engage the field of adult education in thinking theoretically about adult learning. To promote reflection about what he called "a theory in progress," Mezirow founded the International Transformative Learning Conference in 1998. The recipient of the Jack

Mezirow Award contributes to living theory by addressing frames of reference about transformative learning, providing scholars and practitioners with a more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective theoretical and practical perspective that is dynamic in its possibilities for growth and change.

ITLC 2024

**Winner:**

How to provide Safe (Enough) Spaces for Transformative Learning to Support Courageous and Decolonial Practices Towards Climate Justice

Ruth Förster, Anaïs, Sägeser, Mandy Singer-Brodowski, & Skyller Walkes

**Honorable mention:**

Good Trouble for the Long Hard Struggles: Protest Music as Catalyst for Transformative and Emancipatory Learning

Randee Lipson Lawrence, & Gwendolyn Kaltoft

**Honorable mention:** Encompassing Transformation: A Holistic Approach to Assessing Learning in Adult Basic Education

Monika Kastner

The ITLA recognizes emerging scholars by conferring the *Patricia Cranton Distinguished Dissertation Award*. This award commends a distinguished doctoral dissertation that exemplifies scholarly work and contributes to the transdisciplinary field of transformative learning. The Patricia Cranton Distinguished Dissertation Award was established in 2018 and first conferred at the XIII International Transformative Learning Conference.

The Award has three aims:

- To recognize and honor emerging scholars who extend and inform a living theory of transformative learning.
- To acknowledge originality and quality of inquiry.
- To invite and expose contributions from diverse perspectives of transformative learning theory and/or praxis.

**Winner:**

Unlocking embodied cognition in transformative learning: Navigating edge-emotions captured by a disorienting dilemma.

Patricia L. Carter, PhD.

The ITLA *Community Leadership Award* recognizes sustained leadership in fostering and nurturing the International Transformative Learning Conference (ITLC) and the community association (ITLA). The award recognizes sustained leadership in three areas:

- 1) Making significant, innovative and developmental contributions to the long-term success of the conference (ITLC).
- 2) Advancing the work of the International Transformative Learning Association (ITLA).
- 3) Working toward broadening global participation and inclusion in the ITLC and/or ITLA.

*Community Award Winner to be announced at ITCL 2024*



## Welcome Note from the Scientific Committee

*Putting transformation in good trouble* is the theme of the 2024 International Transformative Learning Conference!

The goal of the conference is to re-imagine transformation and transformative learning by putting our (self-)understanding of transformation at risk and gathering new insights and research directions as a global community of academics and practitioners.

The Scientific Committee was responsible for designing and facilitating the conference proposal submission and review process. The ITLC 2024 Call for Papers received 216 proposals, each of which were reviewed by at least two reviewers and some by three.

The SC innovated its processes by organizing a team of nearly 120 reviewers into one of eleven Review Pods, led by members of the Scientific Committee (see below).

This process enabled the Review Pod Leaders to provide meaningful guidance to the reviewers in their pod and ensure that authors received detailed and useful feedback on their proposal. The Review Pod Leaders made the final recommendations on which proposals to accept for ITLC 2024. Thank you again to our committee members and reviewers for their dedication and commitment to our ITLC community!

### Review Pod Leaders

We extend our immense gratitude to the following individuals for their contributions to the committee by serving as Review Pod Leaders:

Grace Alcid, Teachers College, Columbia University, USA

Francesca Bracci, Design Committee Co-Chair, University of Florence, Italy

Loretta Fabbri, Scientific Committee Co-Chair, University of Siena, Italy

Pierre Faller, Scientific Committee Co-Chair, Teachers College, Columbia University, USA

Monica Fedeli, Scientific Committee Co-Chair, University of Padova, Italy

Ted Fleming, Teachers College, Columbia University, USA

Elizabeth Kasl, Independent Scholar, USA

Randee Lawrence, Teachers College, Columbia University, USA

Victoria Marsick, Teachers College, Columbia University, USA

Claudio Melacarne, Conference Co-Chair, University of Siena, Italy

Aliki Nicolaides, Conference Co-Chair, University of Georgia, USA

Alessandra Romano, Scientific Committee Co-Chair, University of Siena, Italy

Ellen Scully-Ross, Design Committee Co-Chair, The George Washington University, USA

Marguerite Welch, Saint Mary's College of California, USA

## Proposal Reviewers

A large number of scholars were invited to review the proposals. We are grateful to the scholars listed here, who accepted our invitation to review up to 5 proposals each.

Zehra Bahadir Kurus	Ted Fleming	Claudio Melacarne
Donna Bailey	Shella E. Fon	Lea Metz
Magali Balayn Lelong	Kathy Geller	Natalie Murray
Claudia Banchetti	Rajashi Ghosh	Rebecca Nelems
Sara Bano	Irene Ganeselli	Aliki Nicolaidis
Trisha Barefield	Labrina Gioti	Erika Marie Pace
Leslyn Beckles	Neal C. Herr	Shannon Perry
Tanya Behrisch	Chad Hoggan	Elizabeth Pope
Vanessa Bettin	Melissa Jozwiak	Sharon Radd
Roshan Bharwaney	Justine Jun	Natassa Raikou
Ajit Bhattarai	Chalisa Kaewla	Vicki Reitenauer
Cecilia Bibbo	Lufi Kartika Sari	Paola Rigoni
Nataschia Bobbo	Theologia Katiniou	Stacey Robbins
Francesca Bracci	Ratha Khuon	Alessandra Romano
Daniele Bullegas	Eric Kyle	Alessandro Romano
Natalia Bussard	Younghyun Kim	Anaïs Sägesser
Martina Capaccioli	George Koulaouzides	Ellen Scully-Russ
Marianna Capo	Rita Kowalski	Emanuele Serrelli
Ruohao Chen	Deborah Kramlich	Burcu Şimşek
Claudia Correa García	Welton Kwong	Lynn Sitanimezi
Ian Corrie	Maria Lamattina	Emmanouil Sofos
Trevor Cox	Anna Laros	George Spais
Maria Cseh	Simi Lawoyin	Stefano Spennati
Antonella Cuppari	Randee Lawrence	Gkiosi Styliani
Naydene De Lange	Chris Lee	Edward Taylor
Carlos Delgado Caro	Ahreum Lim	Thomaita
Alexandris Despina Gavrili	Heather Lindell	Theodorakopoulou
Nellie Deutsch	Charles Liu	Concetta Tino
Diego Di Masi	Maria Liu Wong	Anna Tsiboukli
Zhuqing Ding	Anne-Liisa Longmore	Eleni Vallianatou-Voutsina
Gerry Ebalagoza-Tunnell	Henriette Lundgren	Mitzy Velazco
Kerrijo Ellis	Francesco Magni	Mark Walvoord
Tonya Ensign	Maria Rita Mancaniello	Lisa Watanabe
Loretta Fabbri	Gloria Mbokota	Linden West
Christine Fandrich	Victoria Marsick	David A. Willis
Monica Fedeli	Gloria Mbokota	Fiona Wilson
Valerio Ferrero	Hanna McCathren	Diana Woolis
Rachel Fichter	Rhonda McEwen	Mariana Zuliani Theodoro de Lima

### **Scientific Committee Co-Chairs**

Loretta Fabbri, University of Siena, Italy

Pierre Faller, Teachers College, Columbia University, USA

Monica Fedeli, University of Padova, Italy

Alessandra Romano, University of Siena, Italy

## Welcome Letter from Italian Transformative Learning Network

Dear all,

We are glad to thank you for sharing your research and ideas at the 15th International Transformative Learning Conference.

We are also pleased to welcome you on behalf of the Italian Transformative Learning Network. The Italian Transformative Learning Network (ITLN) promotes theoretical and empirical research on the theory of transformative learning in the Italian and international scientific context.

ITLN organizes conferences, meetings, workshops and research in order to:

- develop studies and research on transformative learning in a transdisciplinary and comparative perspective;
- support students to engage in and promote research on transformative learning theory for organizational development and adult learning;
- promote networking among scholars and community discussion;
- validate methodological approaches for creating the conditions for individuals, groups, communities and organizations to grow up personally and professionally.

In 2006, Jack Mezirow was invited by Loretta Fabbri, Maura Striano and Claudio Melacarne to the Department of Education at the University of Siena.

After this meeting, an informal network of a community of researchers was born with the aim of developing theoretical trajectories and training practices inspired by the theory of transformative learning.

In this way, different working patterns, both theoretical and methodological, have been legitimated, contaminating themselves with other epistemologies and studies:

- the practice-based approach (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998, 2002; Billett, 2001, 2002; Fabbri, 2007; Gherardi, 2019),
- the reflective practices proposed by the tradition of action science (Schön, & Argyris, 1999; Striano, Oliverio, Melacarne, 2018);
- the interconnection with situated learning and sociomateriality (Fenwick, 2010; Fabbri, & Melacarne, 2023);
- the adoption of transformative learning theory for innovation in teaching and learning (Taylor, & Fedeli, 2017; Bierema & Fedeli, 2019; Fedeli, 2020; Bracci, & Fedeli, 2023; Fedeli & Taylor, 2023);
- the fertile connection with the feminist studies (Johnson-Bailey, 2012) and postqualitative research epistemologies (St. Pierre, 2013).

Since 2016, the network has been formalized in the Italian Transformative Learning Network, involving more than 90 Italian and foreign university professors.

We have created a website (<https://itln.unisi.it/>) of the Italian Transformative Learning Network, where members have the opportunity to discuss, to be informed about events and conferences and to find scientific references on TL.

For the future, we would like to explore new directions of the transformative learning theory, such as (but not limited to) the interest for understanding radicalization processes in everyday life (Melacarne, & Fabbri, 2023), the adoption of transformative methodologies for more inclusive and equal mindsets, the possibility of inclusion of post-critical pedagogy (Oliverio, 2022), the contribution of the posthuman epistemology to the evolution of the theory (Barad, 2003; Braidotti, 2020; Bracci, 2024).

Our hope is to re-imagine multiple pathways for the epistemological and methodological trajectories of transformative learning, working with scholars from around the world who position themselves within the transformative paradigm.

On behalf of the Italian Transformative Learning Network,  
Loretta Fabbri, President  
Monica Fedeli, Claudio Melacarne, Maura Striano, Co-Presidents

# PROGRAM

**CONFERENCE SCHEDULE**  
**International Transformative Learning Conference 2024**

**Getting Transformation into Good Trouble:  
 Making New Spaces of Possibility with Community and in Practice**

**11th - 13th September 2024 University of Siena (Italy)**

**DETAILED PROGRAM**

**ITLC Day 1 - Wednesday, September 11, 2024**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Session title</b>	<b>Venue</b>
8.00	Registration	Auditorium–Rettorato
9.00 - 9.30	Welcome from Co-Host Rector of University of Siena <b>Roberto Di Pietra</b> Welcome & Official Opening <b>Aliki Nicolaides, Loretta Fabbri, &amp; Claudio Melacarne</b>	
9.30 - 10.15	Keynote Speech: <b>Katrina S. Rogers</b> Introduction by Aliki Nicolaides	
10.15 - 11.00	Keynote Speech Reflections & Discussion Facilitators: <b>Yabome Gilpin-Jackson, George Koulaouzides</b>	
11.00 – 11.30	Jack Mezirow Living Theory of Transformative Learning Award & ITLA Community Leadership Award Presentations	
11.30 - 12.45	Networking Lunch	Courtyard–Rettorato
13.00 - 14.30	Concurrent Sessions #1	San Niccolò Complex–Ground Floor
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8.00	Registration	Auditorium–Rettorato
9.00 - 9.30	Welcome from Co-Host Rector of University of Siena <b>Roberto Di Pietra</b> Welcome & Official Opening <b>Aliki Nicolaides, Loretta Fabbri, &amp; Claudio Melacarne</b>	
9.30 - 10.15	Keynote Speech: <b>Katrina S. Rogers</b> Introduction by Aliki Nicolaides	

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11.30 - 12.45	Networking Lunch	Courtyard–Rettorato
13.00 - 14.30	Concurrent Sessions #1	San Niccolò Complex–Ground Floor
	Experiential Sessions	
	<i>Good Trouble for the Long Hard Struggles: Protest Music as Catalyst for Transformative and Emancipatory Learning</i> <b>Randee Lawrence, Gwendolyn Kaltoft</b>	Open Space #1
	<i>Seed Bombs for Transformation: Using Guerilla Gardening for Making Good Trouble in Academia</i> <b>Deborah Kramlich, Dina Soeiro, Regina Ebner</b>	Open Space #2
	<i>The scars: the map of transformation in the body. An embodied reading of transformative learning</i> <b>Giovanni Gottardo, Janet Ferguson</b>	Room 16
	Paper Sessions	
	Paper Session 1	Room 8
	1. <i>Building Resilience to Hate in Classrooms with Transformative Learning: Innovation in Practice and Pedagogy to Prevent Extremism and Violence in U.S. Schools</i> <b>Amra Sabic-El-Rayess, Vikramaditya (Vik) Joshi</b>	
	2. <i>Radicalization in everyday life. Cultivating informal learning practices</i> <b>Claudio Melacarne, Loretta Fabbri</b>	
	3. <i>Settler Decolonization: Pathways towards Radical, Systems-Level Transformation</i> <b>Rebeccah Nelems, Wanda Krause, Cheryl Heykoop</b>	
	Chair: <b>Mina Wilson</b>	



	<p>Paper Session 2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Moving between perspectives: the practice of senso-biographical walk as a way of learning and transformation</i> Antonella Cuppari, Silvia Luraschi</li> <li>2. <i>Transformative learning for student aspirations: a case study of student experiences in informal higher education settings from the capability approach</i> Carlos Delgado Caro</li> <li>3. <i>Through the Glass Training inspired by Pasolini's Manifesto Theatre: for a Transformative Performing Arts Education</i> Irene Gianceselli, Andrea Bosco</li> </ol> <p>Chair: Carlos Delgado Caro</p>	Room 13
	<p>Paper Session 3</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Transforming Initial Teacher Education: Community Philosophical Dialogue to Develop an Intercultural and Social Justice Perspective</i> Isabella Pescarmona, Valerio Ferrero</li> <li>2. <i>Cultural heritage and educational communities. Transformative learning and professional skills for a new urban welfare</i> Maria Rita Mancaniello, Francesca Marone, Marisa Musaio</li> <li>3. <i>Exploring the contribution of Transformative Learning (TL) to developing intercultural competency in a North Greece community hosting refugee and immigrant populations</i> Maria Spyropoulou</li> </ol> <p>Chair: Francesca Marone</p>	Room 14

	<p>Paper Session 4</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Engaging a Dark Side Perspective: Integration of Second Wave Positive Psychology and Transformative Learning Theory</i> Adam McClain</li> <li>2. <i>New Possibilities for Transformative Learning Practice through an Integrated Learning Theory</i> Eric Kyle, Mark Walvoord</li> <li>3. <i>Perspective transformation and inclusive education: a literature review</i> George Koulaouzides, Athina Charissi, Effrosyni Kostara</li> <li>4. <i>Exploring Addiction Recovery through Hoggan's Metatheoretical Perspective of Transformative Theory: A Comparative Analysis</i> Giovanni Castiglione, Roberta Piazza</li> </ol> <p>Chair: Effrosyni Kostara</p>	Room 15
	<p><b>Pecha Kucha</b></p>	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>The Role of Consent, Direction and Trauma in Transformative Approaches to Family Learning</i> Charlotte Hardacre</li> <li>2. <i>My Year of Firsts: A personal story of wandering through an altered life</i> Ellen Scully-Russ</li> <li>3. <i>"Playing in the Dark": Radical Speculative Play within the Dark Side of Transformation</i> Ijeoma Njaka</li> </ol>	Auditorium–San Niccolò Complex
	<p>Roundtables Session</p>	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Transformative Learning and Psychological Contracts: The Impact of Perspective Transformation on Millennial and Gen Z Working Mothers' Work Expectations</i> Hanna McCathren, Yoshie Nakamura</li> <li>2. <i>Disney films as disorienting dilemmas. Exploring race and gender through the representation of non-white female Disney main character</i> Cristina Martínez Reig</li> <li>3. <i>Engaging with Power, Privilege and Social Justice</i></li> </ol>	Room 18

	as a Means of Transforming Disaster Management in a Climate-changed World Robin Cox, Michelle Hamilton-Page, Michelle Robichaud, Kate Jenkins-Pilgrim	
	Symposium	
	<i>Jack Mezirow's thoughts: Roots and branches</i> Thanassis Karalis, Natassa Raikou, Manos Pavlakis, Anna Tsiboukli	Room 20
14.30 - 14.45	Break	
14.45 - 16.15	Concurrent Sessions #2	San Niccolò Complex– Ground Floor
	Experiential Sessions	
	<i>Role-playing games to learn towards new knowledge, creativity, and respect for other people's position: research through an experience at the University of Bergamo</i> Stefano Spennati, Victoria Marsick	Open Space #1
	<i>Transformative leadership: getting in good trouble as transformative learners</i> ShaToya Williamson, Lynn Hoare, Alexandra Danino, Jocelyn Chapman	Open Space #2
	<i>Transformational Power of Liberating Authentic Emotion: Re-examine embodied feelings with creative expression</i> Lulu Guo	Room 16
	<i>Mindfulness as a Path to Transformative Learning</i> Marty Jacobs	San Niccolò External Space
	Paper Sessions	
	Paper Session 1  1. <i>A radical enactive perspective on transformative learning: Implications of the agent-environment unity,</i> Peter Hochenauer 2. <i>Transformative learning and teacher agency: The centre pull and the outer end of the same ball of twine?</i> Paola Aiello, Erika Marie Pace, Diana Carmela Di Gennaro, Umesh Sharma	Room 8

	<p>3. <i>Is transformation necessary to become a better researcher? A collective introspection.</i>  Umesh Sharma, Paola Aiello, Erika Pace, Stuart Woodcock</p> <p>Chair: Paola Aiello</p>	
	<p>Paper Session 2</p> <p>1. <i>Transformative learning through Artificial Intelligence Caching: An exploratory study</i>  Gloria Mbokota, Olivier Malafronte</p> <p>2. <i>Ethical Troubles in Machine Learning: A Transformative Learning Perspective on Bias and Fairness</i>  Junyi Yu</p> <p>3. <i>Digital Transformation: a catalyst for transformative learning for employees</i>  Natalie Murray</p> <p>4. <i>Toward Transformative Learning in Online Education: Testing a New Community Engagement Framework Model</i>  Roxana Toma, Ali Ait Si Mhamed</p> <p>Chair: Junyi Yu</p>	<p>Room 13</p>
	<p>Paper Session 3</p> <p>1. <i>Troubling Transformation Through an Experiential Learning Apparatus</i>  Heather Lindell</p> <p>2. <i>Reimagining Teaching and Learning: The Transformative Potential of Service Learning</i>  Livia Cadei, Emanuele Serrelli, Domenico Simeone, Aurora Torri</p> <p>3. <i>Navigating Cultural Transition &amp; Uncertainty: An Autoethnographic Exploration of a Transformative Learning Journey as a Voluntary Latina Immigrant</i>  Mitzy Velazco</p> <p>Chair: Mitzy Velazco</p>	<p>Room 14</p>

	<p>Paper Session 4</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Influences of Transformative Multiple Language Learning and Use on Changing the Ways of Seeing and Being in the World</i> Natalia Bussard</li> <li><i>Transformative Dilemmas in modern contexts</i> Anna Tsiboukli, Katerina Kedraka</li> <li><i>Exploring the Role of Emotions in Transformative Learning Experiences</i> Zehra Bahadir Kurus</li> </ol> <p>Chair: Zehra Bahadir Kurus</p>	Room 15
	Symposium	
	<p><i>Looking for philosophical resemblances with transformation theory: how Maxine Greene, Peter Jarvis and Socrates relate to the work of Jack Mezirow</i> George Koulaouzides, Alexis Kokkos, Effrosyni Kostara</p>	Auditorium–San Niccolò Complex
	Roundtables Session	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adult Learners’ Transformative Learning Experience Through Theater-based Pedagogy: Flourish in Shifting Paradigms and Building Relationships with Others Zhuqing Ding, Yoshie Nakamura</li> <li>Advocating for Transformative Learning: Preparing Teacher Candidates to Become Culturally Responsive Educators Kerrijo Ellis, Raven Robinson-Wilson, Sarah Kiefer, Jennifer Jacobs</li> <li>Creative Discomfort: Brave Spaces for Transformative Learning Ayelet Danielle Aldouby, Dagmar Spain, Randee Lipson Lawrence</li> </ol>	Room 18
16.15 - 16.30	Break	
16.30 - 18.00	Concurrent Sessions #3	San Niccolò Complex–Ground Floor

	Experiential Sessions	
	<i>What does transformation mean for you? Paint it in the air</i> Mario Giampaolo, Caterina Garofano	Open Space #1
	<i>Transformative Governance: Principles, Practices, and Perspectives of Sociocracy</i> Renee Owen, Kristen Del Simone	Open Space #2
	<i>Deep Time Walk as a transformative tool in Higher Education Institutions</i> Carolina Silva, Antje Disterheft, Matthias Barth	Room 16
	<i>Discovering the heART of Transformative Learning. An interactive session where Art and Transformative Learning intersect.</i> Lea Metz, Abigail Lynam	San Niccolò External Space
	Paper Sessions	
	Paper Session 1	Room 8
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Developing Inclusive Practices to Galvanize Retention of Diverse Physician Trainees and Junior Faculty: A Transformative Learning Approach</i> Danielle McCullough, Ruth Gotian, Odinakachukwu Ehie</li> <li>2. <i>Navigating Change: A longitudinal study of how Future Self-Guides Shape International Students' Motivations and Perceived Transformation at a Sino-Foreign Joint-Venture University</i> Emmanuelle Chiocca, Xin Zhang</li> <li>3. <i>The Disorienting Dilemma of Unemployment: Transformative Learning, Life Design, and Community Strategies for navigating work transitions</i> Vanessa Bettin, Chiara Biasin</li> </ol> <p>Chair: Ruth Gotian</p>	
	Paper Session 2	Room 13
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Transforming Education: Counter-hegemonic teaching</i> Daniela Lehner</li> <li>2. <i>Aligning Transformative Learning and Action Research to Re-Evaluate Structures</i> Tammy Rosner</li> </ol>	

	<p>3. <i>Educating for a sense of community. Ex-post reflections from a research study</i> Valentina Meneghel</p> <p>Chair: Daniela Lehner</p>	
	<p>Paper Session 3</p> <p>1. <i>Coaching Practices for Facilitating Reflection Toward Transformative Insight: A Constructive-Developmental Perspective</i> Jessica Halgren</p> <p>2. <i>Completing the Odyssey: Exploring the Homecoming Journeys of Black and Latino Student Veterans</i> Bryce Kyle, Cole Caudle, Alonzo Flowers</p> <p>3. <i>Co-holding and co-navigating collective liminal spaces for transformative learning outside educational contexts</i> Anaïs Sägesser, Marco Gyger, Luea Ritter</p> <p>Chair: Anaïs Sägesser</p>	Room 14
	<p>Paper Session 4</p> <p>1. <i>Individuation, socialization, and transformation – the three dimensions of education</i> Minni Matikainen, Perttu Männistö</p> <p>2. <i>Facilitating good trouble</i> Shawn McCann, Ian Corrie</p> <p>3. <i>Embodied Liberation and The Collective Freedom Dream</i> Shokry Eldaly</p> <p>Chair: Shawn McCann</p>	Room 15
	<p>Paper Session 5</p> <p>1. <i>The transformative learning experience in national competitions: A study of Chinese college students in computer science and engineering</i> Biyang Wen, Qian Wang, Floriana Grasso, Qing Chen, Juming Shen</p> <p>2. <i>When Information Transforms: Towards a Model of Transformative Information Encountering Informed by Mezirow's Critical Premise Reflection</i> Carli Lowe</p>	Auditorium–San Niccolò Complex

	<p>3. <i>Portrayal of Personal Transformation in Indian Feature Films</i>  Tanuj Negi, Chetna Monga</p> <p>Chair: Tanuj Negi</p>	
	<p>Paper Session 6</p> <p>1. <i>Using Multiliteracies to foster transformative and intercultural learning in second language (L2) adult classes</i>  Maria Skiada</p> <p>2. <i>Performative Didactics as Transformative Didactics. Re-discovering the self through the gaze of the other</i>  Nadia Carlomagno, Maria Vittoria Battaglia, Valeria Vadalà</p> <p>3. <i>Quantum Leaps: Rethinking Transformative Learning through Posthuman Theories</i>  Trisha Barefield</p> <p>Chair: Trisha Barefield</p>	Room 18
18.00 - 18.30	Plenary Session: Closing Remarks of Day 1	Auditorium–San Niccolò Complex
19.30 - 21.00	<p>Cultural event:  Chorus of the University of Siena</p> <p>Free aperitif and a light dinner at Cortile del Podestà  (<a href="https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Cortile_del_Podest%C3%A0_%28Siena%29.jpg">https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Cortile_del_Podest%C3%A0_%28Siena%29.jpg</a>)  (<a href="https://maps.app.goo.gl/UGrEbcDw8o9nCB9UA">https://maps.app.goo.gl/UGrEbcDw8o9nCB9UA</a>)  A wine tasting will be organized during the aperitif.  It will also be possible to continue tasting various wines produced by Tuscan wineries (not free).</p>	Il Campo, 1



**ITLC Day 2- Thursday, September 12, 2024**

Time	Session title	Venue
8.30	Registration	Auditorium–San Niccolò Complex
9.00 – 9.30	ITLA–International Transformative Learning Association Presentation by <b>Aliki Nicolaides &amp; Leadership Circle</b>	
9.30 - 10.15	Keynote Speaker: <b>Silvia Gherardi</b> Introduction by Victoria Marsick	
10.15 – 11.00	Keynote Speech Reflections & Discussion Facilitators: <b>Loretta Fabbri, Ahreum Lim</b>	
11.00 – 11.15	Break	
11.15-12.45	Concurrent Sessions #4	San Niccolò Complex– Ground Floor
	Experiential Sessions	
	<i>Exploring Transformative Learning Through the Lens of Dr. Seuss: Leveraging the Simplicity of Iconic Classics to Reinforce Play &amp; Enhance Our Understanding of TL Theory</i> <b>Donna Bailey</b>	Open Space #1
	<i>Wade in the Water: Experience the Troubling of Transformative Learning</i> <b>Kari Eller, Justin Eller</b>	Open Space #2
	<i>Troubling School Change: Using Arts-Integrated Professional Learning to Transform Education from Within</i> <b>Beth Link, Kathryn Dawson</b>	Room 16
	<i>Embodied Approaches to Differentiating and Integrative Transformation</i> <b>Stacy Husebo, Sharon Radd</b>	San Niccolò External Space
	Paper Sessions	

	<p>Paper Session 1</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Power, communication, and biocultural ways of knowing: a duo- ethnography on transformative learning in Higher Education</i> Laura Formenti, Davide Cino</li> <li>2. <i>Troubling transformation: research as auto/biographical pilgrimage</i> Linden West, Elisabeth Tisdell</li> <li>3. <i>Narrating Change: Storytelling as a Transformative Practice in the Initial Training of Specialized Teachers</i> Marinella Muscarà, Alessandro Romano, Enza Manila Raimondo</li> <li>4. <i>Perspective transformation through the arts: Insights from a long-term research</i> Natassa Raikou, Alexis Kokkos</li> </ol> <p>Chair: Laura Formenti</p>	Room 8
	<p>Paper Session 2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Transforming professional understanding and practice in social work with children and families facing vulnerability</i> Diego Di Masi, Chiara Sità</li> <li>2. <i>Pre-service teachers' transformative learning during placement in remote areas: a living experience</i> Lufi Kartika Sari</li> <li>3. <i>Internship as a collective learning journey: a participatory research involving students, faculties, professionals</i> Maria Livia Alga, Chiara Sità</li> <li>4. <i>Cultural Preparedness of Adult Educators: A Changing Dynamic in Higher Education through Transformative Learning,</i> Moirra McDonald</li> </ol> <p>Chair: Moira McDonald</p>	Room 13

	<p>Paper Session 3</p> <p>1. <i>Blind Box: What is Reflection and Transformative Learning During 14-day Forced Isolation?</i> Chengying Guo, Yunong Li, Yilu Guo</p> <p>2. <i>Dialogic (Embodied) Spaces as Research Methodology for Students Post- Graduation Reflection on their Dance Learning</i> Dagmar Spain</p> <p>3. <i>On the "bad road". Building inclusive and transformative trajectories between social distress, deviance and the Camorra system</i> Fausta Sabatano, Flavia Capodanno, Iolanda Zollo</p> <p>Chair: Dagmar Spain</p>	Room 14
	<p>Paper Session 4</p> <p>1. <i>Teacher learning communities and professional development: reflective practices and inclusive processes for students with ADHD</i> Antonello Mura, Antioco Luigi Zurru, Ilaria Tatulli, Daniele Bullegas</p> <p>2. <i>ADHD and families: transformative learning and parenting support</i> Antonello Mura, Daniele Bullegas</p> <p>3. <i>Integrating transformative, formative, and summative dimensions of human learning: a holistic model for the assessment of learning in Adult Basic Education</i> Monika Kastner</p> <p>Chair: Monika Kastner</p>	Room 15
	<p><b>Pecha Kucha</b></p>	

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Feminist 'good trouble': Reframing and (re)performing monumental points of view through photography in the public sphere</i> Darlene Clover, Sarah Williamson</li> <li>2. <i>Inviting Good Trouble Through Performing Justice</i> Lynn Hoare</li> <li>3. Museum and transformative learning: Empowering adult learning in the museum context Panagiotis Sarantidis, Georgios Papaioannou</li> </ol>	Auditorium–San Niccolò Complex
	Symposium	
	<i>Good Trouble: Re-imagining Informal and Incidental Learning Theory Through Transcontextual Exploration and Action</i> Ellen Scully-Russ, Maria Cseh, Victoria Marsick, Aliko Nicolaides, Dimitrios Papanagnou, DJ Ralston, Karen Watkins	Room 20
12.45 - 13.30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Networking Lunch</li> <li>• Formation of Affinity Groups–coordinated by Marguerite Welch &amp; Alexis Kokkos</li> <li>• Anyone who wants can participate in a cultural event that consists in visiting to the Old Mill of the Psychiatric Hospital, which, until 1973, was in the San Niccolo complex. Only with reservation (max. 20 people, deadline September 1<sup>st</sup>): <a href="https://docs.google.com/forms/d/14Ki715d16idex_YLLsnLCFw-71gVnRu3pvxRBA8hpuQ/viewform?edit_requested=true">https://docs.google.com/forms/d/14Ki715d16idex_YLLsnLCFw-71gVnRu3pvxRBA8hpuQ/viewform?edit_requested=true</a></li> </ul>	
13.30 - 15.00	Concurrent Sessions #5	San Niccolò Complex–Ground Floor
	Experiential Sessions	
	<i>Embracing Change</i> Toni Aspin	Open Space #1
	<i>Renewing Vibrancy, Compassion, and Connection Within Ourselves and Beyond</i> Catherine Etmanski, M. Beth Page	Open Space #2
	<i>Drawings and narratives of life crises as a transformational process</i> Charalampos Pouloupoulos, Anna Tsiboukli	Room 16

	<i>Using Narrative to Transform Community – from the power of me to the power of now</i> Lisa DeAngelis, Deanna Yameen	San Niccolò External Space
	Symposium	
	<i>Good Trouble: Re-imagining Informal and Incidental Learning Theory Through Transcontextual Exploration and Action</i> Ellen Scully-Russ, Maria Cseh, Victoria Marsick, Aliko Nicolaides, Dimitrios Papanagnou, DJ Ralston, Karen Watkins	Room 20
12.45 - 13.30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Networking Lunch</li> <li>Formation of Affinity Groups–coordinated by Marguerite Welch &amp; Alexis Kokkos</li> <li>Anyone who wants can participate in a cultural event that consists in visiting to the Old Mill of the Psychiatric Hospital, which, until 1973, was in the San Niccolo complex. Only with reservation (max. 20 people, deadline September 1<sup>st</sup>): <a href="https://docs.google.com/forms/d/14Ki715d16idex_YLLsnLCFw-71gVnRu3pvxRBA8hpuQ/viewform?edit_requested=true">https://docs.google.com/forms/d/14Ki715d16idex_YLLsnLCFw-71gVnRu3pvxRBA8hpuQ/viewform?edit_requested=true</a></li> </ul>	
13.30 - 15.00	Concurrent Sessions #5	
	San Niccolò Complex–Ground Floor	
	Experiential Sessions	
	<i>Embracing Change</i> Toni Aspin	Open Space #1
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	<i>Using Narrative to Transform Community – from the power of me to the power of now</i> Lisa DeAngelis, Deanna Yameen	San Niccolò External Space
	Paper Sessions	
Paper Session 1	Room 8	
1.	<i>Beyond Gestural Solidarities: Troubling the Intricacies in Transforming Organizations for Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI)</i> Ahreum Lim, Ellen Scully-Russ, Aliko Nicolaides	

	<p>2. <i>Bridge-building and Belonging Beyond the Classroom</i> Yabome Gilpin-Jackson, Deborah Kramlich</p> <p>3. <i>Collaborative Autoethnography as a Way to Negotiate, Survive, and Thrive in Academia</i> Mitsunori Misawa, Juanita Johnson-Bailey</p> <p>4. <i>Transformative Learning and Posthuman Feminism. White Researchers' Journey for Becoming an Anti-Racist and Feminist</i> Francesca Bracci, Nicolina Bosco</p> <p>Chair: Juanita Johnson-Bailey</p>	
	<p>Paper Session 2</p> <p>1. <i>Fostering Transformative Learning in Adult ESOL Classrooms: A Participatory Action Research Study</i> Fatma Ghailan, Sarah Siddiq, Gary Beharry</p> <p>2. <i>Promoting transformative epistemologies in teachers to counter youth existential distress at school. Reflections and proposals</i> Angelica Disalvo</p> <p>3. <i>Transformative Learning in Cohort-Based Programs: Exploring the Impact of Diversity on Group Transformation</i> Fatma Ghailan, T.J. Burkett, Cary Tabora, Jade Igbokwe</p> <p>Chair: Fatma Ghailan</p>	Room 13
	<p>Paper Session 3</p> <p>1. <i>The role of Quality Assurance in Transformative Learning in Higher Education: Implications for Policymakers and Accrediting Agencies</i> Cecilia Bibbo, Giuseppe Carci</p> <p>2. <i>Adult Lifelong Learning Communities of Actions to Enhance Environmental Literacy Through Transformative Learning</i> Eleni Vallianatou-Voutsina, Savvatou Tsolakidou</p> <p>3. <i>Nursing Students among transformative learning, professional well-being, and resilience. An observational quantitative study.</i> Natascia Bobbo, Paola Rigoni</p> <p>Chair: Eleni Vallianatou-Voutsina</p>	Room 14

	<p>Paper Session 4</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Accompanying transformation and being untroubled by trouble: How educators can use the kairos practice to elicit transformative moments at the edge of human experience</i> Magali Balayn Lelong, Oliver Crocco</li> <li>2. <i>Challenging Singlehood Stigma: Exploring Stereotypes and Prejudice against singles as a potential Transformative Learning experience</i> Marika Rullo, Giulia Amicone, Emilio Paolo Visintin</li> <li>3. <i>One Foot in the Known and One in the Unknown: Exploring the Potential of Psychedelics for Transformative Learning</i> Oliver Crocco</li> </ol> <p>Chair: Magali Balayn Lelong</p>	Room 15
	<p>Paper Session 5</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>The Transformative Power of Sustainable Learning: Facilitating Teacher Professional Development in Displacement, Refugee, and Crisis Settings</i> Diana Woolis, Oula Abu-Amsha, Sara Kassab</li> <li>2. <i>How transformative learning can create the conditions for perspective transformation in a UK Defence Healthcare setting</i> lan Corrie, Susan Pope, Susan Wilbraham</li> <li>3. <i>Conceptualizing transformative listening in the workplace: a theoretical and practical proposal</i> Vanessa Lemos, Janette Brunstein</li> <li>4. <i>The disorienting dilemmas of wellbeing in higher education: An educator's perspective</i> Susan Wilbraham, Charlotte Hardacre</li> </ol> <p>Chair: Vanessa Lemos</p>	Auditorium–San Niccolò Complex

	<p>Paper Session 6</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Deliberate Phases of Transformative Learning Theory applied to an Educational Sustainability Doctoral Program</i> Erin Redman, Yue Li, Cathy Scheder</li> <li><i>New spaces and educational communities for citizens: the case of Viceversa Project</i> Francesca Bianchi, Camilla Radice, Michela Fiaschi, Diego Cariani</li> <li><i>Transformative overture(s) to the caged bird's song of freedom. Educational approaches "intra muros"</i> Labrina Gioti, Dimitra Markou, Katerina Toka, Kalliopi Gerostergiou</li> </ol> <p>Chair: Francesca Bianchi</p>	Room 18
	<b>Pecha Kucha</b>	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Collective Transformative Learning to Promote Girls' Holistic Development in Senegal</i> Judi Aubel</li> <li><i>Modern Techniques for Transformative Learning: The JASS Academy Case Study</i> Simi Lawoyin</li> <li><i>Japanese Spiritual Practices: A Path to Transformative Learning</i> Ryosuke Watanabe, Risako Watanabe</li> </ol>	Room 20
15.00 - 15.15	Break	
15.15 - 16.45	Concurrent Sessions #6	San Niccolò Complex–Ground Floor
	Experiential Sessions	
	<i>Troubling Broken Systems through Caring Conversations</i> Henriette Lundgren, DJ Ralston, Kathrin Achenbach	Open Space #1
	<i>Ecosophic Mapping of Adult Educators: Why Intervene? Proposing a Cookbook for Navigating Liminality and the Ethos of Transformation</i> Ahreum Lim, Aliko Nicolaidis, Trisha Barefield, Allie Cox, Neal Herr, Shannon Perry	Open Space #2
	<i>Allyship: How to Create a Space of Belonging?</i> Odinakachukwu Ehie, Danielle McCullough, Ruth Gotian	Room 16



	<p><i>Listening Through the Chaos: Toward Transforming Collective Trauma in We-Space</i>  <b>Placida Gallegos, Steven Schapiro</b></p>	San Niccolò External Space
	<p><i>Troubling Transformative Learning Theory in the Context of Liquid Modernity</i>  <b>Tanya Behrisch, Natalia Bussard</b></p>	Room 20
	Paper Sessions	
	<p>Paper Session 1</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Gender Trouble and Getting Gender Into Good Trouble: De-constructing Gender Identity through Transformative Learning</i>  <b>Nils Weber, Saskia Eschenbacher</b></li> <li>2. <i>Saving Lives: Transformative Experiences in the Emergency Industry</i>  <b>Saskia Eschenbacher</b></li> <li>3. <i>"Staying with the trouble": Participatory visual research as transformative learning with young women</i>  <b>Naydene De Lange</b></li> </ol> <p>Chair: <b>Naydene De Lange</b></p>	Room 8
	<p>Paper Session 2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Becoming a Change Agent: A professional transformative path for faculty at University of Padua</i>  <b>Concetta Tino, Monica Fedeli, Laura Bierema, Edward Taylor</b></li> <li>2. <i>Embracing Transformative Learning in Teacher Education: the challenge of Italian Teaching and Learning Centers</i>  <b>Francesco Magni, Virginia Capriotti</b></li> <li>3. <i>Experienced time in the adult learning process: between turning points and long-term reflexivity</i>  <b>Jerome Eneau, Delphine Grech, Aline Ganivet, Eric Bertrand</b></li> </ol>	Room 13
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. <i>My Theory, my Tool, my Tribe: X-raying Scholars' Perspectives on the Evolution of Transformative Learning</i>  <b>Monica Fedeli, Taiwo Isaac Olatunji</b></li> </ol> <p>Chair: <b>Laura Bierema</b></p>	Room 13	

	<p>Paper Session 3</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Faith, Transitions and Transformative Learning: An Exploration of a Community of Middle-Aged Women</i> Grace Alcid</li> <li>2. <i>Parkinson's care innovation as transformative learning</i> Thieme Stap</li> <li>3. <i>Recurrent Life Crises and Potential for Transformative Learning: Making Sense of Natural Disasters in Bahamas</i> Sara Bano, Fredricka Saunders, Isaac Mensah, Amjad Barayan, Frank Antwi-Boasiakoh</li> <li>4. <i>Shame as a Catalyst for Transformative Change in Men: Group Learning in Addictions Recovery</i> Daniel Jordan, Jude Walker</li> </ol> <p>Chair: Sara Bano</p>	Room 14
	<p>Paper Session 4</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Bridging Transformative Learning in Programs to Livelihood By Designing Your Life</i> Chalisa Kaewla</li> <li>2. <i>Exploring Transformative and Formative Practices within Social Movements: A Focus on the LGBTIQ+ Community</i> Davide Ciofi</li> <li>3. <i>Conceptualizing Transformative Learning through Lenses of Vulnerability and Leadership</i> Li-Hsuan Hsu</li> <li>4. <i>How to provide safe (enough) spaces for transformative learning to support courageous and decolonial practices towards climate justice</i> Skyller Walkes, Anaïs Sägesser, Ruth Förster, Mandy Singer- Brodowski</li> </ol> <p>Chair: Li-Hsuan Hsu</p>	Room 15
	<p>Paper Session 5</p>	Auditorium–San Niccolò Complex

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Now I see the colony: Searching for and learning to use the science in our cultural practices to decolonize the science curriculum.</i> Eunice Nyamupangedengu, Constance Khupe</li> <li>2. <i>Contextualizing and transforming child rights education - A decolonizing, participatory project in Canada and Uganda</i> Shelley Jones, Kathleen Manion</li> <li>3. <i>Decision making process: the case of judiciary.</i> Marina Mura, Loretta Fabbri</li> <li>4. <i>Healing our hearts and our planet: The role of transformative learning</i> Katrina Rogers, Leni Wildflower</li> </ol> <p>Chair: Eunice Nyamupangedengu</p>	
	<p>Paper Session 6</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Bildung and Transformative Learning</i> Andrea Potestio, Alice Locatelli</li> <li>2. <i>Do Japanese business leaders experience transformative learning through a deliberately developmental organizational culture intervention? A developmental perspective</i> Risako Watanabe, Ryosuke Watanabe</li> <li>3. <i>Representations that hinder the use of informal learning in work contexts</i> Claudia Banchetti</li> </ol> <p>Chair: Ryosuke Watanabe</p>	Room 18
16.45 - 17.00	Break	
17.00 - 17.30	Patricia Cranton Distinguished Dissertation Award	Auditorium – San Niccolò Complex
17.30 – 18.00	Plenary Session: Closing Remarks of Day 2	
18.30 – 21.30	<p>Cultural event: Visit Siena with a guided tour<sup>1</sup> (18.30 – 19.30). Cost: 20,00 euros per person. The guided tour includes a walking tour. A car cannot be used to reach places of interest. Only with reservation (deadline September 2<sup>nd</sup>): <a href="https://buy.stripe.com/4gw3dUoyKawy6Ri4gg">https://buy.stripe.com/4gw3dUoyKawy6Ri4gg</a></p> <p>At 20.00 Free Dinner at Orto dei Pecci (<a href="http://www.ortodepecci.it/webnew/">http://www.ortodepecci.it/webnew/</a>). Orto dei Pecci is a restaurant run by a social cooperative that provides employment to disabled and marginalised people. It serves organic and local products. Orto dei Pecci is located near the Palazzo dei Congressi in a lovely garden (<a href="https://maps.app.goo.gl/ApfwTk3e377j9b079">https://maps.app.goo.gl/ApfwTk3e377j9b079</a>)</p>	

Menu: Tuscan appetizers and pizza + drinks  
 Only with reservation (deadline September 8<sup>th</sup>):  
[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1L\\_HJMfVPyNErtgZt8FHoxUGb1QboaO2oSSXzLLUqvs/edit](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1L_HJMfVPyNErtgZt8FHoxUGb1QboaO2oSSXzLLUqvs/edit)

**ITLC Day 3 - Friday, September 13, 2024**

Time	Session title	Location
8.00-9.30	Registration	Auditorium - San Niccolò Complex
9.30-10.15	Keynote Speaker: <b>Isabel Rimanoczy</b> Introduction by Ellen Scully-Russ	
10.15-11.00	Keynote Speech Reflections & Discussion Facilitators: <b>Monica Fedeli, Stacey Robbins</b>	
11.15-12.45	Concurrent Sessions #7	San Niccolò Complex–Ground Floor
	Experiential Sessions	
	<i>Taking in Questioning Assumptions: Centering the role of identity and context in Transformative Learning</i> <b>Rajashi Ghosh, Pierre Faller</b>	Open Space #1
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## EXPERIENTIAL



## EXPERIENTIAL

Opportunities to engage interactively with others around a specific topic

# Embracing Change: Developing Greater Mental Complexity to Meet Societal Challenges

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**Abstract:** We have a built-in emotional immune system that keeps us “safe “ from the threat of venturing into unknown territory with our existing habits of mind. While this immunity is giving us relief from the anxiety of the unknown it is also creating a false belief that many things are impossible for us to do when, in fact, they are completely possible. Transformation Theory explains how we make sense of what we know and believe. It tells us we can interrogate our existing frames of reference, learn new frames, which then transforms our habits of mind and points of view. We can change our epistemologies. We learn that it is not change that causes anxiety, rather, it is feeling defenseless in new territory. Change can leave us feeling exposed to dangers for which we are unfamiliar. We can overcome our existing immune system by replacing it with a more expansive one that increases our mental complexity. With greater mental complexity we can meet the ubiquitous challenges facing ourselves and society. What better trouble could transformative learning get into than to support us in the complex act of choosing the world in which we want to live and creating it?

**Key Words:** Transformation, Epistemology, Adult Development, Immunity

Can it be that humans are not just resistant to change but incapable of it? Must we face the realization that, at most, post adolescence, all we can do is make a few adjustments around the fringes? If this scenario is an accurate depiction of mental development, how will our society effectively maneuver increasingly complex, multi-faceted challenges that define our world?

It turns out that both hard and soft scientists have now come to agree that mental development does not need to end at adolescence, rather, the mental models that shaped us in our early years are malleable and can continue to develop well into mature adulthood (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). We humans are not only capable of developing greater mental complexity, we must, to meet the ubiquitous societal challenges and opportunities facing us.

## Making Sense

Given there are no fixed truths or wholly definitive knowledge, we largely make sense of our experiences by turning to tradition, by thoughtlessly seizing explanations from authority figures, or by resorting to various psychological mechanisms such as projection and rationalization to create imaginary meanings (Mezirow, 2000). Mezirow goes on to write, “the human condition may be best understood as a continuous effort to negotiate contested meaning “ (p. 3). We cannot fully trust what we know or believe.

We look to Transformation Theory to help us understand how we make sense of what we know and believe in the absence of fixed truths. We examine our meaning structures, the structure of assumptions and expectations through which we filter sense impressions. We interrogate our frames of reference by becoming critically reflective of our assumptions and their context – the source, nature, and consequences of taken-for-granted beliefs (Mezirow, 2000). We become critically aware of our tacit assumptions and expectations as well as those of others to assess their relevance for making an interpretation.

A frame of reference is composed of two dimensions: a habit of mind and resulting points of view. A habit of mind is a set of assumptions – broad, generalized, orienting predispositions that act as a filter for interpreting the meaning of experience. Examples of habits of mind include *aesthetic* such as values, tastes, and attitudes, *philosophical* such as religious doctrine, *psychological* such as self-concept, personality types, and emotional response patterns, and *epistemic* such as learning styles and sensory preferences.

These habits of mind become expressed as a points-of-view – sets of immediate specific expectations, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and judgments – that tacitly direct and shape a specific interpretation and determine how we typify objects and attribute causality.

Transformation, then, is “reformulating reified meaning structures by reconstructing dominant narratives “ (Mezirow, 2000, p.19). We transform our frames of reference by first elaborating our existing frames, then learning new frames which then transforms habits of mind and points of view.

### **Developing New Epistemologies**

At its root, frame of reference is a way of knowing or epistemology – not *what* we know but *how* we know. Two paths are inherent in epistemology, and both are at the heart of transformative learning. The first path is the way we shape coherent meaning out of the raw material of our outer and inner experiencing – called *meaning-forming*. “Our perceiving is simultaneously an act of conceiving and interpreting “ (Kegan, 2000, p. 52). The second path is the metaprocess of our *meaning-constructing*. We not only form meaning, but we also change meaning and the very structure by which we make meaning. We can change our epistemologies.

These two paths stem from both educational and psychological lines of thought: the educational being at the root of transformative learning and the psychological rooted in constructive developmentalism. As Kegan asserts, (1982, 1994, 2000) “a form of knowing always consists of a temporary equilibrium between the subject and the object of one’s knowing, “ what Keegan calls subject-object balance. We are governed by, identified, and fused with that which is *subject*. But we can gaze at, reflect on, take responsibility for, and exercise control over that which is *object*. What is *subject* in our knowing describes the thinking and feeling that has us. What is *object* in our knowing describes the thoughts and feelings we say we have. “We *are subject*; we *have object*. “ (Kegan, 2000, p. 53)

Constructive-development theory is rooted in the notion that the world does not exist to be discovered, but that people create their world by discovering it. Humans make meaning through their own lenses. Further, the systems wherein people use to make meaning grow and change over the course of life. As individuals transition from one developmental stage to the next, the way in which they make sense of their world broadens, becomes more complex, more expansive, and leads to a qualitative evolution in meaning-making. From Keegan’s school of thought, constructive-development theory depicts the process of development as gradual, and our way of knowing moves from a place of subjectivity to a place of objectivity (<https://developingleadership.net/adult-development-2>). This epistemological depiction of development may come close to the meaning of transformation in transformative learning theory (Kegan, 2000).

### **Mental Complexity**

A transformative learning journey that Keegan describes is developmental in nature and involves three profoundly different adult meaning systems - qualitatively different plateaus that

represent the way we make sense of the world and operate within and that moves us toward greater mental complexity.

*The socialized mind*

- We are shaped by the definitions and expectations of our personal environment.
- Our self coheres by its alignment with that which it identifies.
- This can express itself primarily in our relationship with people, with self, or with our ideas and beliefs.

*The self-authoring mind*

- We are able to step back enough from the social environment to generate a personal authority that evaluates and makes choices about external expectations.
- Our self coheres by its alignment with its own belief system, by its ability to self-direct, take stands, create boundaries on behalf of its own voice.

*The self-transforming mind*

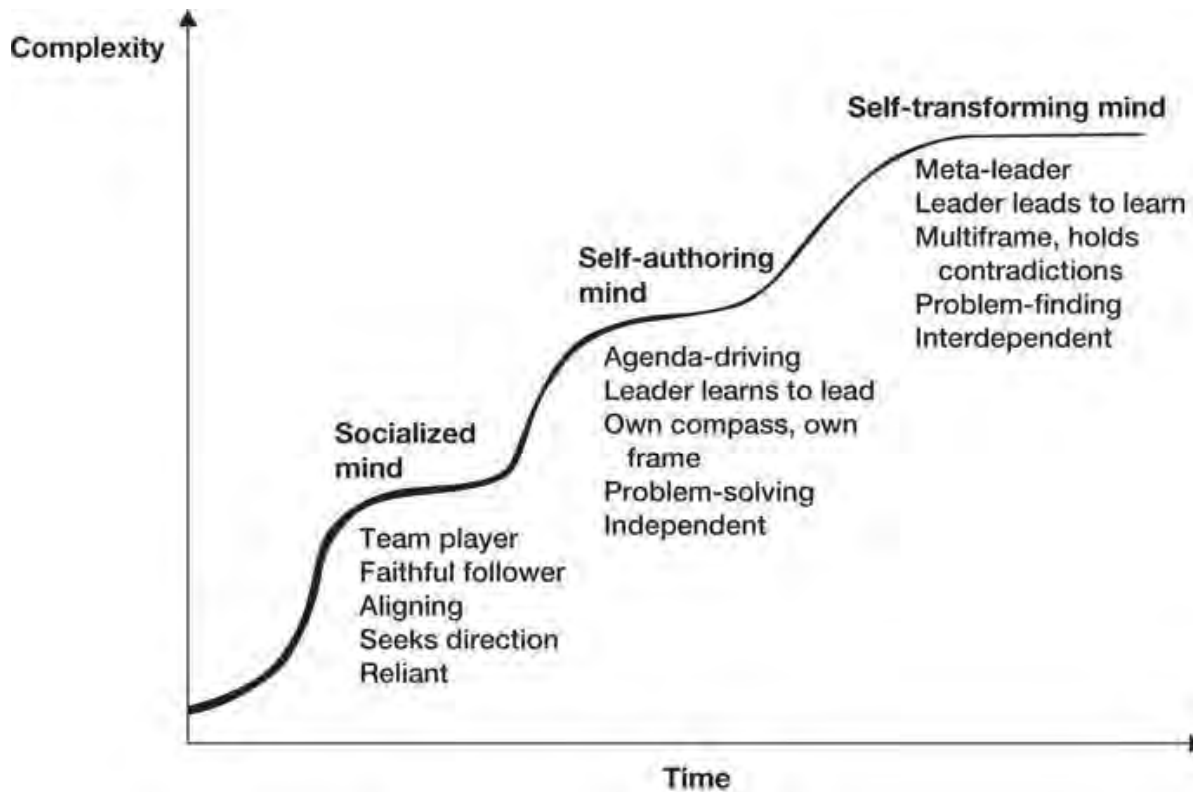
- We can step back from and reflect on the limits of our own ideology, see that it might be partial, become friendlier toward contradiction and opposites, appreciate multiple systems rather than projecting all but one onto the other.
- Our self coheres through its ability not to confuse internal consistency with completeness, and through its alignment with the dialectic rather than either pole.

Each level represents a different way of knowing. Development throughout these levels does not unfold continuously – there are periods of stability and periods of change. When a new plateau is reached, we tend to stay on that level for a considerable period, and the intervals between transformations to new levels get longer and longer. The line gets thinner, because fewer and fewer people reach the higher plateaus. (See Figure 1)

**Figure 1**

*The Trajectory of Mental Development in Adulthood*

Note: Robert Keegan & Lisa Laskow Lahey (2009) p.15



### Technical vs Adaptive Challenges

Another important distinction made in grasping mental complexity is what Ron Heifetz (1995, 2009) posits as knowing the difference between two kinds of challenges, *technical* and *adaptive*. Technical challenges are not easy or simple nor are their results necessarily unimportant or insignificant. Technical challenges are solvable and the skillset necessary to perform the solution is well known – the solution simply needs to be applied by a person with the skill. Think of having to land an airplane with a stuck nose wheel. A difficult and unnerving problem but the solution is well-known – *a technical problem*.

The most pressing challenges in today's environment call for something more astute than applying technical skills. These are the *adaptive challenges* that require mindset transformation, advancing to a more complex stage of mental development – leveling up. The biggest error we can make as developing human beings or as leaders is applying a technical solution to an adaptive challenge. We must find a higher-level means of supporting ourselves and others to meet adaptive challenges. Imagine a leader whose team has become totally disengaged and performance is wholly inadequate. How does the team and the leader frame this challenge in an adaptive way? How do we take the leap onto the next plateau of mental complexity?

Kegan posits that complexity is really a story about the relationship between the complex demands of the world and our own complexity of mind. Two choices seem apparent, we can either reduce the complexity of the world, which is not about to occur, or we can increase our own capacity to function within complexity. The gap between our complexity and the

complexity of the world's demands brings to light the necessity for an evolving mindset. This gap could also explain one reason humans find change so challenging.

### Why Resist?

Keegan & Laskow Lahey (2009) developed a technology that draws on transformation, complexity, and adaptability to uncover the missing piece of the puzzle that reveals why change seems so difficult. They named this technology *Immunity to Change*. It is a tool to be used to answer the question *why do we sabotage the things we really want by engaging in obstructive behaviors?* A recent medical study revealed that when doctors told their seriously at-risk heart patients that they would literally die if they did not make changes to their personal life – diet, exercise, lifestyle – only **one in seven** patients were able to make the necessary changes. Lack of urgency or inadequate incentives do not seem to explain this enigma, so, what is at the root of our seeming inability to take constructive action to get what we need and want?

An immune system is a beautiful thing most of the time, an intelligent force that acts to protect us. But what happens when our immune system threatens our continued good health – turns on us by rejecting new material, internal or external to the body, that is needed to heal itself or to thrive. In these situations, the immune system is no less focused on protecting us, it is simply making a mistake. And it is putting us in danger of stagnation.

Akin to being stuck at a lower level of mental complexity or to applying a technical solution to an adaptive challenge, we are unable to make traction on a sincere commitment to change even when it is for our own betterment. Sincere avowals to change become the equivalent of a New Year's resolution which may be sincere but has a dismal record of accomplishment.

So, how do we reach greater mental complexity? Research reveals that optimal conflict seems to play a major role in this shift (Keegan & Laskow Lahey, 2009). The persistent experience of some frustration, dilemma, life puzzle, or quandary – something we care about and have sufficient supports to challenge, and which causes us to feel the *limits* of our current way of knowing. Mezirow refers to this phenomenon as a “disorienting dilemma “ (Mezirow, 2000, p.22.)

Our immunity to change is serving as an anxiety management system. It is telling us that change is dangerous and that it is better not to venture out of our perceived comfort zone, even though we are frustrated with the status quo. We can use the *Immunity to Change* technology (See Figure 2) to study this process and to then interrogate those commitments and assumptions that are hidden to us at our current level of development.

**Figure 2**

*Immunity to Change Map*

Note: <https://www.leaneast.com/immunity-to-change>

Commitment	Doing/not doing instead	Hidden competing commitments	Big assumptions
<p>To better focus on a few critical things:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delegate</li> <li>• Clarify outcomes desired</li> <li>• Accept different approaches</li> <li>• Support small failures as learning</li> <li>• Challenge the thought process and logic</li> </ul>	<p>I let new opportunities distract me, adding to my list.</p> <p>I accept more tasks and sacrifice non-work-related things.</p> <p>I don't consistently balance time commitment to urgent and important rankings.</p> <p>I don't ask people to help me.</p>	<p>(I fear missing a good opportunity. Falling behind.) I'm committed to being independent and capable of anything.</p> <p>(I fear letting my team down. If I put myself first I feel guilty and selfish.) I'm committed to being selfless.</p> <p>(I dislike leaving boxes unchecked—it's harder to drop something than just to do it.) I'm committed to always finding a way to get it done.</p>	<p>If I am dependent on others and unable to do many things well, I lose my self-respect.</p> <p>If I put myself first I'll become what I dislike in others—superficial and trivial.</p> <p>If I don't find a way to get things done, I'll stop being valuable.</p>

Working from left to right on the map, we see that the first step in this journey is to set one improvement goal to which I will seriously commit (column 1). This step is the key to working through the entirety of the map. It may require that I confer with family and/or colleagues to confirm that this commitment will make a real difference in my life and the lives of those around me, be it my team at work, personal relationships, or family. The next step (column 2) is to recognize and articulate the behaviors I engage in instead of what it takes to realize this improvement goal. I ask myself *what are the behaviors I am doing that work against this commitment?* For column 3, I want to expose the hidden commitments (likely unconscious to me) I have that compete with my improvement goal in column 1. I ask myself, *what is the worst, most uncomfortable thing that could happen* if I did the opposite of the behaviors listed in column 2? Finally, column 4 is my opportunity to create an adaptive formulation of my challenge to change. What are my big assumptions that are signally *danger* to my immune system, making it difficult to attain my desired improvement goal? This work requires that I dig deep and look at myself through an objective lens. Working this map will not be a quick run through. I may need to leave it and come back, a few times.

This work, however, should bring to light three dimensions of immunity to change: 1) *change prevention* - we are actively preventing the very change we wish to make, thwarting challenging aspirations, 2) we are attempting to *manage anxiety* by soothing the feeling system,



and 3) we are *preserving the existing knowing system* (epistemology) by organizing reality in a way that maintains our existing way of knowing the world and ourselves – this is safe.

We find that our immune system has been giving us relief from anxiety but at the same time creating a false belief that many things are impossible for us to do when, in fact, they are completely possible.

What considerations will guide us in our quest to overcome our immunity?

- Overcoming immunity does not mean eliminating all our anxiety-management systems. Success lies in transforming the existing immune system and building one more complex (adaptive rather than technical).
- Understanding that it is not change that causes anxiety. It is feeling we are without defenses in our new territory. Change leaves us feeling exposed to dangers for which we are unfamiliar. We build an immune system to save our lives. We will not easily surrender such critical protection.
- With more expansive mental complexity we have entered an entirely new developmental plateau and can now make sense from this new way of seeing and being.

### **Applying our Insights**

There is a real disconnect between the changes we genuinely want to make in our personal and professional lives and our pessimism about our ability to make any changes at all. The adult development implications that emerge from critical reflection, from interrogating our frames of reference, from stepping to the next plateau of a more complex mindset is vital to meet the state of the world in which we find ourselves. We must go well beyond simply coping with the greater complexities of the world, we must create fertile ground for growing what is possible, we must foster new visions, leverage new opportunities, learn to deliver on our greatest aspirations.

What better trouble could transformative learning get into than to support us in the complex act of choosing the world in which we want to live and creating it.

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## **Exploring Transformative Learning Through the Lens of Dr. Seuss: Leveraging the Iconic Classics to Reinforce Activity-Based-Play and Enhance Our Understanding of Transformative Learning Theory**

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**Abstract:** This session demonstrates how activity-based play catalyzes an expanding understanding of transformative learning theory. Organizations and educational institutions' intentional efforts toward reevaluating play's value serve to cultivate transformative learning experiences. The flow of the experiential session will analyze a collection of Dr. Seuss's books through a critical evaluation of how transformative learning becomes illustrated, discussing its correlation to present research underway on activity-based play and leadership development training and addressing how these tenets apply within respective communities of practice. Discussions will highlight how the cultivation of play space within an experiential learning and development strategy, centered on deliberately developing organizations, deals with skill gaps currently derailing many associations' leadership succession planning efforts. Applying transformative learning strategies within professional development programs equips the next generation of leaders with the necessary skills to thrive in their work environment and drive organizational performance successfully. This reimagination of the training approach invites learners and educators to move beyond their comfort zones towards traditional knowledge transfer experiences and embrace the new possibilities and perspectives of transformative learning frameworks.

**Key Words:** Activity-based Play, Transformative Learning, Organizational Performance, Training, Dr. Seuss

### **Introduction**

This workshop seeks to display insights for applying transformative learning strategies within leadership development curriculums to influence professional growth. Play represents a “unique and universal human experience “ (Kark, 2011, p. 508). Ted Giesel, aka Dr. Seuss, 's revolutionary approach to encouraging reading and learning was done by incorporating fun into the experience. In a complementary fashion, Meyer (2010) invites audiences to reclaim “playspace “ by embracing the new possibilities and perspectives that this mind shift offers (p. 35). Celestine and Yeo's (2020) research surrounding activity-based play at work prompts institutions to consider reevaluating play's value when cultivating transformative learning experiences. Fink's (2013) taxonomy for creating significant learning experiences is a pivotal paradigm referenced during the session. The workshop's structure entails a series of interactive discussions on how transformative learning appears and a call to action ideating innovative ways to incorporate it within leadership development programs.

The breakout discussion starts by reading the short story assigned to the respective table group. This step aims to show the recognizable playful tone in Dr. Seuss's writing style. In addition, it helps to establish common ground for any participant who may need to become more familiar with Dr. Seuss and serves as a quick refresher of the story's plot and primary characters for those who may not readily recall the details of the table's assigned tale. Following the

reading, the table group will respond to thought-provoking questions, facilitate dialogue on the highlighted adult learning theories, and openly reimagine what this means for our performance and contributions to society as transformative learners and educators.

### **General Perspectives on Play at Work**

“Playfulness, the state of being full of possibilities, is essential to organizational survival” (Meyer, 2010, p. 9). Before complete immersion into the whimsical world of Dr. Seuss, there exists an opportunity to frame a connection between leadership development, transformative learning theory, and activity-based play strategies. The application of activity-based-play learning approaches serves as a conduit for promoting social-emotional learning and instilling psychologically safe workspaces (Boxberger, 2023; Chung, 2019).

Play is multidimensional and offers varying experiential approaches for developing creative solutions to conflict or arising problems (Kupers, 2017). Often, traditional workspace projects limit appreciation for the innovation and transformative experiences induced by an activity-based interaction. The anxiety expressed when role-play simulations become introduced as an experiential element to training represents the reservations and prevailing sentiment towards play within the traditional workspace. Playful engagements at work activate discoveries and meaning-making, leading to new perspectives and mindsets toward success (Meyer, 2010; Meyer, 2012).

Applying transformative learning strategies within professional development programs equips the next generation of leaders with the necessary skills to thrive in their work environment and drive organizational performance successfully. Activity-based play enables collaboration across teams in effectively navigating meta-crises and VUCA workspaces to achieve targets (Arpin, 2021). Experimenting with alternative learning activities promotes creative and innovative thinking and ultimately influences our evolving “habits of mind” (Cranton, 2016, p.19).

### **Impact of Activity-Based Play in Work Environments**

Play and work are not exclusive entities and present instances for enhancing well-being and team performance (Scharp et al., 2023; Celestine & Yeo, 2017). Although the framework behind deliberately developmental organizations (DDOs) does not conceptualize play, it anchors to creating practices and forging a culture with high levels of interactivity among all players within an organization (Kegan & Lahey, 2016; Kegan, 2018). This approach promotes a culture of senior leadership meeting team members where they are by recognizing and appreciating unique contributions. In addition, it aligns with Merchant’s (2017) concept of “onlyness” which acknowledges that each of us adds value simply by standing in the world where only one stands—essentially representing the divergent development stages of individuals.

The DDO strategy complements the concept of “serious play,” which involves managers initiating work-embedded activity to achieve goals (Celestine & Yeo, 2017, p. 258). LEGO® Serious Play (LSP) methodologies showcase how play synergizes creativity across teams and operates as a strategy for promoting high performance (Boston et al., 2017; Carlson, 2017; Martin-Cruz et al., 2022). Play serves a purpose in deepening confidence toward an individual’s potential in conflict resolution, generating solutions to organizational challenges, and fostering effective communication to navigate today’s dynamic landscape successfully.

Research surrounding activity-based play at work prompts institutions to consider reevaluating play’s value within professional settings (Celestine & Yeo, 2020). As a component

of leadership development and the future of work, when leaders consider the application of play as a strategy within the work environment, play can be positioned to promote transformative learning. According to Arpin (2021), “Game-based learning is connected to motivation, learner engagement, behavior change, and learning achievement “ (p. 8).

How do organizations and institutions move towards reevaluating play’s value in cultivating transformative learning and development experiences? Creating learning spaces that encourage participants to understand themselves better and others is vital to developing significant learning experiences influenced by human dimensions (Fink, 2013). Fink’s (2013) taxonomy of significant learning runs parallel to the phases of perspective transformation (Mizerow, 2018):

- 1) Experiencing a disorienting dilemma
- 2) Undergoing self-examination
- 3) Conducting a critical assessment of internalized assumptions and feeling a sense of alienation from traditional social expectations
- 4) Relaxing discontent to the similar experiences of others – recognizing that the problem is shared
- 5) Exploring options for new ways of acting
- 6) Building competence and self-confidence in new roles
- 7) Planning a course of action
- 8) Acquiring the knowledge and skills for implementing a new course of action
- 9) Trying out new roles and assessing them
- 10) Reintegrating into society with the new perspective (adapted from Mezirow, 1991, pp 168-169)  
(Cranton, 2016, p. 16)

Learning conversion occurs with the intersection of foundational knowledge, application, integration, human dimension, caring, and learning how to learn (Fink, 2013). Significant learning involves the learner changing central to the individual’s lived experience (Fink, 2013). Play represents activation and commitment to learning by doing to solve complex problems existing in the world. The sustainability of activity-based play within work environments is contingent on the collective commitment of team members, both leaders and individual contributors, who are engaged in collaborative efforts to enable transformative learning (Meyer, 2010; Meyer, 2012). In transitioning to evaluating themes presented throughout a sampling of Dr. Seuss’s books, there is an opportunity to engage in play to enhance our understanding of transformative learning theory.

### **Green Eggs and Ham**

How does social-emotional learning (SEL) correlate with transformative learning theory? Dr. Seuss (1954a) illustrates how emotions, intuition, and imagination (Mizerow, 2018) affect learning. Sam I Am facilitates the transformative experience of the secondary character (Dr. Seuss, 1954a). While the secondary character initially closes his mind off to something, he later opens to possibilities and embraces the unique delicacy of green eggs and ham. This discovery process fuels the expression and association of past experiences – emotion functions as a catalyst in affecting learning experiences (Jackson, 2018). Perez (2020) notes that “emotions drive our attention; they influence our ability to process information and what we encounter “ (p. 10). Sam I Am enables “situational cognition “ (Merriam, 2018, p.88) by creating an environment with

the relevant context that allows the learning activity to transpire fully. From this example, how can leadership educators promote curiosity to enable meaningful learning? How do educators provide a learning experience that stimulates leaders' degree of care towards something? "When [learners] care about something, they then have the energy they need for learning more about it and making it part of their lives" (Fink, 2013, p. 36). Bergin et al. (2023) highlight how SEL engagements foster communal relationships, leading to a greater appreciation of alternative perspectives and increased active listening – essential leadership development skills.

### **Horton Hears a Who**

How does understanding the individual learner impact the overall learning process? Dr. Seuss (1954b) presents a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous situation underway as Horton attempts to protect the Who population occupying his purple Clover—the jungle community's recognition of the individual Who residents become paramount to their survival. Horton's existential encounter represents the transformation of his community through learning (Jarvis, 2018). In addition, both Horton and his community experience the phases of transformation through the sensations (Jarvis, 2018). Within the cycle, each group first takes the world for granted; then they experience a sensory disconnection, which leads to reflection in making sense of the circumstances, followed by a resolution and committed action complementary to the mind shift (Jarvis, 2018). Kwon (2022) explains how the VUCA-natured workspace we operate in today emphasizes the relevance of curating transformative learning experiences to empower individual growth and development. From Horton to his surrounding jungle community to the Who residents on the Clover, each entity emphasizes integrating "our understanding of the whole person in the social situation" and significant learning experiences (Jarvis, 2018, p. 24; Fink, 2013). When formulating learning objectives, how can leadership educators integrate a learning design that elicits discovery surrounding the human dimension and connections between ideas, learning experiences, and realms of life (Fink, 2013)?

### **How the Grinch Stole Christmas**

"Learning has a reflective component. When a learner sits down and thinks, she/he is engaging in a reflective process" (Siemens, 2006, p. 106). The infamous Grinch (Dr. Seuss, 1957) transforms from a recluse stealing toys from children to a champion of Christmas. The Grinch exemplifies an empowered learner by being "able to fully and freely engage in critical reflection, participate in discourse, and act on revised perspectives" (Cranton, 2016, p. 47). Kreber (2012) revisits Mizerow's (2018) "habits of the mind" (p. 116) and denotes the relationship between how people's actions and viewpoints become steered by the meaning they make about their respective experiences. By undergoing an experience, critical reflection, reflective discourse, and acting, the Grinch advances through the four elements of the transformative learning process, resulting in a change of self-identity due to his shift in beliefs and mindset (Sweet, 2021). Kegan (2018) advocates intentionality with learning designs to minimize overwhelming learners during learning experiences. How do leadership educators balance inciting a disorienting event effectively and maintain interest in enhancing "human dimensions" as part of transformative learning (Fink, 2013, p. 36)? When considering the brain's state of mind, whether curiosity- or anxiety-driven, what "brain-aware" (Taylor, 2016, p. 5) approaches are relevant to inspire adult learners to engage in critical reflection proactively?

## **The Lorax**

In *The Lorax*, Dr. Seuss's (1971) title character prophesizes that "unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not." Whether intentional or unintentional, there is an underlying emphasis on promoting critical reflection and transformative learning. Through his explanation of the Lorax's departing message, "unless," the Onceler illuminates the transformative learning theory conceptualizations presented in the works of Mizerow (2018), Cranton (2016), and Taylor (2012). Dr. Seuss's (1971) dire tale about environmental consumption emphasizes the influence of reflection guiding future practices. *The Lorax* brings to life several critical concepts about transformative learning theories. The Onceler's evolution demonstrates the targeted development outcomes for transformative groups described by Schapiro et al. (2012):

- 1) Personal growth and awareness
  - 2) Relational empathy across differences
  - 3) Critical systemic consciousness
- (p. 360)

The Onceler has infinite time in his tower home to consider how his actions have negatively impacted the world around him. This fictional character becomes living proof of Kreber's (2012) position on how social learning affects our personas by "fram[ing] our moral reasoning, our interpersonal relationships, and our ways of knowing, experiencing, and judging what is real and true" (p. 327). When an opportunity presents itself, the Onceler is inspired to share his worldviews with the young boy who stops by. The Onceler's reverence towards the circumstance he contributed to functions as a way of "helping us experience ourselves as part of a greater community of life and inculcating a sense of care for other beings" (Hathaway, 2022, p. 280). How do educators inspire the application of learning from one arena to other kinds of learning (Fink, 2013)? What elements can leadership educators include in development programs that cause reflection toward change in their degree of caring (Fink, 2013)?

## **The Sneetches and Other Stories**

The Sneetches (Dr. Seuss, 1961) represent a case study for building inclusive experiential learning experiences. The title characters discover how to find common ground through valuing differences. Smith (2012) draws attention to the value of collaborative learning by confirming that it "engenders sustained discussion and the need to coordinate different points of view, which means that the students must consider alternative perspectives" (p. 415). Cranton (2016) emphasizes the significance of challenging ideology and increasing exposure to alternative perspectives as part of a transformative learning experience. The author denotes how those engaged in diverse discourse investigate new perspectives and adjust communications to different audiences' viewpoints. "Having an open mind, listening carefully and empathically, seeking common ground, and suspending judgment help learners to assess alternative beliefs as they participate in the discourse" (Cranton, 2016, p. 97). How do educators instill psychological safety as part of a social learning experience to encourage sharing divergent perspectives? How are learners positioned to make new connections between ideas and various learning experiences as part of building "intellection power" (Fink, 2013, p. 36)? How do educators intentionally promote inclusive practices in adult transformative learning?

## Reflection & Further Research

This workshop delved into leveraging play as a transformative learning strategy to influence professional growth and development. The session's structure entailed exploring ways to cultivate play into significant learning moments for ideating innovative ways to engage and lead teams. The recent experiment involving PEDIGREE® treats to position dogs as orchestra conductors represents a transformation of community through learning involving play (Jarvis, 2018; Rice, 2024). Evidence of the musicians' transformation emerges through the critical self-reflection of performance and the shift in everyone's perception, sensemaking, and recognition of the world (Hogan, 2016). From the lead conductor to composers to musicians – each evolved from the initial resistance of the disorienting dilemma to a state of appreciation for the learning experience. Additional research in evaluating if certain work-embedded play activities are more receptive on an individual basis or provide a more significant impact to a collective group is how discussion from this experiential session continues. While current studies do not explicitly encompass play's long-term or lasting effects on knowledge retention, this limitation is an opportunity for continued research.

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# Troubling Transformative Learning Theory in the Context of Liquid Modernity

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**Abstract:** We are taught that modern humans are located at the top of an ontological hierarchy above all earthen beings and matter. Technology becomes ever more efficient at manipulating and extending life, finding and extracting resources for human consumption and our insight into universal mysteries expands. Yet despite this expanded control, we remain insecure about the future. The challenge is to bring this ontic insecurity within our comfort zone by accepting our sense of helplessness, a type of “edge emotion. “ Our theoretical framework weaves Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning together with arts-based research and the theory of plurilingualism to look at how modern humans might resolve what can never be resolved, that is, our troubled relationship with our uncertain future. The authors reimagine individual transformation in the context of liquid modernity, the ongoing experience of rapid technological change and uncertainty. They propose that the ultimate site of disorientation and transformation lies within our own emotional landscape. This paper invites readers to navigate the fluid potentiality of transformation within our very own “liquid “ selves.

**Key Words:** Arts-based research, Modernity, Plurilingualism, Oil painting, Transformative Learning

## The Future: An Ill-Defined Problem

We are taught that modern humans are located at the top of an ontological hierarchy above all earthen beings and matter. Technology becomes ever more efficient at manipulating and extending life, finding and extracting resources for human consumption and our insight into universal mysteries expands. Yet despite this expanded control, we remain insecure about the future. The challenge is to bring this ontic insecurity within our comfort zone by accepting our sense of helplessness, a type of “edge emotion. “ Our theoretical framework weaves Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning (TL) (1978) together with arts-based research (ABR) and the theory of plurilingualism to look at how modern humans might resolve what can never be resolved, that is, our troubled relationship with our uncertain future. The authors reimagine individual transformation in the context of liquid modernity, the ongoing experience of rapid technological change and uncertainty. They propose that the ultimate site of disorientation and transformation lies within our own emotional landscape. This paper invites readers to navigate the fluid potentiality of transformation within our very own “liquid “ selves.

In the first section of our paper, we ponder the future as an “ill-defined problem “ (Mälkki & Raami, 2022), following with Mezirow’s theory of TL and its reliance on rational thought over emotions. The comfort zone is discussed in relation to critical engagement with edge-emotions (Mälkki 2010, Mälkki & Green, 2018, Mälkki & Raami, 2022), using two novel approaches to engaging with our insecurities about the future: ABR and the theory of plurilingualism. The authors are educators and team leaders at Simon Fraser University, a

Canadian post-secondary institution. Behrisch is a practicing oil painter and philosopher of education; Bussard is a plurilingual and TL qualitative educational researcher.

The future is an ill-defined problem, a *strange* disorienting dilemma inducing widespread anxiety among many people. Behrisch describes strangeness as anything that disorients and decenters us, making us feel uncomfortable (2022). Examples include illness, uncertainty, even our bodily functions that operate outside rational control. An ill-defined problem evades common definition. “We may start with one problem, but gradually, it appears that the real problem is elsewhere ... the solution and success criteria are unknown “ (Mälkki and Raami, 2022, p.79). ABR and the theory of multilingualism are suited to this problem because they work with emergent knowledge beyond conventional disciplinary boundaries and promise no closure.

### **Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory, Edge-Emotions and the Comfort Zone**

Mezirow’s seminal TL theory introduced thinking around how humans may undergo transformation when encountering a disorienting dilemma. If critically reflected upon, this can lead to a change in perspective and to one’s ontology, or relationship with the world (1978, p. 101). Mezirow’s theory has been critiqued for the role of cognition that eclipses emotions in the transformative process (Carter & Nicolaides, 2023).

Edge-emotions arise in response to strangeness such as our unknowable future and can be described as “unpleasant feelings, e.g., anxiety, depression, and shame, that we feel when our meaning perspectives become questioned and our dearly held assumptions and premises become challenged “ (Mälkki & Green, 2018, p. 29). Anxiety is induced by a fraught relationship, primarily with ourselves.

Moving through Mezirow’s ten phases of TL offers us a pathway towards resolution, to a return to our comfort zone, “when nothing questions our meaning perspectives, [providing] us with a sense of ontological security; i.e., “I’m OK and my world is safe’ “ (Mälkki & Green, 2018, p. 29). However, the future is not going away; it is always with us. This is a quandary. How can we resolve our relationship with something that will always elude us? When we actively engage with arising edge-emotions instead of subverting them, we reposition our relationship to them. Looked at through artistic and multilingual lenses, this has the potential to foster epistemic humility and to return us to a state of well-being, to the “comfort zone “ (Mälkki 2010).

### **Arts-based Research**

ABR is an emergent methodology integrating non-linear embodied creative practice with traditional cognitive knowledge creation that dominates academic research. This powerful epistemological tool “brings together the systematic and rigorous qualities of the arts “ (Knowles & Luciani, 2007, p. xxi) while engaging intuition and unknowing as powerful sites of inquiry. ABR “calls forth different, alternative modes of thinking which implies that protocols or procedures for qualitative research are unbounded, unfettered by conventions which constrain possibilities “ (Knowles & Luciani, 2007, p. xi). ABR’s defiance of conventional research protocols makes it well-suited to engaging with fear and other edge emotions around the future. Making “art carries *transformative power* that can resist and unsettle stereotypical ways of thinking “ (hooks cited in Leavy, 2020, p. 239, emphasis in original). New knowledge does not rest in the finished artifact but is created *in the process of making art*, with no foreclosed idea about the finished product (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012, 2015). Behrisch’s oil painting practice provides a “method of discovery “ for engaging with strangeness (St. Pierre quoted in Richardson & St. Pierre, 2018, p. 827).

## Theory of Plurilingualism

The term “plurilingualism “ appeared when the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages in the mid-1990s was created (henceforth CEFR; Council of Europe 1996, 2001) and was further refined in the CEFR Companion Volume, CEFR CV (Council of Europe, 2018). Plurilingualism describes “an uneven and changing competence, in which the user/learner’s resources in one language or variety may be very different in nature to those in another “ (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 28). It engages the language learner and user in not aspiring to achieve native level of competencies in their languages and instead suggests becoming comfortable with uneven representation of languages across one’s repertoire. A plurilingual person is a “social agent [who] has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures “ (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 168). Bussard’s plurilingual journey illustrates critical engagement with her edge emotions of discomfort and disillusion, followed by acceptance, widening her comfort zone and ultimately, transformation.

## Liquid Modernity

Mezirow’s TL theory provides with a framework to reimagine individual and group transformation in the context of “liquid modernity, “ a term coined by philosopher Zygmunt Bauman (2012) and described by Fleener and Barcinas as an ongoing experience of “uncertainty, ambiguity and rapid change “ (2022, p. 179). The future promises to deliver more of what liquid modernity is delivering, which is ongoing change and a sense of strangeness to modern humans.

Change is *the only* permanence, and uncertainty *the only* certainty. A hundred years ago ‘to be modern’ meant to chase ‘the final state of perfection’ – now it means an infinity of improvement, with no ‘final state’ in sight and none desired. (Bauman, 2012, pp. viii–ix)

Uncertainty is the new norm, giving rise to pervasive edge-emotions across large sectors of society. We propose bringing edge-emotions around how we relate to liquid modernity into our comfort zone by building what Fleener and Barcinas call Futures Literacy (FL) (2022).

Behrisch used oil painting to research strangeness, using a photograph of the Elaho River as one site of her ABR (Figure 1).

## Figure 1

*Elaho River, B.C.*



*Note:* Photo by Behrisch (author).

Using her camera, she zoomed into her painting and discovered strange topographies she did not anticipate or consciously create (Figures 2 and 3).

## Figure 2

*Strange Topography Emerges in Detail of Elaho River Painting in Progress*



*Note:* Oil on canvas painting by Behrisch (author).

She had little control over the outcome, mirroring our relationship with the future over which we have little control. Behrisch’s discovery triggered surprise and disorientation, decentering her humanness and previous knowing. Encountering limits of knowing should foster epistemic humility, something modern humans would do well to adopt with respect to the future.

## Figure 3

*Strangeness Asserts Itself, Independent of Artist*



*Note:* Oil on canvas painting by Behrisch (author), oil on canvas.

Zen scholar Alan Watts states “there is no safety or security “ (2011, p. 79). We face certain uncertainty. Zen scholar Alan Watts states “there is no safety or security “ (2011, p. 79). We face certain uncertainty. In adopting epistemic humility, we may befriend edge-emotions and not treat them as toxins to tolerate or “sweat out “ (Mezirow, 1991, cited in (Carter &

Nicolaides, 2023, p. 30). “Embedded within liquid modernity are new requirements for [TL] to support ... engagement within the contexts of ambiguity and lack of predictability “ (Fleener & Barcinas, 2022, p. 180). How we deal with problems has ontological significance, potentially priming us for internal transformation. “Learners must deal with constant change and the challenge to maintain their ontological security “ (p.76). For Mezirow, this depends on the framework through which we orient ourselves, our “meaning perspective, “ a “personal paradigm for understanding ourselves and our relationships “ (1978, p. 10). Our ontological security is tested or strengthened depending on how we adapt, or resist, to disorienting dilemmas. For some, letting go of control allows for the potentiality of the unknown, whereas holding tightly to the reigns of control negates this potentiality.

### **Widening the Comfort Zone**

TL theory offers us practical tools to deal with our ontic insecurity that do not rely on cognition and planning, strategies that may have exacerbated our sense of helplessness. Fleener and Barcinas (2022) advocate building adult literacy around the future called “futures literacy “ (FL). This offer skills to cope with liquid modernity’s discontinuities and rapid change. “FL uses strategies and skills that facilitate and support deeper, more meaningful relationships with the future “ (Fleener & Barcinas, 2022, p. 183), including “letting go, “ a surrender hitherto dismissed as ineffective or unproductive in modern capitalist society where cognition and control reign supreme over acceptance of limits. Behrisch was forced to “let go “ of the known when she encountered strange topographies within her painting of the Elaho River (Figures 1, 2, 3).

While we seek to future proof ourselves, a more pressing challenge is learning to live with our *anxiety* around the future. As we experience those unpleasant edge-emotions, we often wish to get rid of that unpleasantness, as soon as possible. As they feel unpleasant to us, we may, in consequence, regard them as something bad or shameful. However, we can utilize these edge-emotions by modifying our disposition and attitude towards them. (Mälkki & Green, 2018, p. 30)

In order to make friends with our unresolvable future, Fleener and Barcinas (2022) propose bringing its strangeness into our comfort zone, shifting uncertainty from being a threat towards becoming a familiar feature of modern life. This requires moving from fixed towards fluid expectations, a state mirrored by Bauman’s (2012) “*liquid* modernity. “ By building FL, liquid modernity no longer confronts us as a dilemma and morphs into a non-threatening familiar entity.

It is tempting, for many people, to approach the future as they did in the past ... succumbing to fear, hoping for safety in the known versus the uncertainty of the unknown, and engaging in negative or neutral resistance to change rather than embracing risk and adventure. In adult and lifelong learning, there are certain periods in adult development that are thought to be more or less appropriate for treating the future as something to be welcomed, controlled, protected, or risked. (Fleener & Barcinas, 2022, p. 180)

For many modern humans, our ontological insecurity about the future is so deeply embedded that we may be unaware of its pervasiveness. For others, anxiety around the future presents an urgent “wicked problem “ (Mälkki & Raami 2022).

## **A Plurilingual Scholar's Lived Experience with Edge-Emotions and Transformation**

Plurilingual scholar Bussard, co-author of this paper, observes that disorienting dilemmas do not necessarily always present as a crisis. Some present as an extended continuum over time or an internal desire for a “different, more desirable version of oneself“ (2024, p. 26), triggered by discomfort, disillusionment and disappointment with oneself. These edge-emotions can lead to detachment from others and social or emotional isolation. Bussard recounts her experience moving to Canada with English as one of her six languages within her plurilingual repertoire.

As a linguist, she expected her English proficiency to be accepted as near that of a native English speaker. However, after seeing that her English proficiency was not received as she had expected, she experienced discomfort and disillusionment. Engaging with painful edge-emotions prompted her to undergo transformation. This led to a transformation of her self-identity and meaning perspective, influencing her to become more accepting of people's differences and flaws. Below is an excerpt from her transformative language learning memoir:

My tumultuous journey in Canada has been transformative. It turned my initial pride in my English skills and illusion of speaking like a native speaker into the realization that I had to work to fully understand idiosyncrasies and idioms of the English language. I realized I no longer wanted to be a native speaker; in reality, I was a plurilingual person. Perfection in all aspects of a spoken language is unattainable, even to people born in English-speaking countries. No one can fulfill this one hundred percent!

With time, I learned that being a native speaker does not mean always speaking correctly; in fact, a plurilingual might have a deeper syntactic and grammatical knowledge of the language than a person born in the country where the language is spoken as they may not have been dedicated to studying that language deeply. My experience was transformative not only as a language learner and user but also as a human being. I became more patient, more determined and understanding of other people's difficulties and journeys. It transformed me into a better listener. I became more interested in other people's experiences and knowing. My journey would not have evolved this way had I not constantly reached out and found people I could trust, built confidence in myself, overcome hurdles and stood on my feet after every obstacle. (Bussard, 2024, pp.70–71)

Bussard “fought with herself“ to accept and exist within the scope of possibilities while redesigning a new version of herself with which she was able to thrive (2024). Through this transformation, she re-empowered herself as a lifelong learner and committed to creating a world of greater acceptance for other people. Critically engaging with her edge-emotions led towards her transformation.

### **The Primary Struggle is Inside**

We must learn to release our addiction to security, and befriend insecurity. “We can hardly begin to consider this problem unless it is clear that the craving for security is itself a pain and a contradiction“ (Watts, 2011, p. 78). We propose that the primary site of transformation is within each of us, with our edge-emotions around the future. We reorient our focus from the ill-defined problem of our uncertain future towards transforming our relationship with our *feelings* that arise around our ambiguous future. Like liquid modernity, our bodies and minds are constantly changing and adapting to new challenges, whether we're conscious of this or not.

Bringing this discourse back to TL theory, Behrisch asks how we might “make friends with strangeness,” specifically our edge-emotions, to accommodate them within our comfort zone (2022). The answer, she believes, lies in treating the dilemma relationally from a non-dualist perspective. Our struggle with the future is not outside ourselves but *within us*. While it may *feel* like we are struggling with an external threat, our foremost struggle is within ourselves.

Behrisch draws on queer theorists Halberstam (2011) and Sandilands (1994) who dismiss our modern ontology of binaries which binarize the world into oppositional dualisms such as inside/outside, safe/unsafe, certain/uncertain. Bussard invites those who struggle with feelings of ‘not being enough’ as language learners and users to allow themselves to grow into a comfort zone as per theory of plurilingualism (Council of Europe, 2001). We invite readers to reconsider the vast multiplicity of possibilities, include the potentiality of the future to be many things, not one thing or the other.

### **Closing: An Invitation into Relationship With Ontic Insecurity**

Watt urges us to dissolve the false boundary between *what* we fear and our fear. What we fear most is fear itself. “To stand face to face with insecurity is still not to understand it. To understand it, you must not face it but *be* it” (Watts, 2011, p. 80, emphasis added to original). This wisdom aligns with Mälkki and Raami’s (2022) work on using edge-emotions constructively to face impossible problems. Rather than framing our problems externally, we invite readers to frame problems as existing within ourselves and therefore solvable through inner work.

We often limit our view by focusing *only* on problem solving. We obstruct the way *ourselves*, but we do not understand *how* we obstruct the way ... when we work *with the problem*, we end up in loops. To solve the problem, we need to work instead *with ourselves*. (Mälkki & Green, 2018, p. 79, emphasis in original)

Making friends with edge-emotions around the future shifts our relationship with anxiety, to neutral or even positive potentiality. In closing, engaging with edge-emotions in a constructive, non-fearful manner has value to educators, leaders, and scholars. We challenge conventional TL theory to contribute to new ideas related to futures literacy. Our ultimate goal is to bring edge-emotions relating to the future within our comfort zone. This offers us potential comfort in the context of liquid modernity’s pervasive instability.

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# **Transformative Identity Development in Early Childhood Educator Anti-Bias Efforts**

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**Abstract:** The experiential session showcases methodologies used to support an anti-bias education program for Early Childhood Educators working in Head Start Centers, which serve predominantly Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) children and families living in poverty. The findings of an internal discovery period revealed themes and outcomes for learning aligned with Derman-Sparks and Edward's (2010) four goals for anti-bias education. Transformative Learning Theory provides a frame for adult learning goals aligned to these four outcomes and a set of methodological considerations for curriculum development. The experiential session demonstrates two simulations from the curriculum and prompts consideration of application to audiences outside of the original audience of Early Childhood Educators.

**Key Words:** Early Childhood Education, Anti-Bias Education, Simulation Learning

## **Transformative Identity Development in Early Childhood Educator Anti-Bias Efforts**

At its core, transformative learning theory articulates a process through which our taken-for-granted assumptions are illuminated, reflected upon, and revised to be “more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action “ (Mezirow, 2000). Since the great racial reckoning of 2020, the need for racial healing and justice became much more apparent. The video footage of Floyd struggling for breath served as a disorienting experience for many, upending and challenging their belief in a racially equitable society.

Disorienting experiences catalyze the ten-stage process through which individuals transform previous meaning perspectives into new operating beliefs (Mezirow, 1991). Certain beliefs, such as the belief in the meritocratic U.S. Society or the implicit supremacy of whiteness as a culture make up the dominant ideology through which inequity is allowed to thrive. Disorienting experiences such as the murder of George Floyd may trigger the process of transforming these beliefs, but absent space for critical reflection, dialogue, and other stages in Mezirow's theory, many revert back to their old schema.

### **Goals for Anti-Bias Education**

Early Childhood Education efforts represent an early attempt to preempt the development of these pervasive ideologies in young children. Derman-Sparks et al. (2015) lay out a four-part framework for leading anti-bias classrooms in the early childhood setting. The conceptual framework enumerates four goals for anti-bias learning:

- **“Goal 1 - Identity:** Each child will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.
- **Goal 2 - Diversity:** Each child will express comfort and joy with human diversity; accurate language for human differences; and deep caring for human connections.
- **Goal 3 - Justice:** Each child will increasingly recognize unfairness, have language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.

- **Goal 4 - Advocacy:** Each child will demonstrate empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions “ (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010, p. xiv).

The Head Start Early Learning provider, Acelero Inc. recently requisitioned an adult-learning program to support teachers to better lead and implement anti-bias curriculum in their classrooms aligned with the goals above. The content provider and author of this proposal conducted a discovery research phase to uncover the knowledge, skills, and beliefs most necessary to support such an endeavor.

Numerous focus groups and one-on-one interviews revealed high-level themes related to these four goals (Burkett and Prasad, 2023). The contractor team concluded that to lead anti-bias experiences for early learners, adults first required their own transforming experience aligned to the four explicit goals, resulting in the following goal framework guiding the curriculum design process. The current state of teacher beliefs surrounding anti-bias work often matched a dominant ideology of a hegemonic idea often seen as “hegemonic assumptions “ (Brookfield, 2012).

	<b>Dominant Ideology</b>	<b>Transformed Ideology</b>
<b>Goal 1: Identity</b>	<b>Internalized Oppression:</b> Teachers internalize negative messages about themselves through implicit or explicit messaging in their socialization experience.	Teachers experience a strong sense of self-awareness and worth in their personal and social identity resulting in a positive sense of self.
<b>Goal 2: Diversity</b>	<b>White Supremacy:</b> Teachers hold fixed beliefs about the “right way “ of doing things or ways of being. Teachers hold biases about others different from them or the societal norm.	Teachers demonstrate a deep value for difference across a variety of identity lines. Teachers interact with one another, students, and families in affirming and respectful ways across lines of difference.
<b>Goal 3: Justice</b>	<b>Meritocratic Awareness:</b> Teachers are unaware of or contribute to unfairness or injustice in the classroom and school system, upholding exclusionary or discriminatory practices.	Teachers show awareness of injustice within education. Teachers can identify examples of inequity in a variety of settings. Teachers show empathy towards those impacted by bias and injustice.
<b>Goal 4: Advocacy</b>	<b>Learned Helplessness:</b> Teachers experience a sense of hopelessness, and disempowerment due to unfairness and injustice within the school and society.	Teachers show motivation and agency, actively addressing inequity in the classroom and the school. Teachers feel empowered through their newly acquired skills to take action.

*Adapted from Derman-Sparks and Olsen-Edwards (2020)*

## **Transformative Learning Theory Application**

The goals above seek to transform dominant ideologies associated with oppression in the United States. Dominant ideologies defined by Brookfield perpetuate economic inequality, racism, homophobia, sexism, ableism, and other manifestations of oppression (2012). Through the curriculum, participants transform limiting beliefs about society, those around them and themselves.

Curriculum designers expanded upon methodologies to prompt critical reflection and critical self-reflection (Cranton, 2016). Simulations provide activating experiences to prompt cognitive dissonance and activate awareness of current assumptions. The game of Monopoly, a direct simulation of a closed-loop Capitalist system, was manipulated in a learning experience to illustrate inequity in the public education system (Jost et al., 2005). In the simulation, a third of the participants began the game and played for a fixed amount of time before others (allocated the same starting resources) followed in two subsequent rounds. Unsurprisingly, winners from the starting group always won the game, while participants from the other rounds often gave up and adopted self-defeating behaviors. When asked to draw parallels to the school environment, participants draw deep connections to the way historical cycles of privilege play out in student experience in the classroom and the attitudes they adopt about them.

StarPower, another simulated society game, has proven useful in helping students unpack the nature of power, how those with power often maintain it, how advancement is limited among those without it, and make personal connections to their own privileged status (Dundes & Harlow, 2005). Similarly, the game Barga, a card game of modified rules has been studied for its promise in illustrating the potency of cultural clashes (Thiagarajan & Thiagarajan, 2011). The experiential session showcases a shorter version of the simulated society through a modified team-building exercise: the TeamStepps Paper Chain activity (2023), where groups complete the activity in silence and receive drastically different sets of material resources.

Disruption for its own sake will not necessarily foster transformed belief schemas. Participants must be supported in identifying their assumptions, opening themselves up to alternative perspectives, revising their assumptions, and acting on their new and revised assumptions. From a constructive developmental lens, when we take our taken-for-granted assumptions as the object of our attention, we are no longer subject to their influence on our decision-making (Kegan, 1998). Autoethnography through the lens of one identity marker, allows educators to identify the development of privileged perspectives or internalized oppression (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015). Using a technique of narrative disclosure (Brookfield, 2020), facilitators can support those from privileged backgrounds to identify their existing assumptions. This learning experience uses a biographical reflection framework, modeled after Bobbie Harro's Cycle of Socialization as an opportunity for evaluating and revising assumptions (2000).

## **Outline of Experiential Session**

The session will review the four goals of the anti-bias curriculum and showcase selected methodologies. Through the selected activities, conference attendees will consider various dimensions of their identity and how dominant ideologies impact their worldviews. The session will conclude with research findings on the curriculum pilot, taking place in four regional Head Start centers across the country (Wisconsin, Nevada, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania).

Section	Description
<b>Opening</b> (20 minutes)	Opening Identity Wheel Activity (Barnes, 2010) and overview of the discovery findings and the four goals of anti-bias education connected to Transformative Learning.
<b>Simulation Two</b> (35 minutes)	Modified TeamSTEPPS Paper Chain activity to simulate inequitable distribution of resources and resulting biases. (University of Washington, 2023)
<b>Simulation Three</b> (25 minutes)	The Cycle of Socialization reflection (Harro, 2000).
<b>Conclusion</b> (10 minutes)	Closing reflection and summary of results from curriculum pilot

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Nicholas Brealey.

# **Troubling School Change: Using Arts-Integrated Professional Learning to Transform Education from Within**

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**Abstract:** School improvement efforts often position students and teachers as the problem that needs to be fixed, not its solution. How can the critical and creative capacities of young people and their educators drive learning and social transformation in public education? In this interactive workshop, we explore how arts integrated professional learning can be used to center teachers' and students' knowledge and inquiry to "trouble" and transform education from within. This session will use artistic strategies to activate critical theory and consider case studies of arts-integrated professional learning in a range of global contexts.

**Key Words:** Transformation, Professional Learning, Participatory Action Research, Arts Integration

## **Introduction**

How can the critical and creative capacities of young people and their educators drive learning and social transformation in education? In this experiential workshop, we use three artistic strategies to explore the transformative potential of arts integrated professional learning, alongside brief case study examples. In each strategy, we consider how arts integration might begin to transform education by centering teacher and student knowledge and inquiry in school improvement. In doing so, we acknowledge that unsubstantiated claims of "transformation" are common in the arts in education literature. Therefore, we strive to reframe and reclaim transformation as "a gradual, cumulative process, the result of learning and negotiation of others, a progressive act of self-creation" (Nicholson, 2014, p. 15).

## **Why Use the Arts in Transformative Learning**

We utilize transformative learning theory combined with arts integration in spaces of professional development for K-12 teachers. Professional learning in education aims to change the attitudes and beliefs of teachers, to affect classroom practices, and to transform teacher knowledge to improve student learning (Guskey, 2002). Arts integration has been shown to improve students' social-emotional and academic learning in a wide range of subject areas (Podlozny, 2000). Our theoretical framework builds upon Mezirow's transformative learning theory (1978; 2009), as well as anti-oppressive educators (Freire, 1970; Kumashiro, 2000), artists (Wilson, 2018), and theorists (Lewis, 2018; Ranciere, 1998) who explore similar arguments.

We are particularly interested in how professional learning in arts integration can support teachers and students to mediate difficult discussions through dialogic meaning-making. Specifically, we use the arts in education to 1) spark and mediate dialogue, 2) make the invisible visible, 3) prompt self expression and reflection, and 4) ask participants to imagine new possibilities. Integrating the arts across the curriculum can create a gateway for "[surfacing] ideas that we can't easily talk about by making them visual and outside ourselves" (Dewhurst,

2018, pp. 34-35). Through arts integrated learning students may move beyond a cerebral recognition of social issues towards a new embodied and empathetic understanding, where students may feel or understand their identity in a new way.

### **Arts Integrated Transformative Strategies and Case Examples**

In our interactive session we will explore three arts integration strategies to active an aspect of critical theory. After each strategy, we will consider research examples of how we applied the strategy in a learning context.

#### **Watercolor Conversations**

We begin with *Watercolor Conversations*. A strategy that engages participants in a silent, paired, abstract, visual conversation, as they take consecutive turns painting a visual response to a prompt on a shared page. Watercolor Conversations produce a visual record of the negotiation of power and exchange that often occurs in verbal conversations yet is difficult to discuss with new people. The strategy invites participants to self-reflect and express emotions through visual language, often revealing new insights. We will use Watercolor Conversations to consider the value of co-constructed community agreements in a transformative learning approach.

After exploring the strategy, we will share a vignette from our use of Watercolor Conversations in an arts-integrated professional learning project in Bosnia and Herzegovina, co-sponsored by the U.S. Embassy in Sarajevo (Dawson et al., in press). Here, we explore how Watercolor Conversations supported inter-ethnic teacher participants to use visual language outside the boundaries of the verbal signifiers of their ethnic backgrounds. We will consider the value of Watercolor Conversation's structural provision of care, to support intimacy, gentle disorientation, and productive exchange as a first method to build bridges across differences in complex learning contexts.

#### **The Great Game of Power**

Next, we follow with an embodied theatre strategy, *The Great Game of Power*, to unpack systems of power in education through critical reflection. Adapted from the work of Augusto Boal (1974), *The Great Game of Power* uses chairs and water bottle to explore metaphors of power and how they operate in systems. Through an interrogation of how racial, gender, and class-specific privilege often informs our experience of education, we will use the strategy to unravel, rearrange, and co-construct a more just, alternate vision for school transformation. We plan to share various adaptations of this strategy and consider its use as an entry point into participatory action research (PAR). Here, we point to Michelle Fine's (2008) assertion that PAR is a "radical *epistemological* challenge to the traditions of social science, most critically on the topic of where knowledge resides" (p. 215; author's emphasis).

Next, we will share a vignette about our use of *The Great Game of Power* in an undergraduate course on Arts Integration in the United States. We describe how student facilitators used the strategy to explore assimilation in the work of contemporary Mexican photographer Graciela Iturbide. A young white woman arranged the chairs/bottle and then stepped back while the class "read" the image. The class, a racially diverse cohort, analyzed the sculpture and related it to their own experiences of racialized microaggressions, code switching, and navigating bi-cultural identity. After this reading the white woman sculptor shared surprise at her peers' negative reactions to assimilation. As a white woman who moved to a new school, she viewed assimilation positively. The dissonance between these perspectives led to a revealing



conversation about how our racialized and embodied experiences shape how we experience similar places and situations in different ways (Link, 2022).

### **Model Making with Young People**

We conclude with an individual goal setting activity where participants are invited to reflect, make sense of their learning, and set an action step for their future practice based on their discovery. Each participant will be guided to develop a 3-D sculpture using their body or provided materials to represent an idea or value that will apply to their work from our collective investigation. Through this final reflection strategy, we hope to seed and nourish collective exchange and critical action. We will also use this final activity to consider how the arts can create networks for exchange. In doing so, we hope to advocate for a better educational future for all, as we begin to transform ourselves, which, in turn, begins to transform our world.

To help participants consider how they might apply this strategy we share a vignette from our Student Teacher Learning Community (STLC) project with upper elementary students in a US public school. The STLC was an 18-month project that used arts integration to position young people as agentic learners, thinkers, and change makers in their school and community. Students used wire, construction paper, foil, and markers to construct small 3-D sculptures to make sense of the “messiness,” “pride,” and “joy” they felt while driving educational change on their campus (Dawson et al., in press).

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## Using Narrative to Transform Community – From the Power of Me to the Power of Now

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**Abstract:** While transformative learning at the individual level is powerful, collective transformative learning carries the potential to make organizations/systems/communities more equitable. The power lies within the narrative where individual narratives interweave into shared narratives. The question becomes, how can we create spaces where these raw, uncomfortable dialogues can occur; where recognition of the dissonance can open the way to repair; and where we can create a system where we support one another in living our values? One answer is public narrative. “Public narrative involves three aspects, namely the story of self (personal), the story of us (collective), and the story of now “ (Yameen, 2014, p. 141). In order to move from models of power over to models of power with, we must accept our roles as protagonists, as leaders in our communities, and recognize that we all possess that power if we stand up and claim it. It is through public narrative that we seek to create more just systems. Using the 5 Critical Questions from the ITLA website (<https://www.intertla.org/five-critical-questions/>), in this experiential session, we will focus on exploring one as an example of how we can use inquiry to evoke a collective narrative.

**Key Words:** Public Narrative, Leadership, Transformation, Dialogue

### Extended Abstract

The transformative learning process begins with a disorienting dilemma (Cranton, 1994; DeAngelis, 2019; Dirkx, 2006; Dirkx et al., 2006; Mezirow, 1978). A disorienting dilemma has been described as “a time when new information causes an individual to call into question their values, beliefs, or assumptions “ (DeAngelis, 2019, p. v).

One of the triggers for a disorienting dilemma is when we experience a values conflict. Rokeach (1973) explains this as, “*Contradictions involving values are especially likely to implicate self-conceptions, since values are employed as the standards for evaluating oneself as well as others. Contradictions involving a person’s more important values should implicate self-conceptions more than those involving less important values. The more a contradiction implicates self-conceptions, the more it produces tension and, consequently, the more it should lead to efforts to reduce the tension* “ (p. 226).

Values conflicts can occur in two ways. First, our values can come into conflict with someone else’s values. In other words, “*When an individual is confronted with worldviews that differ from their deeply held beliefs and values, the distress of this discrepancy offers an opportunity for one to engage in the transformative learning process* “ (DeAngelis, 2019, p. 144). Conversely, internal values conflicts occur when an individual is “faced with the need to prioritize among held values “ (DeAngelis, 2019, p. 165).

Narrative, both individual and collective, can enable the transformative learning process as Mezirow had conceived it. Mezirow (1991) defined transformative learning as “an enhanced level of awareness of the context of one’s beliefs and feelings, a critique of their assumptions and particularly premises, an assessment of alternative perspectives, a decision to negate an old perspective in favor of a new one or to make a synthesis of old and new, an ability to take action based upon the new perspective, and a desire to fit the new perspective into the broader context of one’s life “ (p. 161). Through narrative, we lay bare the stories that underpin our values, beliefs, and assumptions, so that we may examine our thinking.

While transformative learning at the individual level is powerful, collective transformative learning carries the potential to make organizations/systems/communities more equitable. The power lies within the narrative where individual narratives interweave into shared narratives.

The question becomes, how can we create spaces where these raw, uncomfortable dialogues can occur; where recognition of the dissonance can open the way to repair; and where we can create a system where we support one another in living our values?

One answer is public narrative. The use of Public Narrative, a leadership development practice, creates a space where we move beyond self and move away from judgment of others. It provides participants the opportunity to invite others to join them in collective action based on shared values. This leadership practice moves us beyond self and others to public narrative. Since this involves a process rather than a script, we move beyond individual narrative to action based on common goals ((Ganz, 2009, 2012; Ganz et al., 2010).

“Public narrative involves three aspects, namely the story of self (personal), the story of us (collective), and the story of now “ (Yameen, 2014, p. 141). The story of self entails becoming aware of and putting language to, our experiences. The story of us “puts what we have in common into words and creates connection “ (Yameen, 2014, p. 142). The story of now is when the “gulf between what we *want* (or value) and what *is* comes into sharp focus “ for *us* (Yameen, 2014, p. 143).

In order to move from models of power over to models of power with, we must accept our roles as protagonists, as leaders in our communities, and recognize that we all possess that power if we stand up and claim it. When we shift from “try(ing) to blame ‘other people’ for our own shortcomings, “ from “noticing the injustice in others but not in ourselves, “ and from “retreating into denial, “ we are able to take “the appropriate steps to create justice “ (Scott, 2021, p. 350). It is through public narrative that we seek to create more just systems.

## Exercise

Using the 5 Critical Questions from the ITLA website (<https://www.intertla.org/five-critical-questions/>), we will focus on exploring one as an example of how we can use inquiry to evoke a collective narrative. The exercise will be broken into 3 parts. First, an individual writing exercise where each participant is able to collect their thoughts on how this system supports them and why this is important, as well as the ways in which this system disempowers them and the value of addressing this. We will then shift to small groups where the participants will share and explore their collective responses. And, in the final section, we will establish a call to action as to what each participant is committing to doing toward perpetuating the collective narrative.

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## **Allyship: How to Create a Space of Belonging?**

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**Abstract:** Despite growing efforts to increase diversity in recruitment and teach principles of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEI-B), there is still widespread underrepresentation of marginalized people in medicine and the business sector. This phenomenon demonstrates a need for targeted efforts in the work environment and culture to increase retention alongside existing recruitment initiatives. This 2-hour Allyship workshop utilizes Mezirow's transformation learning theory to prepare colleagues to foster an inclusive learning environment. The workshop materials are adaptable across different institutions and could be used at all levels of training to establish an educational foundation around privilege and allyship that can be further developed as one evolves within their career.

### **Learning Objectives**

- 1) Discuss two key examples of allyship that can be demonstrated in your work environment.
- 2) Increase self-reflection on one's own experience of privilege through an interactive exercise.
- 3) Develop an action plan for sponsorship and mentorship that mirrors the concept of allyship.

### **Extended Abstract**

Allyship is a continual process where individuals with power and privilege work towards creating a supportive and inclusive culture for disadvantaged groups (Atcheson, 2018). Despite its importance, there are limited curricula that focus on training healthcare providers in allyship and privilege, particularly through an actionable and skills-based approach (Chow et al., 2019; Djulus et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2021). Traditional curricula often rely on didactic methods, with few incorporating activity-based learning or skill-building in clinical settings. One recent study highlights the need for workshops aimed at clinical allyship skill-building to better enable medical trainees to support their peers and patients (Martinez et al., 2021). Additionally, in a needs assessment survey (pre-survey), participants expressed interest in having small group discussions to uncover biases, learn about actionable changes, and build skills to develop as allies (Ehie et al., 2021).

Recognizing this gap, a novel Allyship workshop was developed for surgery and anesthesia resident physicians at UCSF (Ehie et al., 2021). This 2-hour virtual workshop combines large-group didactics with small-group interactive, reflective, and skills-building exercises aimed at enhancing clinical allyship. It draws on Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory and Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory, providing a robust framework for

discussing power, privilege, and allyship (Delgado et al., 2017; Kaufman, 2003). The workshop's design facilitates participants' exploration and validation of their own and their peers' identities and lived experiences, fostering an environment conducive to introspection on how these identities influence interactions with others. This approach not only models allyship, but also equips the healthcare workforce with tools to advocate for and support their colleagues and patients effectively, fostering broader cultural change within institutions.

Preliminary outcomes from the workshop were gathered through a pre-post survey of 52 of the 68 perioperative residents who participated. Results indicated high satisfaction levels with the workshop content and the approach of the trained facilitators. These facilitators played a crucial role by sharing their own vulnerable experiences first, setting a precedent for open and honest discussions. Feedback highlighted the effectiveness of small-group interactions and the relevance of the critical thinking and self-reflection exercises in aligning with Mezirow's transformational learning framework.

The positive feedback suggests that this workshop format could significantly contribute to the development of a healthcare workforce skilled in allyship, which is vital for supporting disadvantaged colleagues and patients. Lessons learned from this initial offering underscore the need to reduce didactic content and allocate more time for engaging in activities in smaller, intimate groups. This shift should enhance the workshop's impact on behavioral change and ally development. This iterative improvement will continue to refine the workshop, aligning it closer with our long-term goal of cultivating a supportive and inclusive healthcare environment.

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## **Wade in the Water: Experience the Troubling of Transformative Learning**

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**Abstract:** The evolving nature of transformative learning, the desire for reflection and dialogue, and the quest to see the theory progress birthed the International Transformative Learning Conference in 1998. In this same spirit, participants in this experiential session are invited to reengage the seminal theories of transformative learning, their unique contextualizations of them, and to bring them into dialogue with one another. Using communal automatism, participants will find themselves in visual points of disorientation and orientation as they wade into the ambiguous waters of transformative learning inter-theorization.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Dialogue, Surrealist Collage Techniques, Collective Automatism, Inter-Theorization

### **Inter-theorization: A Theoretical Perspective**

Transformative learning radically changes our worldview, how we engage, and perhaps, the world itself (Mezirow, 1995, 2000, Preskill & Brookfield, 2009, p. 171). Whether the locus of that change has an individual or a sociocultural focus, transformative learning leads to common outcomes and can operate as “a metatheory under which individual theories congregate” (Taylor, 2005, 2008; Hoggan, 2016a, 2016b). However, what kind of good trouble could we get into with a move toward inter-theorization of transformative learning?

Mezirow understood that transformation “does not suggest a disengaged image of the individual learner, but of a learning process characterized by dialogical voices.” (Mezirow, 1996, p.169). Therefore, let us open space for authentic dialogue where the diverse voices of transformative learning theories can engage, challenge one another, and co-create new possibilities from liminal spaces.

Automatism, as an early 20th-century surrealist method of artmaking, is a group of techniques (i.e., drawing, writing, collage) that attempt to let the subconscious mind freely lead a spontaneous creative process (Breton, 1972; Cramer & Grant, 2023). The particular method of surrealist collage, developed by Max Ernst, combines various torn or clipped elements from previously published materials (Automatism, 2023). This experiential session will incorporate surrealist techniques in group form, leading to communal automatism as a visual artistic expression of the inter-theorization of transformative learning.

### **Wade in the Water: Workshop Session Plan**

#### **Context and Materials Needed**

Participants will work individually and in groups of 5-7 people around a table/joined desks. Each group will need the following materials: white paper (one per person), colored markers (one box), crayons (one box), glue/stapler (one), paper clips (seven), pinking shears (one), star stickers (one sheet), charcoal sticks (four), pastel sticks (four), and painter’s tape (one roll). This session assumes there will be tables/desks, a whiteboard, and dry-erase markers.



### **Movement 1: Troubling the Definition(s) of Transformative Learning**

- Step 1: Facilitators play the song, “Wade in the Water “ by Sweet Honey in the Rock (Riddle Films, 2012) and encourage participants to be present in the moment, considering what they hear as they watch assigned individuals around the room engage, play with, and “trouble “ water in different ways.
- Step 2: Participants write their own definition of transformative learning on a strip of paper and fold the paper down to one chosen word.
- Step 3: Participants gather in groups of 5-7 people. The group works together to form a new definition of transformative learning based on their individual chosen words.
- Step 4: Facilitators read a quote about incidental impressions. Participants individually make a visual expression for the communal definition created on paper using colored markers.
- Step 5: Facilitators read aloud the following directions: “You will receive one new ‘editing tool’ or an ‘action verb paper.’ Do not switch tools or action verb papers with others. Your job is to review and ‘edit’ the artistic expression of the person to your right to best represent the communal definition. You will have one minute to ‘edit’ the expression and then you will rotate on to the next person’s expression until everyone’s expression has been edited by everyone in the group. During this editing time, we will play music. Please work quietly enough to hear when we say to rotate. “

### **Movement 2: Troubling Transformative Processes**

Participants debrief in their small groups:

- Step 6: Learning Outcome #1 (consciousness) Participants answer any/all of the following questions: How did it feel to see others’ work and contribute to its development? How do you feel about the edits and contributions you received? What did you learn about the process of editing and contributing?
- Step 7: Learning Outcome #2 (cognitive development) Participants collectively spend time examining each other’s visual expressions of transformative learning as they are one at a time. Each participant shares aloud what resonates with them with the originator of the piece going last. The originator begins by sharing their original definition and ends with a question they now have about transformative learning.
- Step 8: Learning Outcome #3 (spirituality) Facilitators request participants alter their visual expressions of transformative learning as a group to represent their collective reflection. Once completed, the group then answers any/all of the following questions: What was revealed in our group expression of transformative learning that maybe you didn’t consider before? How has the group’s visual expression transformed your original definition of transformative learning? How do you feel about your individual and group expressions and definitions of transformative learning now?

Participants dialogue and work together:

- Step 9: Facilitators read a quote about art and philosophy for further thought. Participants are invited to arrange the visual expressions of their group work in the space in ways that interact with the work of other groups.

### **Movement 3: Troubling (Self-) Reflection**

- Step 10: Participants are invited to introduce themselves to the whole group and answer one of the following questions: How do you think/feel we should engage collectively moving forward to transform learning? What resources do you/do we

- need? What are the next steps (for you) and why are they important? How might you trouble your individual definition of transformative learning after this session?
- Step 11: Facilitators introduce themselves and their thoughts, feelings, and questions on wading into the troubling waters of inter-theoretical transformative learning. The session concludes with appreciation from facilitators for participants' willingness to participate in the dialogue and process.

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## Renewing Vibrancy, Compassion, and Connection Within Ourselves and Beyond

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**Key Words:** Self-Compassion, Empathy Fatigue, Triad Consulting, Liberating Structures

### Extended Abstract

As the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic stretch on, people in the workplace are facing lowered morale, burnout, increased mental health concerns, staffing shortages, backlog, economic upheaval, global insecurity, climate anxiety, employee turnover, and disengagement—not to mention calls for decolonization and greater equity, diversity, justice, and inclusion, often in hybrid or remote work contexts. Therefore, the need to create vibrant, thriving organizations with healthy organizational cultures has never been stronger.

Given this context, in working with colleagues and students who are leaders in their own organizations, we (the facilitators) have noticed a recurring theme of compassion fatigue (Neff, 2023) or what is sometimes more specifically called empathy fatigue (Stebnicki, 2008). When we are experiencing compassion fatigue, we observe a decline in both sympathy and empathy (Stoewen, 2021). As trauma expert, Manuela Mischke-Reeds, suggested, if empathy can be understood as resonating with others' pain, compassion can be understood as empathy plus the willingness to take action (personal communication, October 30, 2023). With compassion fatigue, both the caring *feeling* and *acts* of compassion decline. What often remains is a sense of feeling detached, which can impact multiple dimensions in our life.

In this workshop, we offer that the antidote to compassion (or empathy) fatigue is *self-compassion* (Neff, 2023; 2011; 2003). Turning the compassion mirror towards ourselves offers an opportunity for us to invest in reconnecting ourselves *to ourselves* so that we may nourish ourselves prior to nourishing others. We offer that when introduced as a workplace priority, this focus on self-compassion can ripple outward in organizations, thus promoting healthier workplaces overall.

Educators and leaders are often expected to cultivate compassion for others. People working in what are often called *caring* professions (social work, nursing, etc.) are even trained to do so. Learning compassion can be understood as transformative insofar as it:

requires a learning environment in both education and practice settings that engenders not only critical thinking, but [also] facilitates personal growth and change that is actually meaningful to the individual student. This kind of deep and transformational learning is necessary because it can facilitate the questioning of one's personal values and beliefs and the opportunity to adjust any distorted views (Clouston, 2018, pp. 1016–1017; see also Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 1991).

Nevertheless, little focus is placed on self-compassion as part of the transformative process, although we know from transformative learning theory that transformation is often disorienting, painful, or even traumatic. Jack Mezirow (1991), for example, is famously known for identifying the disorienting dilemma common to transformative learning. Lawrence and Cranton (2015) differentiated disorienting dilemmas from their own work on catalysts by stating

that “a catalyst can be traumatic, a turning point in a process, epochal (dramatic), or incremental (gradual) “ (p. 63; see also, Etmanski, 2018). Yet Freire (2003) said it most poignantly when he expressed that liberation is a “childbirth, and a painful one “ (p. 49). In this experiential workshop, we therefore turn the compassion gaze inward and ask participants, “In whatever transformation we are facing, what might be involved in *counting ourselves in* to the circle of compassion and care that we often so generously offer to others? “

Through their critical literature review on place-based transformative learning, Pisters, Vihinenb, & Figueiredoc (2019) found that both self-compassion and compassion for all beings can allow us to sense our own interconnections with this planet, work to reduce internal and external suffering, and even spark creativity. They suggested that “self-compassion is about being kind and understanding towards oneself, understanding one’s experiences as part of the universal human experience and being mindful of thoughts and feelings while not over-identifying with them “ (Pisters, Vihinenb, & Figueiredoc, 2019, p. 4). Amidst feelings of suffering and disconnection, we know we need to radically reimagine and transform how we engage with one another, the Earth, and ourselves. Our current way of thinking, doing, and being has brought us to this time of multiple intersecting crises. In this workshop, we will provide what is potentially a radically new angle on self-transformation, as well as a concrete opportunity to address any empathy fatigue participants may be experiencing in their/our roles as educators, leaders, scholars, parents, global citizens, and more. In so doing, we invite a renewed sense of vibrancy and interconnection into the workshop space, while advancing the role self-compassion can play in transformative learning.

In this experiential session, we will draw from a facilitation tool we are choosing to call Triad Consulting (see also, “Troika Consulting “ in Lipmanowicz & McCandless 2014’s list of liberating structures). This method invites participants to serve as consultants to one another, to (a) support one another in reimagining the real-time challenges with which they are confronted, and (b) refine their skills in asking for help, which can be useful during times of transformation. As the word triad suggests, participants work in groups of three. One participant (the client) sits back-to-back with the other two (consultants) and shares an empathy or compassion-related challenge they are facing (2 minutes). The other two listen attentively and ask clarifying questions, e.g., might you be willing to tell me more about [client’s specific statement] (2 minutes). The two consultants then share observations, reflections, or curiosities and generate potential ideas, while the client’s back is still turned (4 minutes). This position allows the client to receive words from the two consultants with a degree of privacy for their immediate (facial or physical) response. When they are ready, the client then turns around and shares what was most helpful in the comments they heard from consultants (2 minutes). This process then repeats in two more rounds so that each person has the opportunity to play the client role (30 minutes). What makes this facilitation method unique is not only that people are sitting back-to-back, but also that there is a specifically timed structure that is less about dialogue and more about rapid idea generation to expand one’s thinking on a particular challenge through others’ observations and questions. It also enables people to practice active, non-judgemental listening and better understand how to give useful, supportive feedback. It is a quick, yet often profound way to seek new insights on what might feel like an enduring challenge in some participants’ lives.

Participants will be actively engaged throughout this 90-minute experiential session. We invite you to join us in this unique opportunity to experience an antidote to empathy fatigue in collaboration with other participants in this workshop and to resource ourselves up in service of transforming our connections with self, families, communities, and planet.

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## **Listening Through the Chaos: Toward Transforming Collective Trauma in We-Space**

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**Abstract:** In this interactive session, we will delve deeply into conditions needed to create meaningful dialogue across differences. As the world becomes more chaotic and polarized, we are interested in more powerful ways to counteract the divisions that are driving us apart. This experiential session will engage participants in two emerging practices with which we've been experimenting in our work, which we call "we spaces for racial equity ". We will provide an interactive, intergroup experience by creating a "brave space " container where all can take risks, feel a sense of belonging and explore their own ancestral and generational connections. In the session, we will move from personal introductions to a guided visualization in which we invite people to connect with and bring forward a message from an ancestor, to an innovative "spiral we space " for sharing our stories and listening to what emerges from the group. We set guidelines in advance to invite people to notice and set aside their individual chatter and listen for the voice of the collective that is emerging in the space. Throughout the session we will share breakthroughs, barriers and best practices we have developed including specific examples and stories from our consulting practice.

**Key Words:** Racial Equity, We-space, Intergroup Dialogue

### **Session Description**

In this experiential session we will engage participants in two of the practices described in our recent book chapter, *Integral We-Spaces for Racial Equity* (Gallegos et al 2022). This work draws on and integrates an array of approaches to transformative learning, including transformation through group work and dialogue (Schapiro et al 2012; Huckaby 2014) soul work (Dirkx 2012), embodied practices (Menachim 2017), integral theory (Wilber, 2000; Gunnlaugsen & Brabant 2016); and social identity development (Hardiman & Jackson 1999; Gallegos & Ferdman 2012). Implicit to this model are our understandings about how transformation occurs by providing a brave holding space in which people can take risks and engage in radical experiments in the here and now (Arao & Clemens 2013) engaging participants in challenging and sometimes dis-orienting experiences in which their current assumptions and ways of being are challenged (Mezirow 1991); re-integrative practices through which they can experience a deep connection with one another and a deeper sense of wholeness; and opportunities to put these new understandings, feelings and insights into practice.

During this session, we will provide an interactive, intergroup experience by creating a "brave space " container where all can take risks, feel a sense of belonging and explore their own ancestral and generational connections. We are developing "human technologies " that encourage people to move beyond their more narrow individual identifications and consider

aspects of their group membership that are often invisible yet exert powerful influence on how we connect with others.

Given the dominance of white supremacy culture (Okun 2021), many are not aware of how much we perform based on these influences e.g. individualism, hoarding power, rationality valued over emotion, quantity over quality, etc. We find the tendency toward individualism to be so strong that it is difficult for many to expand their sense of self to include group as well as individual considerations. It can be a disorienting dilemma for people who have only seen themselves as separate and distinct from others to open to the perspective that they share much with those who come from similar backgrounds historically and culturally.

Whether one's background includes experiences of dominance or subordination or both, it is important to engage in considerable self work to recognize these inheritances. Often feelings of shame, blame and guilt can accompany such recognition, so the community container provides the context for holding onto and deepening one's exploration. Sharing one's stories while listening deeply creates a sense of connection that serves as an antidote to the isolation many people experience daily.

In our workshops, we build intentionally across various levels of system, starting at the personal and individual level, adding the interpersonal and finally the intergroup levels for consideration.

The two particular practices in which we will engage participants are (1) ancestral recovery work<sup>1</sup> and (2) a spiral we-space interaction, both of which we describe below.

### **Session Outline**

- Welcome/Overview/Our approach (5 minutes)
- Introductions – invite people to put themselves in the room by stating their name, location, purpose and one thing that makes them different from others in the room (10 minutes)
- Theoretical foundations and practice orientation – how our work has evolved (5 minutes)
- Ancestral Activity (40 minutes) - This activity serves to help connect people to their own ancestral heritage in deep and often unexpected ways by sharing stories about their lineage and lessons learned.
  - Guided visualization – calling forth your ancestor
  - Journal
  - Name your Ancestor / Their name/ Their lesson- tell us what message you bring from your ancestors for all of us as a collective e.g. if we were seeking their wisdom, what would they want us to know...
  - Intergroup sharing process
- Spiral we-space to process what questions and insights emerged from hearing others and sharing your own story. (20 minutes)
- Closing comments and where we plan to continue evolving our praxis. (5-10 minutes)

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<sup>1</sup> <https://hiplatina.com/connecting-ancestors-guide/>  
<https://whiteawake.org/2018/10/27/roots-deeper-than-whiteness/>

## Spiral We-Space

One of the more provocative methods we have developed helps groups shift from a solely individual worldview to include a broader collectivist perspective we call “Spiral We-Space “. The physical/energetic arrangement of the room is one of the key aspects of this practice. Rather than sitting in linear rows, theatre style or in a single circle, we position people where they do not have direct line of sight with others while being placed in a spiral formation where they are seated next to each other but not face-to-face. We set guidelines in advance to invite people to notice and set aside their individual chatter and listen for the voice of the collective that is emerging in the space. Some of our parameters include the following:

### LISTENING

Listen for the sound of our voice

Listen from the ears of your heart to hear from the heart of your soul

Listen with reverence, patience, and positive regard

Ground yourself to let go of individual chatter

### BEING

Become present to the here and now

Assume that the collective wisdom is available as a resource for us to tap into

Open to what wants to come through you to the We

Quiet the already knowing mind: rational, frameworks, problem-solving

Many topics okay... not one track: non-linear, emergent

### SPEAKING

Take the risk of speaking from your most authentic edge

Speak from a place beyond the personal, the habitual

Expect that what you articulate matters and reflects the collective

Speak when moved

Questions are okay. No expectations of an answer (soon or ever)

Groups vary widely in their ability to practice this level of communication. We are in the process of naming and replicating the conditions that scaffold learning and deep intergroup engagement. As scholar-practitioners, we learn from doing and shift our designs and practice to maximize transformation and “fierce love “. Rather than pointing fingers or projecting blame onto others, we promote authentic inquiry, cultural humility and shared exploration.

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# What Does Transformation Mean for You? Paint It in The Air

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**Abstract:** The paper explores the relationship between tinkering and transformative learning and in particular its implications for adult learning and professional development. Tinkering, characterized by hands-on, exploratory, and iterative processes, appears to align with the principles of transformative learning theory, which emphasize critical reflection, perspective-taking, and engagement in dialogic learning. The article describes a tinkering learning experience conducted with a group of preschool teachers and examines how adults use tinkering to enhance critical thinking, develop problem-solving skills, and promote dynamic communication and reflection within collaborative projects, key elements that support the transformative learning process.

**Key Words:** Tinkering, Transformative Learning, Learning Experience, Creativity

## Introduction

This paper describes a tinkering learning experience conducted with teachers that work with children from a few months to six years. This learning experience had the aims to involve these professionals in “developing a practice and ethos of tinkering “ (The Tinkering Studio, 2017) to give participants examples to design learning activities, to facilitate learning strategies, to build an environment that can support learning, to cultivate a culture of creativity and experimentation in educational settings. This learning experience is also an example of how to integrate the practical exploratory approach of tinkering with the reflective and critical elements of transformative learning.

## Differences and Similarities Between Tinkering and Transformative Learning Theory

This paragraph explores two seemingly distant learning models that can be used in complementary ways to foster active and meaningful learning. The tinkering approach (Wilkinson & Petrich, 2017; The Tinkering Studio, 2017), the first model, is encouraged among children, as it can stimulate their creativity, curiosity, and critical thinking (tab.1). Transformative learning as initially theorized by Mezirow (2003; 2016), the second model, aims at generating changes in adults’ perspectives, beliefs, and identity.

**Table 1**

*Learning Dimensions of Making and Tinkering (The Tinkering Studio, 2017)*

<b>Initiative &amp; Intentionality</b>	<b>Problem Solving &amp; Critical Thinking</b>	<b>Conceptual Understanding</b>	<b>Creativity &amp; Self-Expression</b>	<b>Social &amp; Emotional Engagement</b>
•Actively participating	•Troubleshooting through iterations	•Making observations and asking questions	•Playfully exploring	•Working in teams

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Setting one's own goals</li> <li>•Taking intellectual &amp; creative risks</li> <li>•Adjusting goals based on physical feedback and evidence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Dissecting the problem components</li> <li>•Seeking ideas, tools, and materials to solve the problem</li> <li>•Developing work-arounds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Testing tentative ideas</li> <li>•Constructing explanations</li> <li>•Applying solutions to new problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Responding aesthetically to materials and phenomena</li> <li>•Connecting projects to personal interests and experiences</li> <li>•Using materials in novel ways</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Teaching and helping one another</li> <li>•Expressing pride and ownership</li> <li>•Documenting / sharing ideas with others</li> </ul>
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The difference in the targets of these two learning models is not the only one we could find studying them. Some other differences about the two approaches could be summarized as follows.

Tinkering focuses on exploration and learning through direct manipulation of materials and concepts (Parisi, Rognoli & Sonneveld, 2017). Individuals are encouraged to experiment, make mistakes, and learn through the process of trial and error (Papert, 1980). Transformative learning, on the other hand, is based on deepening one's beliefs, values, and perspectives. It involves questioning pre-existing ideas and expanding one's knowledge through critical reflection (Mezirow, 2003; Fabbri & Romano, 2017).

Tinkering places an emphasis on acquiring practical skills and solving concrete problems. It is often associated with the maker movement and aims at developing creativity, problem solving skills and independence (Vossoughi & Bevan, 2014). In contrast, transformative learning aims at pushing individuals to explore and question their beliefs and perceptions, attempting to generate significant changes in the way they think and live (Marsick, 1988).

Tinkering is applied in more concrete and practical contexts, such as science museums, fab labs, school labs or hands-on learning environments (Resnick & Rosenbaum, 2013). On the other hand, transformative learning uses dialogic contexts where to discuss issues related to social sciences or personal self-reflection (Mezirow, 2003; Melacarne, 2018).

Tinkering tends to produce more tangible and practical results, such as creating working prototypes or solving practical problems (Rognoli, Ayala, & Parisi, 2016). Transformative learning instead aims at generating significant personal transformations, such as a greater self-awareness, a broadening of perspectives and a change in the way of thinking and acting (Mezirow, 1978).

As differences exist, so similarities between the two models also emphasize their relations with experience, reflection, transformation, involvement, and continuity. Tinkering and transformative learning value learning through practical experience. Both approaches encourage people to practice what they are learning and to apply it in their daily lives (Lave & Wenger, 2006; Fabbri, 2007). Both promote critical reflection on one's experience and ideas gained. Both approaches invite individuals to carefully examine their own beliefs, values and thought patterns, allowing them to develop a more critical and informed perspective (Mezirow, 2016). These approaches aim at promoting personal transformation.

Both approaches attempt to go beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge or skills, focusing instead on developing a new understanding of the self and the world around us (Mezirow, 2016). Transformative thinking and learning require active involvement on the part of the individual. Both models encourage active participation, taking responsibility for one's own learning and a willingness to explore new areas and ideas. Finally, both models recognize that

learning is not limited to a single moment or event but is a process that continues over time (Mezirow, 1978; 2003; 2016).

### **The Learning Experience**

More than one hundred teachers working in nursery school or kindergarten participated in 2023 to the training course titled: “Che genere di giochi? “ held at the University of Siena. During the course, a team of facilitators engaged participants in various tinkering activities:

- Building catapults, cars, and towers with Lego bricks;
- Drawing stories on light tables;
- Realize “Cranky contraptions “, “Chain reactions “, and “Crazy marbles “.

Following some examples of Lego constructions (Fig. 1) and a nursery rhyme that participants drew on Light tables (Fig. 2).

#### **Figure 1**

*Examples of Lego constructions realized by participants*



“There is a seed, which is found in the midst of nature and a strong desire to grow. It’s a beautiful sunny day, but to grow the seed also needs rain. Slowly the seed grows, becoming larger and larger. It begins to put down roots underground and even sprouts some leaves until it becomes a very big tree happy to provide shelter for many birds. “

**Figure 2**  
*Examples of activities with Light tables*



Cranky Contraptions (Fig 3) are kinetic sculptures that animate a character or scene when the handle is turned. These automata are powered by a simple crank slider mechanism which provides the basic motion (The Tinkering Studio, 2017)

**Figure 3**  
*Examples of Cranky Contraptions*



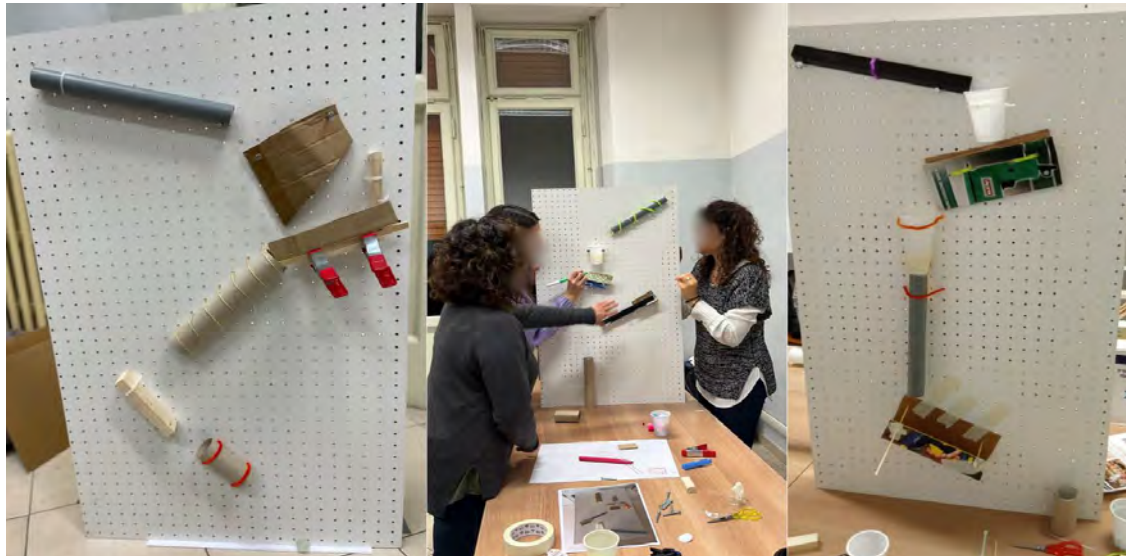
During the “chain reaction “ activity, facilitators provided examples that served as initial inspiration, some ideas that had worked well and seemed useful (Fig. 4). Facilitators taught to examples because there is no right way to build a chain reaction; you can start with the input and work towards the output or vice versa. Some people start in the middle and build towards both ends. Patience is required while building; things rarely work exactly as expected on the first attempt. Actions must be repeated, tested often, observed, and appropriate modifications made.

**Figure 4**  
*Examples of a chain reaction*



The other activity was about crazy marbles. It involves designing a path along a perforated wall to launch a marble through tubes, channels, tracks, and collectors (Fig. 5). The goal was to build a pathway that would get a marble to move slowly down the board. Participants had to consider the angle, speed, and placement of each element to create a successful marble run (Kurkovsky et al., 2019).

**Figure 5**  
*Examples of crazy marbles*



All these activities present to teachers an innovative learning approach that can significantly enhance professional development. These activities allow participants to engage in hands-on experimentation and problem-solving, fostering creativity and critical thinking skills (Bevan et al., 2015). Additionally, these activities promote collaboration and teamwork as participants work together to design and construct with lego or to understand how to build kinetic sculptures. Activities like the chain reactions provide opportunities for participants to learn from failure, as it often requires trial and error to achieve desired results. Overall, tinkering activities offer a unique and effective way to cultivate essential skills and attributes in learners, regardless of their profession or field of study (Vossoughi & Bevan, 2014).

### **Integrating Tinkering and Transformative Learning**

In this paragraph, authors try to elaborate on the potential point of contact between the tinkering approach and transformative learning. To do this we will analyze more in depth how tinkering experiences allow for critical reflection, dialogue and perspective-taking, and action planning (Bevan et al., 2015) three key concepts of Transformative learning theory as outlined by Mezirow (1978; 2003; 2016).

Tinkering activities proposed to participants of the learning experience provide a platform for critical reflection as they engage in hands-on experimentation. Critical reflection both for tinkering and Transformative learning theory means assessing the effectiveness of one's actions, understanding the reasons behind success or failure, considering alternative approaches, and integrating new knowledge into future problem-solving efforts. During the building of catapults they were encouraged to reflect on their actions (i.e. It is possible use bricks in a different way from those in the example?), observe the outcomes (i.e. This kind of brick doesn't allow the elastic to be in tension), and make necessary modifications, fostering a deeper understanding of cause and effect (Resnick & Rosenbaum, 2013).

Observing participants engage during tinkering activities like Crunky contraptions, Chain reactions, and Crazy marbles we could note that they are not only learning through direct experience how to build an artifact but are also developing critical thinking by:

- Posing problems to solve and identifying emerging problems. Most of the participants were worried about how to translate circular movement from the crank into up and down movement. Others were focused on the weight of the materials and how it affects the contraptions.
- Generating solutions and exploring different methods to achieve an outcome. During the activity chain reaction, participants brainstormed and experimented with various materials and designs to create their path.
- Analyzing, refining, and evaluating their ideas. Obviously at the first tentative marbles doesn't follow the path built by the participants. Each time different configurations of plastic glasses, tubes, or ducts needed to be tested.
- Planning and iterating on their actions based on what they have learned. Great was the surprise of a group of participants when the reaction chain was completed without any hitch and unexpectedly after yet another test.

The development of critical thinking skills through tinkering activities can significantly benefit adults in their everyday life and work beyond the immediate context of training. Teachers with developed critical thinking skills can generate new ideas, leading to innovative products, services, or processes within their schools. Tinkering exercises the assessment and evaluation of different options, resulting in more informed and sound decision-making in day-to-day responsibilities of a kindergarten. Teachers skilled in critical thinking are better prepared to adapt to changes and challenges, as they are used to thinking on their feet and pivoting when necessary. Critical thinkers contribute effectively to common projects, providing well-thought-out perspectives, and fostering productive discussions. Finally, the ability to analyze and explain complex topics clearly and concisely is enhanced, leading to clearer communication with relatives and colleagues.

Dialogue and perspective-taking are also fostered in tinkering activities. Participants involved in drawing stories on light tables were encouraged to collaborate and exchange ideas, discussing different approaches and perspectives in order to achieve their goals. Through this dialogue, participants gain new insights and expand their understanding of the story that needs to be narrated. Participants shared their thoughts and worked together during the stories creation on light tables, leading to productive conversations about different approaches and solutions for narrating stories easily. Inventing stories and drawing it on a light table brings together individuals with a range of backgrounds, which typically sparks discussions where varied viewpoints are shared and considered, enriching the overall understanding of the group. As tinkering frequently revolves around solving open-ended problems, it naturally encourages dialogue among participants to brainstorm and test ideas, which represent stories on the light table. The activity often involves a process of review and feedback, where participants are encouraged to articulate their thoughts and listen to others, fostering an environment where dialogue is essential to the iterative process. When working on a shared project, like the ideation of a short story, dialogue becomes a tool for aligning goals, setting tasks, and coordinating efforts.

Discussing what worked and what did not, participants engage in storytelling and reflection, which drives dialogue about what's next in the story. Tinkering encourages asking



why and how, leading to exploratory dialogue aimed at understanding processes, materials, and designs more deeply. In these ways, tinkering activities like drawing stories on light tables fosters an open and communicative environment, promoting dialogue as a key component of the collaborative and exploratory learning experience (García-Corretjer et al., 2020).

Furthermore, tinkering activities provide a space for action planning. Participants are prompted to devise strategies, make decisions, and implement their plans to create their desired outcomes. These activities give participants the opportunity to experience the iterative process of planning, experimenting, reflecting, and adjusting, which aligns with transformative learning principles. The crazy marble activity began with a goal in mind: to build the correct path for the marble. Participants had to plan how to achieve this goal, setting the stage for action planning. Teachers had to consider what materials and tools are available, and how best to utilize them, which involves strategic planning and resource allocation. The use of screws, funnel, and pipes is iterative, involving cycles of planning, creating, testing, and revising. Professionals learn to adapt their plans based on feedback from each iteration. Tinkering requires identifying problems and brainstorming potential solutions. This often leads to developing a sequence of actions that need to be planned and executed. In groups, Teachers often accomplished tasks based on their skillsets, requiring a plan for collaboration and coordination. Tinkering involves experimenting and taking risks, which requires planning for potential setbacks and developing contingency plans. Recording the steps taken, results observed, and lessons learned is an essential part of the tinkering process and action planning for future activities.

Through these aspects, tinkering activities provide practical experience in developing and executing plans, an essential skill in professional and personal contexts.

### **Future Directions**

Future research directions exploring the relationship between Tinkering and Transformative Learning Theory could delve into various areas to deepen our understanding of how these concepts intersect and enhance each other. Studies could investigate the long-term impacts of integrating tinkering into adult learning and professional development programs, assessing changes in problem-solving abilities, adaptability, and creativity. Comparative research might explore different educational contexts-formal versus informal, online versus in-person-to examine how tinkering practices influence transformative learning outcomes across diverse environments.

There's also scope for examining the role of technology in supporting tinkering and transformative learning, such as the use of digital fabrication tools or virtual reality simulations. Another avenue for research could analyze how tinkering's emphasis on failure and iterative design fosters resilience and a growth mindset, integral to transformative learning. Moreover, qualitative research capturing personal narratives could provide insight into the lived experiences of learners engaging in tinkering activities, revealing the psychological and social processes at play during transformative learning episodes. By expanding the empirical evidence base in these areas, future studies can offer valuable guidance for educators aiming to incorporate tinkering into curricula and can inform policy decisions regarding education reforms that foreground active, experiential learning strategies.

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# **Embodied Transformations: Exploring Scars and Stories in Transformative Learning**

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**Abstract:** Scars can be an illustration of indelible crystallization of the problems, risks, and transformations we go through and of which we are not always aware. Using the artistic medium and theatrical performance methodologies, an attempt will be made to offer a lens through which to re-signify one's scars in a positive key. Participants, starting (1) from the exploration of their own bodies, through (2) the 'translation' of the embodied experience, passing (3) through the creation of a common map of scars, to arrive at (4) the sharing and discussion of the whole activity, will have the opportunity to rewrite the story of their scars. These scars will thus be transformed from elements of rupture to elements of rebirth and restart. The scars are not denied or hidden, but highlighted, as in the Japanese art of Kintsugi, where broken ceramics are mended, highlighting the fractures with gold. The body is not only the place of wounds but becomes the badge of restarting and above all a privileged witness, repository of profound knowledge. An embodied knowledge that opens the door to reparative transformation.

**Key Words:** Embodied Transformative Learning, Creative Arts, Performative Methodologies, Scar, Kintsugi

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate an activity that, through the creative expressive arts, aims to map and reflect on painful and traumatic experiences from the past. The body, as an embodied representation of its own transformations, can be a source of knowledge (Butterwick & Lawrence, 2009) and, simultaneously, a channel through which to (re)discover, narrate, and share life stories. Through the artistic exploration of the body, starting with an embodied theater practice, the intention is to offer a lens through which to re-signify one's scars. Just as scars are more or less visible, stories can shed light on obvious and obscure trajectories of transformation, illuminating aspects that are sometimes overlooked, thus revealing possibilities for transformation and change.

Facilitators are aware that the theme of scars may relate to trauma and unresolved painful events; however, the aim of guiding the experience session is educational and not therapeutic. Although education can have therapeutic purposes (WHO, 1998), it differs from therapy, because the goal of education is learning. Since, during embodied activities, there is a risk that the emotions of one participant will be appropriated and intensely experienced by the others, facilitators feel invested with a duty of care and protection towards all participants. For this reason, participants can decide whether and how to participate, negotiating their own limits and possibilities for sharing their experiences throughout the activity.

### **From Transformative Learning to Embodied Transformative Learning**

One of the major criticisms of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991) relates to the excessive focus on the cognitive dimension, neglecting the extra-rational dimensions (Schlattner, 2022). Thanks to developments in the field of neuroscience, the role of emotions within cognitive processes has been (re)considered (Carter & Nicolaides, 2023), thus re-evaluating the dimension of the self, of imagination and intuition (Davis-Manigaulte et alii, 2006). The bodily component is also starting to be investigated as the body is “the pivot of the world “ (Merleau-Ponty, 2018), experiencing and being aware of everything around it, playing an active role in the creation of knowledge (Schlattner, 1994). In this direction, Finnegan (2020, p.83) speaks of an «embodied dimension of transformative learning» which considers the rational, emotional and bodily components inseparable. The transformation will involve not only rationality, but the integrity of the individual (York & Kasl, 2002), thus shifting from a compartmentalized and ‘narrow’ to a holistic and ‘wide-ranging’ view of the whole subject (Dirkx, 2008; Taylor, 2019).

### **The Creative Arts for Embodied Transformative Learning**

From the perspective of embodied knowledge and a holistic conception of the subject, we can no longer rely exclusively on verbal communication, written and spoken words to intercept transformation and change (Vacchelli, 2018). It is necessary to create spaces in which reason and the body can be simultaneously questioned or, better, given the possibility for expression. Art can be a useful tool in this direction as a «mélange of cognition, emotion and imagination» (Kokkos, 2010, p.162). Creative and artistic media such as stories, poetry, music, drawing and performance can give voice to unconscious dynamics (Dirkx, 2000) as they are able to tap into that knowledge deposited below our awareness (Lawrence, 2012). Art can give us access to that primordial form of knowledge created and inscribed in the body (Lawrence, 2012), bringing to the surface the hidden knowledge, concerns and desires (Davis-Manigaulte et alii, 2006). By stimulating creativity, arts-based disciplines make it possible to imagine new worlds (Denzin, 2003) and to identify unexpected connections for the brain and rationality (Nicolaides et alii, 2024). The arts can not only give voice to unspeakable in words (Butterwick & Lawrence, 2023), but, above all, they allow for the conveyance of imaginative and emotional knowledge that can foster or hinder the development of new perspectives of meaning (Carter & Nicolaides, 2023). Just as experience must be followed by reflection to generate learning (Dewey, 1934) so artistic experience must be unpacked and analyzed for it to promote transformation (Lawrence, 2008).

### **Theater Methodologies for Transformation**

Theater methodologies are art-based experiential methods (Butterwick & Lawrence, 2009; Fabbri & Romano, 2017) that actively involve the subject, promote embodied and sensory experiences, and open the way to new ways of being, seeing and knowing (Bishop & Etmanski, 2016). Theatrical methodologies, as embodied practices, insist on visual, emotional and visceral dimensions (Horsfall & Titchen, 2009) and holistically engage the subject, simultaneously inscribing themselves in the bodies, minds and emotions of the participants. The immediacy and involvement, typical of performance, lead participants to merge past memories, present emotions and future desires (Denzin, 2003). Theater is a bridge, a connection between the body and rationality, as bodies are often repositories of non-conscious knowledge at a rational level (Butterwick & Lawrence, 2009). Through theater it is possible to express ourselves, giving voice to the body and translating our unconscious with images, sounds and metaphors, fostering understanding and transformation.

Although the theater performance methodology most investigated in the literature to foster transformative learning is the Theatre of the Oppressed (Gottardo & Rossi, 2024), the potential and transformative value of other methods is not excluded. Indeed, Butterwick and Lawrence (2009) identify three key characteristics for promoting transformative learning in theater methodologies:

- 1) the possibility of tapping into unconscious knowledge,
- 2) the sharing of stories and experiences with others,
- 3) the identification of new ways of being and knowing.

These steps are also the starting point for the following theatrical experiential proposal.

### **The Activity**

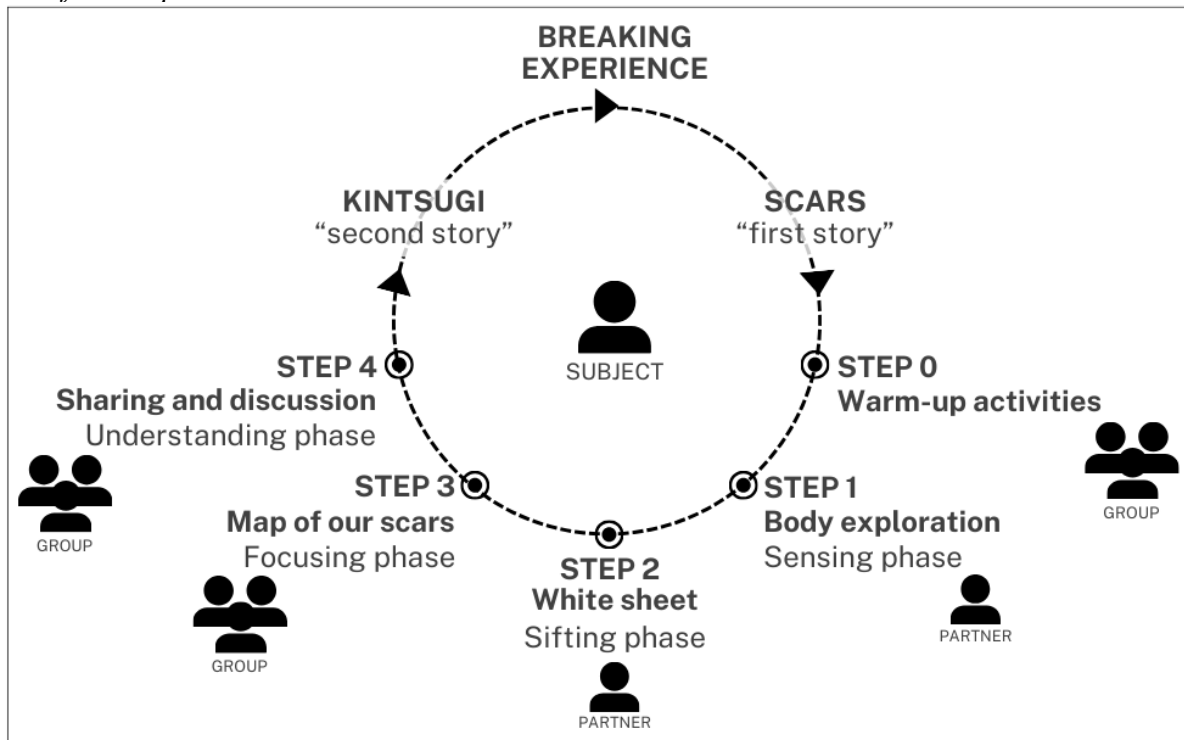
Every day, our lives are characterized by experiences and events, traversed by moods and emotions. While some of these are easily understood and accepted, some circumstances appear complex, uncategorizable, a source of changes and challenges, points of rupture and transformation from ‘normality’.

Often, when faced with such an experience, whether traumatic or painful, we do not have the resources to respond adequately, thus justifying the events with ‘first stories’ that risk imprisoning us in the situation (Den Elzen & Lengelle, 2023). These stories can crystallize into scars, more or less visible signs of an experience, which can still be painful and of which we feel ashamed. Acknowledging the rupture, seizing it as a gateway to a new world (Nicolaidis et alii, 2024) means trying to reconnect with ourselves and others, with our wounds. Scars can thus become emblems, badges of openness to change and transformation. Just as in the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with gold, Kintsugi, the breaking points are highlighted and become the object’s distinctive and beautiful element, so can scars become points of change and rebirth. For this to happen it is necessary to re-examine and re-write the ‘first stories’ that live in the subconscious and the body into ‘second stories’ (Den Elzen & Lengelle, 2023). To do so «we need a process that ‘goes through the belly’ (i.e., engaging the body and emotions), acknowledging the pain and making room to voice what ails us» (Den Elzen & Lengelle, 2023, p.5). Artistic and theatrical methodologies therefore seem to be the privileged tools to undertake this journey of reshaping our perspectives to generate a comprehensive and meaningful understanding of our experiences (Nicolaidis, 2023).

The activity will be presented twice: the first description is intended to safeguard the nature of the experience itself, trying to respect the flow and the artistic dimension of the workshop.

The graph (figure 1) represents a kind of guide, a *trade-du-union* between the two presentations to facilitate understanding and the transition from the ‘artistic’ to the ‘technical’ part.

**Figure 1**  
*Flow of the Experiential Session*



*Note:* Authors' elaboration from Den Elzen and Lengelle (2023).

### **The Artistic Flow of the Activity**

Cold bodies and minds that do not know each other must warm up, must come into contact. A common game, to get to know each other and create a living space (Step 0) represents the beginning of a journey, of a common experience between scars, stories and bodies.

Then the body will be given voice, the bodies of the participants divided into pairs (Step 1). Music will guide the exploration of our scars, bringing the silent story of our wounds to the stage. The personal story will thus be shared and embodied with the partner, amplifying the voice of the bodies.

A blank sheet of paper conceals infinite possibilities, leaving free space for imagination and creativity: it can be written on or drawn on, folded or crumpled, torn or simply left blank. A sheet of paper can collect, translate and keep track of the history of our scars (Step 2).

The pairs open up, merge, (re)creating the initial group. Now it is the turn of the stories to unite, to amalgamate, to fuse (Step 3). There will no longer be my scars and your scars, only ours. The map of our scars will be born.

And like any new map, it too must be tried out. Together, back to using words, back to dialogue, we will try to find as one body, one person a new point of arrival (Step 4).

A new story, where the scars filled with gold represent the point of strength and restart of our lives.

### **The Technique of the Activity**

This presentation aims to clarify the unfolding of the activity through the model of Den Elzen and Lengelle (2023) and try to link it to some of the stages of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991).

### **Step 0, the Warm-up Activities**

To start becoming familiar and aware of our body, the facilitators will pose a warm-up game. An exercise of walking, looking and handshaking that allows everyone to get active, to start moving their body and encounter that of others. An activity to create a protected space in which participants can feel free; to create a group they feel part and in which they feel comfortable expressing themselves.

Then an image-shape of the human body will be placed in the center of the room, the facilitators will stimulate the comparison between the represented body and the living body in order to discuss the theme of the scar: what it is, what kind of scars exist, what they can represent. The aim is not to arrive at a group definition, but to pause in the uncertainty and plurality of answers. Scars, in fact, can have a varied nature, and their very 'value' is multiple: according to Snowber (2016) they are a sign of both fragility and human strength.

### **Step 1, the Body Exploration**

After investigating scars with the head, now it will be done with the body. Embodied activities, such as theater, in fact «provide ways to begin to talk about difficult and painful experiences when words fail us» (Butterwick & Lawrence, 2023, p.55).

Facilitators will ask participants to split into pairs and “tell “ their partner the story of their scars without using words but using movement. This delivery, which for some will be challenging, will encourage «participants, educated primarily through written and spoken verbal language to rely on physical, gestural expression without resorting to speech» (Grant, 2017).

The member of the couple who 'listens' to the partner's body history will have the task of reproducing it, simultaneously, as if he/she was a mirror. Thus, the first can mirror him/herself in the second, having the chance to look at one's own history from the outside.

The aim is 'sensing', that is, the expression of how the body feels, of what is imprinted in the flesh, without censorship, (Den Elzen & Lengelle, 2023) bypassing possible cognitive obstacles and verbal communication difficulties. This activates a real process of self-examination, which may correspond to phase 2 of the transformation (Mezirow, 1991).

### **Step 2, the Blank Sheet**

Step 2 corresponds to the 'sifting phase' (Den Elzen & Lengelle, 2023), that is, the emergence and consideration of the concerns and critical issues that emerged in the previous phase.

The educators will hand over a blank sheet of paper and two pens to each pair. No delivery will be given. Living in uncertainty and lack of instructions, each participant will be free to interact (or not) with his/her partner through the sheet.

It is precisely the lack of delivery that represents the greatest possibility of freedom, each person being able to choose the form and modality through which they 'translate', re-elaborate and reflect about the embodied experience they have just had.

### **Step 3, the Map of our Scars**

The facilitators will sign their scars on the human shape with coloured markers. These scars may have 'names', words that condense or evoke the wound. Facilitators, always without giving directions, will wait for participants to arrive around the human body image. Here, each person will have the opportunity to take one (or more) markers to represent their scars. Slowly,

the initial empty outline will fill in, scar after scar, wound after wound, ‘names’ after ‘names’, gathering the experiences of the group of participants.

Thus, similar words, common themes may emerge, opening the door for an initial reformulation of experiences, through this ‘focusing’ phase (Den Elzen & Lengelle, 2023). Simultaneously, in these words, one can discover common processes of rupture and transformation, similar changes that occurred to other group members, which refer to the fourth phase of transformation (Mezirow, 1991).

**Step 4, the Sharing and Discussion**

Facilitators will ‘return’ the voice to the group to investigate and explore what happened during the workshop.

The individual observations will be the starting point for investigating the embodied experience through the ORID protocol (Marsick & Maltbia, 2009). This framework distinguishes among Objective, Reflective, Interpretative, and Decisional questions, which allow the group to free its thinking by generating new ideas and strategic insights (Table 1).

The answers to these questions will arise at an individual level and, like scars on the human figure, they can be united and fused between them. In this way, a broader and more complex system will emerge given by the grouping of individual narratives and subjectivities, a system that responds to the pronoun “we “ and the identity of the group, a 4th person perspective (Koh, 2020). The aim is ‘understanding’ (Den Elzen & Lengelle, 2023) and the production of new insights, congruent with the visceral feelings of the entire group, with a view to creating a ‘second story’.

**Table 1**

*The ORID Protocol (Marsick & Maltbia, 2009)*

Type of Questions	Questions
O - Objective	What happened? What did we notice?
R - Reflective	Are there connections between my experience and that of others? What dimensions do they involve?
I -Interpretative	What new knowledge and insights have been generated?
D - Decisional	And now? What is my/our take-away from the experience?

**Conclusion**

Scars are breaking points, fractures, indelible traces of events that have left their mark. As marks, scars have no intrinsic value, but depend on what we assign to them.

In the Kintsugi, the result is a unique work of art, where cracks and breaking points are highlighted and become the characteristic element of the object. Kintsugi is not a simple artist practice, but a philosophy of healing and resilience (Santini, 2018) and as such can be applied to human wounds. Just as breaks paradoxically become the strengths and beauty points of the object, so scars can represent elements of turning point and rebirth for the individual.

Being able to look at one’s scars in this way means re-reading the past from another point of view, transforming one’s ‘first story’ into a ‘second story’, broadening one’s horizons and reformulating the meaning of experiences, with the awareness that every wound conceals an opportunity. Thus, Kintsugi becomes an artistic metaphor for Transformative Learning. A ceramic that breaks or a traumatic experience are catalyzing events (Butterwick & Lawrence, 2023), disorienting dilemmas. One can decide to do nothing, to leave things as they are. But, at other times, however, a long and difficult process is activated to understand how to intervene to



repair the damage, to reconstruct the object, to integrate and adapt the meaning perspectives. In this last case the scar will be filled with gold, loaded with value, an indelible and distinctive sign of transformation and change.

The logic, or rather, the philosophy of Kintsugi is not merely reparative (we do not fix ceramics by trying to minimize the traces of damage), but celebratory and renewing (we enhance fractures with gold, to give new life and value). Equally, through the embodiment of the history of one's scars, one wants to retrace them, to re-signify them, to exalt and celebrate restart. One's scars, one's wounds will thus become a source of learning, transformation and change. A learning that starts from the recomposition of the shards, from the valorisation of the ashes, of what remains, in view of new future trajectories.

A transformative restorative learning.

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## Radical Conversations: Uncovering New Ground

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**Key Words:** Resonance, Epistemology, Relationship, Experience

### Experiential Conversation (a Philosophers' Café)

“How can we radically question our (own) (self-)understanding of what it means to transform? “

This question welcomes fresh air. That possibility is strengthened when we frame ourselves as “learners with questions “. This orientation contrasts with the implicit expectation that scholars offer conclusions — an expectation which nurtures an emphasis on mapping certainties rather than exploring questions. Our dynamic, open-ended inquiry will be an alternative to the tradition of re-presenting cumulative knowledge that has characterized the academy until relatively recently.

### Potential Earthquake: Questioning Foundational Assumptions

We want to stimulate a discussion where it is possible to question the assumptions on which TL Theory has been constructed. We will be asking if those assumptions still hold true? Have conditions on the ground changed so fast that TL theory's assumptions refer to an era that no longer exists? To name one example: the context within which TL was formulated was the late modern, rational, Western society, that has been described as the “reflexive society “ by Beck, Giddens, Bauman, and others. Reflexivity entails a separation between the subject and the world, between I and Thou. Has the time come to question this foundational background? In the new digitalized, hyperconnected, accelerating (and ageing) era, “resonance “ (Rosa, 2019) is becoming more (or at least equally) relevant, to resist alienation by some form of “authentic contact “ with oneself, the other, and the environment. Relationship not separation: “a kind of relationship to the world, formed through af-fect and e-motion [...] in which subject and world are mutually affected and transformed [...] a responsive relationship, requiring that both sides speak *with their own voice* “ (Rosa, 2019: 174). Interaction and responsiveness in this reading can be a correction to the separateness generated by hyper-reflexivity. Furthermore, our conversation will explore what other foundational assumptions need “troubling “? We will keep in mind what implications this troubling might have for the theory and practice of our work as educators. Will the resultant theory and practice be informed by the same new assumptions, or will they develop on separate tracks?

Larry recently attended a conference where academics read tightly reasoned, exhaustively supported arguments to an increasingly passive audience. The presentation *form* (reading dense papers to a *passive* audience) worked against engaging audience attention and participation. Ironically, the theme of the conference was “attention “ and its implications for education. That is, we were enacting a performative contradiction — where the theorizing *about* learning interfered with the *process* of learning. How many times do we enact such a performative contradiction? The relationship between content and form is a crucial one in communication and learning (Bateson, 1972). *Isn't it time that we also “trouble “ the presentation forms and not just*

*the conceptual content of our TL Theory?* A dialogical exploration of our experience invites us to think beyond TL theory's "givens" and through that process, learn. For that reason, we are proposing an *experiential* conversation.

Radical questioning entails a challenge to the dominant epistemology; it disrupts the idea that self-consistency or internal coherence is the most relevant criterion to test theory. As an alternative Larry will argue that experience is that which lies beneath the tip of the iceberg of TL theory. By comparing transformative *experience* with transformative learning *theory* we have a means by which we can "radically question our (own) (self-)understanding" of transformation. In the conference example cited above, a theoretical presentation resulted in a disengaged audience. Theory and experience didn't interact but developed in disconnected domains. We ask, "Does TL theory fit with our on the ground experience?" Furthermore, how often do we employ an abstract concept posited by TL Theory to guide our interactions in the concrete context of the classroom?

Laura belongs to a community of "practical philosophers" (attended by professionals in care, education, social work, psychoanalysis, community work, etc.) in Milan (Hadot, Davidson & Chase, 1997; Formenti, 2019) where embodied narratives and aesthetic practices are shared to question dominant ideas and hidden theories that shape the caring relationship. This community values autobiography and biography as media for individual and collective transformation. Biographically orientated cooperative inquiry becomes the leverage for transformative learning in groups and communities (Formenti & Hoggan-Kloubert, 2023). This entails a practice of dialogue, respectful communication, and creative management of conflict.

### **Experiential: Philosopher's Cafe**

Among the many possibilities and practices that we have explored, over the years, to disrupt the usual form of the academic presentation (e.g. dialogic presentations, performative sessions, workshops, outdoor activities, arts-based presentations, etc.), we have chosen the philosopher's café, since it encourages rigorous thought characterized by embodied, relational, dialogic epistemologies. It is inspired by ancient practices, such as the "lectio" (a Latin word for "reading"), where a presenter puts forward a question followed by a few exploratory remarks; then participants are invited to join in following some reflexive steps, individually or in small groups, and to participate in the debate with (re)presentations, answers, more questions, and comments. The expectation is for active participation rather than passive presence/absence.

### **Rational**

Our presupposition is that existential engagement is a prerequisite for *transformation*. This process can be initiated by a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1991): where a person is confronted with a challenge for which they lack an adequate response. We believe that many of us are experiencing multiple disorienting dilemmas. Transformative learning can entail a revision of previous perspectives of meaning (as in Bateson's deuterolearning or second level learning, 1972), while existential transformation is like a religious conversion (third level learning), as James (1902) noted, when the fundamental premise(s) that previously organized one's way of being in the world (the "metaphor that we are", Bateson, 1977) are being deeply challenged and eventually replaced.

### **Café Format**

The café will implement a process of open exploration and examination of the participants' experiences vis a vis TL theory. We, the presenters, will embody a dilemma, since we bring two different theories: Larry's more centered on (a) the individual process of

transformation (Green, 2021), Laura's (b) on the co-evolutionary unit individual-plus-environment (Bateson, 1972):

- a) Individuals *resist* transformation because they are attempting to preserve their ontological security through their attachments to, and identifications with their meaning perspective, ideological loyalties and self-concept. If we understand the source of personal resistance, is the desire for ontological security then we have a concept that transcends the different means that we use to achieve it. Apparent polarities have an underlying unity in that they are seeking the same ends.
- b) Western epistemology is individualistic and rationalistic; the myth of autonomy and separation is a disaster for the human species and the environment. Our identity is dynamic, multiple and situational and individual transformation depends on the environment, or better: that part of the environment that is situationally involved in the process of interaction (an object, space, the other person, words...). We are trained not to follow the flux, express our freedom, and trust systemic wisdom. We (can only) transform with the environment, not against it.

How can the theory – and practice - of TL embrace this double description (or dilemma?) and offer good enough learning spaces to take care of the relationship?

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# **Transformational Power of Liberating Authentic Emotion: Re-examine Embodied Feelings with Creative Expressions**

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**Abstract:** This experiential workshop invites participants to explore the intricacies of the physiological mechanisms involved in the initial phase of transformative learning. Through various creative modalities like drawing, poetry writing, and improvisational music, participants will reflect on the conventional notion of “negative emotions “. Guided activities will encourage applying artistic ways of knowing to construct a more integrated relationship with emotions. By visualizing the dissolution of the binary interpretation of feelings, participants can unleash the latent energy within authentic emotions for integral growth.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Emotion, Creative Expression

## **Emotion and Transformative Learning**

Emotion, if appropriately addressed, can be used as a gateway for critical reflection on taken-for-granted assumptions (Mälkki, 2019). However, due to the long-standing belief that “negative emotions “ are inappropriate and harmful, individuals often develop painful relationships with their uncomfortable feelings. Such painful relationships with emotions lead to individuals habitually avoiding the shadow of emotional experiences in exchange for a false sense of safety and security (Harmon-Jones et al., 2015; Wilber et al., 2008). Consequently, when facing a disorienting dilemma, typically triggering uncomfortable feelings, individuals with painful relationships to their emotions tend to resist emotional processing. This resistance to processing emotional experiences prevents them from progressing towards later stages of transformative learning, including critical reflection and the development of a revised frame of reference (Carter & Nicolaide, 2023).

To establish healthier relationships with their emotions, individuals must review the constructed meaning of so-called “negative emotions “. Instead of labeling uncomfortable feelings as “negative “, Wilber et al., (2008) suggests unveiling the mask of our inauthentic secondary emotions, the meanings of which are socially constructed, and confronts our authentic primary emotions. With an alternative view of “negative emotions “ as a form of authentic raw energy experienced by “me “ (not in “me “), individuals can evolve their relationships with their emotions, liberating the energy required for further transformation and growth.

Furthermore, possessing a mindset that mislabels authentic emotions as “negative “ depletes individuals’ energy. Such negative interpretations of experienced emotions cause the brain to signal body organs to produce hormones in response to stress and anxiety. However, if individuals consistently react to the “phantomic “ stress and anxiety stemming from inauthentic secondary emotions, an excess of hormones is produced, resulting into hormonal imbalance (Haruyama, 1995). This hormonal imbalance could reinforce the unhealthy habitual emotional experience. Therefore, Haruyama (1995) further elaborates the importance of maintaining an alternative mindset towards embodied feelings. Re-examining authentic emotions by recognizing the potential positive aspects of uncomfortable feelings can stimulate the brain to produce  $\beta$ -Endorphin. This particular endorphin is essential for enhancing individuals’ energetic capacity, physical immunity, levels of consciousness, and creativity, etc. Therefore, an alternative mindset

regarding emotions also holds transformative power from the neurological and physiological perspective, fostering individuals to transform toward a higher order of consciousness (Kegan, 2001).

### **Artistic Gateways to Embodied Emotion and Transformative Potential**

While emotions intricately link our minds and bodies, we often struggle to precisely describe these experiences with words. The depth and complexity of our emotional sensations far outstrip the limited vocabulary we have to express them. Thus, artistic forms of expression, such as music, poetry and visual arts, offer invaluable pathways for exploring and conveying the rich, textured landscapes of our lived emotional realities.

Creative processes can render unconscious feelings more tangible and accessible to conscious reflection. For instance, the act of drawing images related to an emotion can make that feeling more visible and concrete, bringing it from the depths of our unconscious into the light of conscious awareness for deeper contemplation (Dirkx, 2001). As Hoggan et al. (2009) assert, “art and creative expression offer an opportunity for us to engage in alternative forms of expression, which may shift the way in which we view our current situation “ (p.17). Artistic inquiry facilitates new perspectives, allowing us to step outside habitual frames and consider our experiences through fresh lenses.

Recognizing the profound link between artistic ways of knowing and transformative learning (Miller, 2020; Lawrence, 2012), this workshop purposefully integrates a variety of creative modalities. These activities invite participants not merely to access and express their emotions beyond the constraints of language, but also to actively engage in reconstituting the personal meanings and significance they ascribe to particular emotional states. Through iterative cycles of immersed artistic exploration and reflexive meaning-making, participants can cultivate greater awareness, understanding, and self-regulation of their inner emotional terrains.

This process of exploration and expression can facilitate the initial stages of transformative learning, where individuals begin to question and re-evaluate their existing assumptions and beliefs about emotions, setting the stage for critical reflection and the development of new, more adaptive perspectives.

Overall, this experiential workshop provides a unique and engaging approach to addressing the physiological and emotional components of transformative learning, empowering participants to embrace their authentic emotions as sources of energy, growth, and personal transformation.

### **Flow of the Experiential Session**

This workshop engages participants’ artistic ways of knowing (Blackburn Miller, 2020) to reconstruct the meaning of embodied feelings and experience “physiological microprocesses “ in transformative learning’s initial phase (Carter & Nicolaidis, 2023). Three artistic experiential activities are designed and facilitated: drawing, reflective poetry writing and improvisational singing.

#### **Emotional Creature Drawing (45 minutes)**

In this section, participants will create distinctive emotional creature by drawings to gain insights into how feelings influence physical organs. As participants illustrating how their creatures’ organ configurations evolve as different emotions are experienced in their own drawing, participants will learn to perceive feelings as a form of energy.

- Guided exploratory drawing (drawing shapes & color filling) (Fink, 2023)

- Create emotional creature with organs (visualize your emotion, and connect it to your physical wellbeing)
  - Draw how the organs will change as it feels sad and angry
  - Select one of the shadow emotions, explain what had happened to the creature's organs
  - Connect to participants' own shadow experience, feel how your body/organ react to particular emotion
- Explain the relationship between emotion, body/organ and energy
  - How mistreat emotion affect physical organs and energetic capacity (Haruyama, 1995)
- Addressing authentic emotion
  - Draw how emotional creature's organs change when feeling clear and care
  - Explain the power of liberating energy from authentic emotion (Wilber et al., 2008)

Tools needed: paper, color pens/pencils or crayons

### **Reflective Poem Writing and Improvisational Singing (30 minutes)**

Participants will collectively create a poem together. First, the facilitator will play an original song about emotion, providing a framework for the participants on the structure of the poem. Accompanied by the music, each participant will either write one sentence about attitudes or beliefs they associate with certain emotions, or they can reinterpret the meaning of certain emotions. Together, participants will arrange the sentences into a coherent poem. As a group, they will then sing the poem improvisationally, experiencing how embodied feelings can transmute into energy.

Tools needed: a music instrument or pre-selected music recording, post-it notes

### **Closing Mark (15 minutes)**

The final facilitated dialogue synthesizes the participants' creative explorations, connecting the contemplative activities to transformative learning theory. Reflecting on distinguishing inauthentic secondary emotional reactions from authentic primary somatic experiences crystallizes the path toward intimacy with emotional energies. By reconstructing the meaning of uncomfortable feelings as stored unleashed energy to be liberated, residual resistance to those emotions dissolves. Recognizing the wisdom of embracing rather than avoiding "negative" emotional states opens a gateway to their transformative potential for personal growth.

### **Conclusion**

This experiential process anchors participants in a firsthand understanding of the psychological and biological underpinnings of emotion -- their own embodied emotional experiences. By reframing emotional experiences from "positive/negative" dichotomy to dynamic patterns of consciousness representing wisdom to be embraced, participants construct a fertile new ground for transformative insight. This revised perspective on emotion allows disorienting dilemmas to be met with undefended presence, setting the stage for the vulnerability and candor prerequisite to critical self-reflection.



In essence, this workshop harnesses the synergistic resonances between creative expressions, physiological processes, and contemplative self-inquiry. It invites participants to palpably experience the mind-body resonances of emotion, embrace them through artistic expression, and ultimately recontextualize emotions from obstructions into openings. The transformed relationship to authentic emotion catalyzed in this co-creative process empowers an integration of energy that ignites transformative learning at its source.

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## Mindfulness as a Path to Transformative Learning

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**Key Words:** Mindfulness, Transformative Learning, Meaning Making, Adult Development

Mindfulness meditation has risen in popularity in Western society as a means for attaining better health, a calm mind, presence in the face of uncertainty, better decision-making, and untapped creativity, to name a few. Similarly, transformative learning theory has gained a much broader audience since Jack Mezirow (1991) first introduced it to the field of adult education. More recent applications of transformative learning theory have been in the fields of organizational studies, community dialogue, community planning, and complexity theory, among others, signifying a wider appeal. These two practices, along with constructive developmental theory, complement each other and enhance one's ability to achieve perspective transformation.

According to the *Harvard Business Review* (Cameron & Hafenbrack, 2022), more than half of US companies offer mindfulness training to their employees. Mindfulness training is also being offered to patients experiencing moderate levels of anxiety as an alternative to medication, with significant success (Morris, 2023, January 23). Although it is encouraging to see Western cultures embrace what is ostensibly an Eastern practice, the mindfulness that most Westerners practice is only a small part of the meditation practice based in Buddhist philosophy. The typical meanings that most Americans attach to meditation (focusing on one object, a state of relaxation, a dissociated state, or a mystical state) do not in any way reflect the practice of Buddhist mindfulness (Varela, Rosch, & Thompson, 2000).

Buddhist mindfulness involves a practice of both concentration meditation and insight meditation, the former in which the individual concentrates on one particular object, often the breath, and the latter in which the individual observes the arising, duration, and passing of thoughts or other phenomena. Concentration meditation existed before the Buddha (Rahula, 1959/1974) and is the type of meditation that most people are familiar with. The aim of concentration meditation is to cultivate a state of deep concentration or one-pointedness of mind and tranquility by focusing one's attention on a single object of meditation. Insight meditation "is essentially Buddhist 'meditation'.... It is an analytical method based on mindfulness, awareness, vigilance, observation" (Rahula, 1959/1974, pp. 68-69). Insight meditation helps us to see things as they really are and eventually leads us to final liberation or enlightenment. The two practices combined enable mental development and a calming of the mind: "The purpose of calming the mind in Buddhism is not to become absorbed but to render the mind able to be present with itself long enough to gain insight into its own nature and functioning" (Varela et al., 2000, p. 24). The combination of insight and calmness makes it possible for one to not react to difficult situations but to ponder the possibilities.

This capacity for both insight and equanimity provides a solid foundation for transformative learning. Mezirow (2000) considered emotional maturity—awareness, empathy, and control—essential conditions for transformative learning. These three aspects are also foundational to mindfulness meditation. During both concentration and insight meditation, one develops their awareness of their thoughts and thinking patterns, as well as developing greater mental discipline. Empathy is enhanced through the loving-kindness meditation, which involves extending compassion, both to oneself and to all other beings. Maintaining a consistent and

regular mindfulness practice requires the same level of emotional maturity needed for transformative learning.

Mindfulness also prepares an individual well for responding to a disorienting dilemma and engaging in critical self-reflection and meaning making. For many people, a disorienting dilemma causes considerable anxiety and confusion. Taylor and Elias (2012) noted that how one engages with the dilemma can significantly impact the process of transformation. Mindfulness emphasizes the process of observing phenomena rather than reacting to them. Thus, a mindfulness practice makes it possible to engage with a disorienting dilemma in a more intentional and thoughtful manner.

Furthermore, mindfulness as a reflective practice enhances one's ability to engage in critical self-reflection, which ultimately develops one's capacity for meaning making. Whereas mindfulness is observational, critical self-reflection is analytical, and both are necessary for transformative learning (Sherman, 2021). The observational nature of mindfulness makes it possible for one to identify their habits of mind. Indeed, Hyland (2017) considers insight meditation as one method that can be combined with transformative learning in order "to switch off the automatic pilot by examining the impulses and emotions which distort or inhibit clarity of thinking about the world around them" (p. 17).

Unlike Mezirow's cognitive perspective of transformative learning, mindfulness encourages the letting go of forward- and backward-looking thoughts in order to be present with the current experience through mind and body. It is a deeply spiritual practice that reflects Dirks's (Dirks, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006) "soul work" (p. 125), which he "suggests [is] a more integrated and holistic understanding of subjectivity, one that reflects the intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual dimensions of our being in the world" (p. 125). Mindfulness based in Buddhist philosophy focuses on the development of mental discipline, wisdom, and ethical conduct, and while there is no belief in a soul in Buddhism, mindfulness is steeped in the notion of wholesomeness and leaving this world in a positive mind moment to move on to the next.

Mindfulness is also connected to adult development in its capacity to develop meaning making and emotional maturity, in particular through the levels of development illustrated in constructive developmental theory. The highest level of adult development, according to constructive developmental theory, is the self-transforming mind, a perspective that recognizes the interdependence of systems and embraces contradiction and ambiguity (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). It is the only level of adult development that operates from within its frame of reference as well as outside that frame. There are three key principles of mindfulness practice that enable one to move into the self-transforming mind. The first is right understanding, the ability to see things as they really are and not as one wishes. The capacity of the self-transforming mind to move in and out of one's frame of reference and question perspectives is essentially right understanding. The next is impermanence—the idea that everything is constantly changing. During insight meditation, one is constantly observing the beginning, duration, and end of phenomena, enabling one to accept uncertainty. The final principle is that of no-self. The concept of no self is tied to the concept of impermanence in that the self is always changing and consequently, there is no permanent self. As Vu and Burton (2020) describe,

The self exists in relation to its surroundings, emphasizing the interdependent nature of all phenomena in the universe. Correcting the self thus encourages a continuous self-reflexivity to adapt to constant changes, learning from both successes and failures of the self and from others. (p. 214)

In the self-transforming mind, one recognizes the impermanence and interconnectedness of any given situation, including the self. One must reside in the self-transforming mind in order to make any progress toward enlightenment. And it is there where transformative learning is most likely to bloom.

This experiential session is intended to give participants the opportunity to engage in a couple of mindfulness practices and explore the Buddhist philosophy (as noted above) behind these practices. A short presentation will draw connections between mindfulness and transformative learning, but participants will also have an opportunity to discuss those connections in greater detail in small groups.

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# Seed Bombs for Transformation: Using Guerilla Gardening for Making Good Trouble in Academia

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**Abstract:** Good Trouble is a concept proposed by John Lewis to use peaceful disruption for social and political change. This principle aligns with the transformative learning framework which posits that transformation often stems from a disrupting event that compels an individual to rethink existing paradigms. Today, academia is often rife with competition, pressure to “publish or perish“, and an increasing disproportion of resources between wealthy and impoverished nations. This experiential session offers disruption using Freire’s Pedagogy of the Question for re-thinking and re-framing ways we in academia engage with each other and with our work to bring transformation to a world in crisis. Good Trouble involves asking hard questions, questioning ourselves, the purposes we serve, and the values that our actions stand for. Guerilla gardening is an apt metaphor for Good Trouble in education and research. The activities can range from simple, such as throwing seed bombs in urban areas without any plants to more complex, illegal actions such as occupying empty lots and creating gardens. Our desire for this presentation is to co-create a transformative experience where “seed bombs“ are planted to bring transformation to the important work of academia.

**Key Words:** Transformation Theory, Academia, Guerilla Gardening, Scholar-Activist

## Introduction

*Good Trouble* is a concept proposed by John Lewis to use peaceful disruption to spotlight injustice for social and political change. “Get in good trouble, necessary trouble, and help redeem the soul of America“ (Associated Press, 2020). He was unwavering in his focus to make the world more equitable and just for all people and recognized that this pursuit of justice necessitated him to disrupt and disturb the status quo for which he was arrested and put in jail. For Lewis, *Good Trouble* meant challenging oppressive systems of power and policy for the goal of transformation. Mezirow (1975) too, realized that transformation is not a quick or easy process and requires disequilibrium to shift meaning perspectives and themes in both people and organizations.

Currently, global society is experiencing turmoil, with an unfortunate trend toward increasing division and thus, decreasing openness to transformation that is also threatening democracies around the globe. The ITLC is taking place at one of Europe’s oldest universities, the University of Siena, and it is important to reflect on the original intent of the university as an institution. In Greece, the first universities formed around the principle of *paideia*—creating ideal members of society and citizens (Moutsios, 2024). Today, academia is often rife with

competition, obsessed with publishing in top-tier journals (Aguinis et al., 2020), and overly focused on rankings where the “current system is dysfunctional and causes more harm than good” (Adler & Harzing, 2009, p.72; Lasco, 2023). This has resulted in some universities opting out of the rankings system (University of Zurich, 2024). Academia seems to have lost connection to its original purpose. We, the authors, are disturbed by the realities we encounter in our lived experience in academia and offer our paper and session to explore where there are places we might best allocate our time and energy to cause *Good Trouble* and thus, use our positions to advance justice and equality.

### **Blackstock: A Modern-Day *Good Troublemaker***

A 2023 article cited Blackstock, a Canadian professor, as saying that universities needed to hire more academics who were “willing to get into trouble” (Rynor, 2023). Her understanding of “trouble” aligns with John Lewis’ definition. In this article, she asks scholars and academics to consider ways they can use their platforms to give voice to important struggles and unjust systems around the world and to be scholar-activists (Cann & DeMeulenaere, 2020; Flood et al., 2013). Blackstock’s words embody the principles she lives by as a modern-day good troublemaker. Although her publications are numerous, her main accomplishments are within her role as an activist. She is a professor and a member of the Gitksan First Nations and the Director of the First Nations Children’s Action Research and Education Service. She has worked for 25 years towards granting Indigenous children child protection (Blackstock, 2009, 2011). She uses action research by connecting with the lived experience of people and their communities, by working with them and not on them (Bradbury, 2015).

Blackstock encouraged those in academia to prioritize their voice in addressing issues of injustice. She emphasizes the importance of intertwining academia and activism viewing academic freedom as a valuable platform to address discrimination from a unique vantage point. Her challenge to those in academia is to move beyond traditional methods of knowledge dissemination such as publishing and presenting noting that eighty-five percent of journal articles go unread. Instead, she advocates for academics to engage with the lived experience of people and use their positions to address real-life challenges, modeling this approach in her life (Rynor, 2023).

### **Loamy Soil**

To follow her example, we must first consider the context and place in which we are situated, much like preparing loamy soil for planting. Loamy soil ideal for plant growth, results from the cultivation and fertilization of barren soil, creating an environment conducive to transformation. Similarly, the transformative learning (TL) framework suggests that transformation often stems from disruptive events that compel individuals to rethink outdated paradigms (Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2008). Adapting to and making sense of new events requires relinquishing old preconceptions and being open to new perspectives fostering positive transformation (Mezirow, 1991). This disruption is similar to *Good Trouble* as it provides the necessary context for transformation and growth.

One specific example of loamy soil in action is the ITLC conferences. For one of the authors of this paper, the ITLC 2018 was especially transformative and her story is highlighted in this paper as an example. Deborah Kramlich’s interest in transformative learning theory began when she read about Edee Mezirow, who experienced a profound transformation upon returning to higher education in her 40s. Deborah also embarked on her PhD journey at the age of 39, and as a mother of six children ranging in age from 1 to 10. The doctoral journey became a crucial lifeline, enabling her to contemplate and explore ways to enhance the learning process. Her

program required on-site presence twice a year which enabled her to find a new identity in addition to being a mother and offered her time for reflection and imagination. Her times onsite allowed her to be fully herself and consider her 14 years lived abroad that had shaped and transformed her. This was a time of individual transformation.

In the last stages of completing her dissertation, she joined the ITLA and participated in two affinity groups to help plan the 2018 conference. Monthly Zoom meetings with these groups of strangers provided the fertile ground she needed to build authentic relationships and collaborate in real-time with individuals from around the world. Living in Thailand and not connected to a university was often lonely, but these groups offered her community. By the time the groups met in person at Teachers College, she was grateful to have already formed meaningful friendships. This time was personally tumultuous for her, as she had moved away from the US in 1993 and was saddened to see the radical shifts in 2016 in the US from a distance. Many friends and family had become increasingly militant in their political views, and the conservative values she once shared seemed to have been discarded in the interest of nationalism. At ITLC 2018, she found a safe space to discuss and dream about making the world a better place while forging friendships and collaborations that continue to this day. The collaborative and collective environment at ITLC2018 created the space for this ongoing transformation and we hope that other participants here will find this space at ITLC2024 as well.

Rooted in the *conscientization* process of transformation (Freire, 1979), we invite the participants of this session to develop a critical understanding of reality through reflection and action. This is a demanding process because it requires a commitment to make changes in our work and in the research world dynamics we contribute to. Inspired by hooks (1994), we can affirm that research could be a practice of freedom, in a provocative way, *Good Trouble* could be transgressive research. Fox (2000) proposes a model of ‘transgressive action research’ in which the integration of research into practice is augmented with a commitment to resistance.

This experiential session uses Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Question* (Brass & Macedo, 1985). to re-think and reframe ways we in academia can engage with each other and with our work to bring transformation to a world in crisis. *Good Trouble* involves asking hard questions, questioning ourselves, the purposes we serve, and the values that our actions stand for. Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Question* supports the framework of our proposal. As Freire, our interest in asking questions is to link the question and answer to actions that can be performed (Freire & Faundez, 1989) and that are potentially transformative.

Human existence, because it came into being through asking questions, is at the root of change in the world. There is a radical element to existence, which is the radical act of asking questions. And precisely when someone loses the capacity to be surprised, they sink into bureaucratization. I think it important to note that there is an undeniable relationship between being surprised and asking questions, taking risks, and existence. At root human existence involves surprise, questioning, and risk. And, because of all this, it involves action and change (Freire & Faundez, 1989, p. 40).

### **Guerilla Gardening**

Guerilla gardening is an apt metaphor for disruptive action or *Good Trouble* in both education and research. The activities can range from simple, such as throwing seed bombs in urban areas without any plants to more complex, illegal actions such as occupying empty lots and creating gardens. “Fundamentally, guerilla gardening is a movement that takes unused or neglected private property [...] and brings it back to the masses to beautify and repurpose every



square inch, while often incorporating fresh produce sources to those in need “ ( “Guerilla Gardening “, n.d.).

Several gardens have turned into community gardens that are used by the neighborhood and encourage intergenerational and intercultural exchanges and cooperation (Reynolds, 2014). This creates new ways of empowerment and new partnerships, which enriches their communities. “When you’re a guerrilla gardener, you’re an active participant in the living environment. You’re no longer content to merely react to what happens to the spaces around you. You’re a player which means you help determine how these spaces get used “ (Tracey, 2007, p. 32).

Being active in a local community, mentoring, and outreach initiatives are supposed to be part of the service requirement for professors and those seeking tenure in the United States. Yet, time is scarce and often they are encouraged to do the bare minimum. In fact, one tenure track professor referenced to the service obligation as a “dragon that must be slain to survive the hero’s journey to tenure “ (Irish, 2024). To be fair, this is not an act of selfishness but rather one of survival. The pressure to “publish or perish “ is real and forces individuals to prioritize their publication output over service and teaching.

Here are some provocative questions to consider:

- What was and what is our role in academia?
- What is the goal of teaching?
- Does it remain confined to the classroom?
- How can universities use their position to address risks to our democracies?
- What is the role of the university regarding addressing challenging political situations?
- When should universities speak up?
- Who is responsible to nurture others much like gardeners planting seeds for a future harvest?

Addressing these challenges requires a collective effort; the goal is to make the world a better place by changing policies and systems to ensure freedom and justice for all (Pantzar, 2023).

We invite you to envision yourselves as gardeners in your contexts. What would it take to create a culture of collaboration rather than competition? What shifts are needed to make this vision a reality? The seeds that can be planted in a learning, research, and advocacy environment include inclusion, diversity, access, creativity, and equality. Imagine an academic world where collaboration is rewarded, where teachers are mentored, and where schools prioritize advocacy. Such a transformation would require addressing time constraints, financial limitations, and literacy challenges. Nevertheless, like guerrilla gardening, creating a nurturing environment is essential for the growth of these transformative ideas. This session will explore what these changes mean for research and learning, and how we can cultivate an environment that supports ongoing transformation.

### **Experiential Session Proposal**

Our desire for our session and beyond is to co-create a transformative experience informed by *Good Trouble* by asking disorienting questions for participants to consider their sustainable long-term impact regarding their research and academic work. Our intention is to co-create “seed bombs “ with the participants to take with them and plant in their contexts across the globe to bring transformation. We encourage the participants to think outside of the box as to

what they can do and who they can garden with. We want them to think beyond their workplace, their office, their home, to consider their city, their communities, religious gatherings, sports events, hobbies, choir, knitting groups because guerrilla gardening can happen everywhere.

We offer three examples where seed bombs have been planted for transformation.

- 1) **Classroom and Beyond:** This activity connects students studying gerontology with older people to discuss politics. The students first critically analyzed the electoral programs of the parties running in the 2024 legislative elections in Portugal. Then they left the classroom to read and discuss the electoral programs together with older people. This intergenerational service-learning approach has great potential for transformative, two-way learning, both for the students and for the older people.
- 2) **Media:** As adult education advocates, we participate in media conferences to bring awareness to journalists about the situation of older people living remotely who do not have access to education. By doing so, we invite media professionals to become guerilla gardeners with us to promote adult education. We plant the seeds of transformative and democratic adult education in the media soil.
- 3) **Conferences:** Another challenge to consider is the current conference model which can exclude low-income participants due to the cost of attendance, travel and accommodation. One alternative could be to offer free or low-cost bi-yearly online options. Conferences could be in person on the opposite year to continue to facilitate face-to-face connection. In planning online conferences, there needs to be special attention to create space to connect with other participants and to have active participation in presentations and meetings. Kuomospace is an interactive app that allows for this type of informal connection. Another possibility is to be able to choose a conference buddy for those who are new to a conference. The conference buddy is already part of the community and can facilitate integration and connection. Here is an example of an open-access conference: The Conference New Media Pedagogy 24. It is free of charge and online (<https://sites.google.com/view/nmp-2024-conference/home-page>).

We present these ideas as seeds for discussion and reflection, hoping they will transform our barren soil. Through our collective efforts we can cultivate beautiful and fruitful gardens.

### **Experiential Session Outline**

#### **1. Introduction:** *Making Good Trouble*

- *Open Discussion* about delineating *Good* vs. *Bad Trouble*

#### **2. Purpose of Academia:**

- *Digital Discussion* session about expectations vs. reality in academia using *Fig-Jam* (an interactive whiteboard allowing all participants to contribute anonymously and simultaneously)
- Example of C. Blackstock as a modern-day *Good Troublemaker*.

#### **3. Challenges in Academia:** *Small Group Discussion* about challenges and possible solutions

- Challenges for universities with limited resources
  - Limited economic challenges—cannot afford to purchase books, cannot afford to attend academic conferences due to cost
  - Limited resources challenges—lack of access to journals/publications/databases/books; expense of open-access publishing

- Emotional challenges—lack of family and mental health support
- Political challenges—statelessness, displaced peoples, visas needed for travel and research
- Ethical challenges—plagiarism and artificial intelligence (AI)
- Language challenges—most students are working in a second or third language
- Equity challenges—research from the Global South is not as disseminated, read, or cited

#### 4. Guerilla Gardening

- Definition
- Application and relevance for academia
- What can we do or commit to doing?
  - Open-access publishing (Open access works, 2024)
  - Reclaim our work we have done to make it more easily available to others (informed by Taylor Swift who found a way to re-record her original songs that had been sold to a recording company and re-release them under her company)
  - Highlight new researchers (Iceland)

#### 5. How do we begin?

- Ask participants to adopt one practice from the seminar.
  - Ask participants to cultivate loamy soil from the Conference—
    - Connect with someone new—use the listening protocol from the Transformative Listening Collaborative
    - Start a collaboration (research or paper) with someone from the conference around a common interest
    - Offer to mentor someone
  - Take home postcards with seeds to practice guerilla gardening
  - Expand the circle of people to include *all conference participants* through posting questions (either with a QR code OR with poster board for everyone to respond)
  - How can we use advocacy, research and practice to transform our communities and societies?

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## Good Trouble for the Long Hard Struggles: Protest Music as Catalyst for Transformative and Emancipatory Learning

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**Key Words:** Protest Music, Emancipatory Learning, Critical Pedagogy

**Abstract:** This paper explores historic and contemporary protest music as a catalyst for transformative and emancipatory learning. Music speaks to us in ways that reading or hearing news reports do not. It wakes us up, provoking emotion like anger or sadness. Music inspires empathy and connection with others in struggle and helps us to imagine a better world. When we are deeply impacted by a powerful piece of music, especially if it is disturbing, we are more often inspired to take action to create change.

We shall overcome, We shall overcome  
We shall overcome, someday  
Oh, deep in my heart I do believe  
We shall overcome, someday <sup>1</sup>

Protest music has historically influenced social movements in almost every culture. From the perspective of global history in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries alone, the role of music can be seen integrated in the roots of cultural struggles, wars, racial protests, workers' battles for fair wages, and other fights for human rights.

Music touches the human psyche, sparking a wide variety of emotional reactions. It lifts the spirits of those who are deeply invested in the work of these human rights issues. Music inspires hope, motivates movement and often cultivates learning that has the potential to emancipate and to transform. The purpose of this paper is to lift up the role of protest music in these struggles and to examine the potential use of this music in adult education, specifically related to transformative learning and emancipatory education. Listening to protest music invites critical reflection at an individual level. Communal singing of protest songs creates solidarity, which can transform feelings of powerlessness to agency. "By incorporating a shared (social or group) "we" view of reality, as opposed to an individualized view of reality, such songs overtly connect the singer, listener, and victim of the stated injustice." (Berger, 2000 p.60).

For example, I (Randee) remember participating in a protest march against the Vietnam War in downtown Detroit. As we marched, we chanted "All we are saying is give peace a chance" from the John Lennon song of the same name. Witnessing my countrymen going off to fight an unjust war on foreign soil was immensely distressing, but as I heard hundreds of people

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<sup>1</sup> One of the best known songs of the United States' civil rights movement, "We Shall Overcome" is a gospel song which became a protest song. It is descended from "I'll Overcome Some Day", a hymn by Charles Albert Tindley (1901). Zilphia Horton of Highlander learned the song from Lucille Simmons, leader of the tobacco workers in 1945. She later taught it to many others including Pete Seeger, who added verses and popularized it as a protest song. <https://genius.com/Pete-seeger-we-shall-overcome-lyrics>

singing the words along with me, I felt hope, knowing I was not alone, and that collectively we could make a difference.

Artists and musicians often intentionally create disturbance in their work. According to Picasso, “You have to wake people up. To revolutionize their way of identifying things. You’ve got to create images they won’t accept. Make them foam at the mouth. Force them to understand they’re living in a pretty queer world. A world that’s not reassuring. A world that’s not what they think it is.” (Malraux, 1974 p.110).

### **Protest Music is Universal**

Protest music exists in every decade and in every culture. In 1939, Billie Holiday recorded “Strange Fruit “ (written by Abel Meeropol) to call attention to the horrors of lynching of Black Americans. In the 1960’s, folk musician Phil Ochs wrote several protest songs including “I Ain’t Marching Anymore “ in protest of the war in Vietnam and “There but for Fortune “ about poverty and the forgotten. More recently, John Legend recorded “Glory “, a music video to protest the killings of Black men by police officers:

“One son died, his spirit is revisitin’ us  
Truant livin’ livin’ in us, resistance is us  
That’s why Rosa sat on the bus  
That’s why we walk through Ferguson with our hands up “ (Legend, 2014)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUZOKvYcx\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUZOKvYcx_o)

Protest music includes a range of songs such as those produced for world-wide audiences by the Playing for Change Foundation. One example is: “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For “ by the Irish rock band U2 and played on the International Day of the Disappeared, as a tribute to the thousands of people who disappear every year due to armed conflict, violence, natural disasters or migration.

Jamaican Reggae music is filled with protest. One example is the freedom song, “Get Up Stand Up “ by Bob Marley. Other examples of international protest music include “Soweto Blues “ by High Masekela about the Civil war in South Africa and “Paite Rima “, a Zimbabwean call and response prayer to the Shona lion spirits to end the bloodshed, by Stella Chiweshe. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hltmTWQNF8>) As in many protest songs, the musical cadence is just as powerful if not more so than the lyrics. One does not have to understand the language in “Paite Rima “ to be moved by the spirit of the song.

### **Historical Perspective of Protest Music- Highlander**

One organization devoted to waking people up, and expanding social awareness lies in New Market Tennessee. Since the 1930s the Highlander Research and Education Center has used music and art as a cornerstone of their activities to create educational experiences that empower people. During Gwendolyn’s dissertation research she was taken with Highlander’s commitment to develop educational experiences designed to empower participants to take democratic leadership toward fundamental change (Kaltoft, 1990).

Highlander’s mission statement states: “We are a catalyst for grassroots organizing and movement building in Appalachia and the South. We work with people fighting for justice, equality and sustainability, supporting their efforts to take collective action to shape their own destiny.” (Highlander Center, n.d.).

Zilphia Johnson Horton came to Highlander in 1935, bringing music and theater to the activist work they were engaged in. She staged plays and led singing about labor struggles. Eventually, “she adapted the church hymn called ‘We Will Overcome’ and taught it to labor groups all over the South.” (Horton, 1990 p. 77). The song, eventually called “We Shall Overcome”, was further adapted by Pete Seeger and became an anthem for the Civil Rights movement. Since 1966, the Highlander Center has administered the “We Shall Overcome Fund”, which is generated by royalties from the commercial use of the song “We Shall Overcome.” The fund support continues to contribute to cultural and social programs in rural and urban communities throughout the South (Highlander Center, n.d.).

After Zilphia’s death, a wide range of musicians including Guy and Candie Carawan continued to be a major part of the social change work at Highlander workshops. In 2012 Highlander received the Lifetime Achievement Award by the Folk Alliance International. Their work has involved musicians and groups like Sweet Honey in The Rock and The Reel World String Band and artists like musician and producer Toshi Reagon. Specifically, the work of Bernice Johnson Reagon, was highlighted at Highlander’s 90<sup>th</sup> Homecoming celebration by naming the event after Dr. Reagon’s song “There’s A New World Coming.”

### **Theoretical Perspective**

Because music is a holistic medium that connects to people emotionally and viscerally, we have grounded this discussion in Dirkx’s (2012) Jungian perspectives on the role of emotions in transformative learning and Yorks and Kasl’s (2002) whole-person learning. As protest music is inherently emancipatory, we also consider transformative learning from a social justice perspective (Finnegan, 2023).

Dirkx (2012) advances a theory of transformative learning as soul work grounded in Jung’s concept of individuation. In reaction to Mezirow’s (1991) theory, largely focused on transformative learning as a cognitive rational process, Dirkx sees it as an affective and relational process of meaning making by surfacing unconscious knowledge. Unconscious images come to us as symbol and metaphor and can be surfaced through artistic expression, including music.

Yorks and Kasl proposed a related perspective of transformative learning described as whole-person learning, defining “whole person” as “an affective, intuitive, thinking, physical, spiritual self” (Yorks & Kasl, 2006 p.46). This concept requires the skillful adult educator to attend to learners’ multiple ways of knowing which corresponds to each of these realms of human experience. To emphasize the engagement of the whole person in the learning process they draw on Heron (1992) to discuss the importance of “expressive ways of knowing” or “those forms of expression that engage a learner’s imaginal and intuitive processes” (Yorks & Kasl, p. 47), and the potential of this to cultivate transformative learning.

In Heron’s theory of personhood, music is seen as the “grounding medium, the formative potential... of all other learning media. Its home is in the world of presence, the world of resonance...; it speaks directly to the affective mode of the psyche and to the affective-imaginal pairing that generates the world of presence.” (Heron 1992, p. 233). As such, music becomes a ‘media’ vehicle for Heron and can represent a conduit in the process of the learner grasping one’s whole experience.

While there has been some discussion of music as a medium for social action (Haycock, 2015; Berger, 2000), Haycock points to a lack of serious critical research in examining the association of protest music with social change. Given our previous assertion that protest music



has traditionally risen out of international issues related to social justice, we focus briefly on the meaning of transformative and emancipatory learning.

Tisdell draws our attention to the wide use of terms related to transformational learning. She categorizes three camps and suggests that emancipatory learning is grounded in the efforts of those who work together to make their communities better as they challenge systems of privilege and oppression. These efforts include learning and education where... “People meet; their eyes and hearts and minds engage. “(Tisdell, 2012, p. 22).

Finnegan’s (2023) comprehensive and critical literature review of transformative learning for social justice, cites literature rooted in critical pedagogy and popular education i.e., Freire, Horton, hooks and Brookfield. He argues that much of the literature connected to social change is linked to community-based projects. He also discusses literature based in specific social movements related to disrupting hegemonic conditions such as racism, misogyny and environmental injustice. Music not only accompanies the social energy required for these community-based projects, it also inspires the imagination for seeing beyond the hegemonic conditions.

### **Imagining a Better World**

As educator and philosopher Maxine Greene stated: “Imagining things being otherwise may be a first step toward acting on the belief that they can be changed. “ (Greene, 1995, p. 22). Butterwick and Lawrence (2023) discussed the role of emotion and imagination for inspiring action in feminist social movements. They recalled an incident in Canada where funding was being cut for Women’s Centers and being spent on other government offices. Outraged, a group of women came together to protest. As the women engaged in critical reflection, they began to “understand how their individual experiences of marginalization are not natural nor their fault, rather...the result of patriarchal structures. . . That understanding opens up a space for changing these structures and worldviews and to imagining that things can, and must, be different. “ (Butterwick & Lawrence, p. 53).

Olson researched people involved with community music. He found that “music created space that fostered engaged pedagogy, where hegemonic structures of power and positionality could be challenged and new solutions to individual and social dilemmas and injustices could be imagined “. (Olson, 2005 p. 58). John Lennon and Yoko Ono’s prolific song “Imagine “ comes to mind. They invite listeners to “imagine all the people livin’ life in peace. . . “ (Lennon & Ono, 1971). We see protest music as a form of “good trouble “ that shakes people out of complacency, encouraging them to imagine how things might be different, and to take action.

### **Music Evokes Emotion**

Most of us experience music by the way it makes us feel. The emotion is conveyed through the lyrics, instrumentation and the voice of the singer. We are moved, sometimes in surprising ways. This emotion is often felt as sensations in the body. We might experience it as a wrenching of the gut, tightness in the chest, or a welling of tears behind the eyes. Because protest music is intentionally designed to provoke outrage, it appeals to our emotions. Even if we have not experienced the injustice at a personal level, it helps us to develop empathy with those victimized. For example, Tracy Chapman’s “Fast Car “

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIOAlaACuv4>) is about the desire to escape from a life of poverty.

You got a fast car  
I want a ticket to anywhere  
Maybe we make a deal  
Maybe together we can get somewhere  
Any place is better  
Starting from zero, got nothing to lose  
Maybe we'll make something  
Me, myself, I got nothing to prove (Chapman, 1988)

Whether or not we have experienced being on welfare or living in a housing project, the emotion evoked in the song can move us to consider what we can do to right the economic imbalance. Berger (2000) believes the emotionally charged nature of protest music creates bonding among the participants of social movements, bringing them together in the shared struggle.

### **Our Brains on Music**

Contemporary brain science is also investigating ways in which music makes connections between emotions and actions. Music is seen as a potential catalyst for learning. Neuropsychological theories suggest that music mimics some of the features of language, and brain research shows that music invokes some of the same regions that language does, tapping into “the primitive brain structures involved with motivation, reward and emotion.” (Levitin 2006, p. 191). These studies involve relationships between music and perception, language and conscious and unconscious thought (Magsamen & Ross, 2023).

### **Bringing the Unconscious into Consciousness**

Much of what we know lies just beyond our conscious awareness. Music in general and protest music in particular stirs our emotions bringing long buried feelings to the surface. As we experience empathy and solidarity with the people involved in the struggles, we may experience a psychological shift that causes us to re-examine and possibly transform our worldview.

Montanari (2023), building on Dirkx (2012), believes that music is a way of nurturing the soul and inspiring individuation through facilitating a dialogue between the unconscious and the conscious. In researching how music creates a link between consciousness and the unconscious, Skar found a letter from Carl Jung: “Music certainly has to do with the collective unconscious... music expresses... the movement of the feelings... that cling to the unconscious processes... music represents the movement, development and transformation of the motifs of the collective unconscious...” (Jung 1973, p. 542 in Skar, 2015).

Margaret Tilly, a music therapist was invited to visit Jung in his home in Switzerland. She showed him her case histories and he then asked her to treat him as if he were one of her patients. After the therapy session he said: “This opens up whole new avenues of research I’ve never... dreamed of... because of what you shown me... I feel that from now on music should be an essential part of every analysis. This reaches the deep archetypal material that we can only sometimes reach in our analytical work with patients.” (Tilly 1956, p. 275).

### **Protest Music as a Teaching Tool**

Haycock (2015) examines protest music as explicit public pedagogy drawing on the concepts of hegemony and conscientization to undergird suggestions that musicians are public pedagogues. Lyrics and music are the pedagogical content and the audiences are the adult learners.

Protest music can be a great tool to raise awareness of important social issues in both formal and informal adult educational settings. Teachers can play songs related to particular movements such as “Black Lives Matter“, “Me Too“, or “Climate Justice“. Simply assigning readings to catalyze discussions around these movements may be marginally effective, however listening to the songs provokes emotion and connectedness and can be an entry way to discussing difficult and painful topics.

Teach-ins are informal educational experiences that take place outside of classroom settings. Popularized during the 1960’s, teach-ins brought people together to learn about and rally against the Vietnam War, and promote Black Power, as well as women’s and LGBTQ rights. Music and theatre were often a part of these experiences. As Haycock (2015, p. 427) purports, “Protest musicians can be (re)imagined as radical adult educators, working within yet against the capitalist system which is, to the greatest extent, responsible for the production and exchange of social protest as commodified popular music. “

### **Transformative Learning Through Good Trouble**

Each of us can probably think of protest music that has been impactful, such as protest against political injustices, oppression of people based on race, religion, sexual orientation, or gender, health and environmental concerns, and gun violence. The list goes on. While these injustices bring up much pain and anguish, we have argued in this paper that protest music as public pedagogy is potentially transformative as it creates good trouble that evokes emotion and brings about empathy and solidarity. Furthermore, it allows us to imagine a world where we shall overcome the struggles and live together in peace.

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## **Ecosophic Mapping: Why Intervene? Proposing a Cookbook for a Joyful Fuss**

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**Abstract:** Transformative learning, initially framed by Mezirow as a form of adult metacognitive reasoning, involves navigating through liminal states where old norms are suspended, enabling transformation. This session offers a dialogic space for adult educators to explore transformation in adult learning, employing cooking as a metaphor for dynamic interaction and institutional change, inspired by Guattari's work in psychiatric clinics. Our intervention model draws on critical pedagogy and ecosophy to reshape ambience and relational dynamics, fostering new configurations and awareness.

Participants will engage in “making a joyful fuss, “ (Stenger & Despret, 2011) a process of experimentation and resistance within adult education. This involves an ecosophic mapping activity, where adult educators map and share their working environments to deepen understanding of their roles and the systemic forces at play, after sharing their stories of resistance. This interactive session is designed to encourage educators to rethink and reshape the socio-material dynamics of learning, aiming to generate an alternative mode of understanding our role as adult educators.

The session aims to catalyze transformative learning by rearticulating the discomfort and displacement that arise in the process of transformation, thus enabling exploration of our collectivity.

**Key Words:** Cooking, Ecosophy, Intervention, Feminist

Since its inception, transformative learning, described by Mezirow (2003) as a “uniquely adult form of metacognitive reasoning, “ has continually evolved. It fundamentally involves adults navigating transitional liminal states, where old norms are suspended but new ones aren't yet established (Nicolaidis & Eschenbacher, 2022). Transformative pedagogy aims to scrutinize and reshape prevailing ideologies and psychological constraints, linking individual and societal growth (Biasin, 2018).

This session introduces a dialogic space for adult educators to explore transformative dimensions in adult learning. Inspired by Guattari (1995), who viewed the kitchen in psychiatric clinics as dynamic spaces for interaction, we use cooking as a metaphor for transformation. Guattari observed that collective cooking reconfigures caretaker and caregiver roles, challenging traditional hierarchies and fostering institutional transformation. Our intervention model is

multifaceted, focusing on reconfiguring unseen institutional forces. It draws from critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2014; Freire, 1992/2021) and ecosophy (Guattari, 1995; Greenhalgh-Spencer, 2014; Mannion, 2020), promoting a conscious reshaping of ambience and relational dynamics. Known as ecosophy, this approach aims to “describe, interrupt, and recast existing relations, including educational ones “ (Mannion, 2020, p. 1366), fostering new awareness and configurations.

Reexploring and experimenting with socio-material dynamics fosters the emergence of a diverse “we. “ It’s critical to acknowledge the contributions of feminist philosophers, such as Braidotti (2013) and Stengers & Despret (2011), who critique inclusion logics within oppressive frameworks. These frameworks superficially embrace diversity for its performative value rather than for its intrinsic worth. Central to reshaping the concept of “we “ is the creation of a liminal space that encourages a joyful engagement with new ways of self-identification and socio-material interaction through different articulation of refusals and acknowledgement of the discomfort and displacement that arise in the process of transformation, thus enabling collective feelings and expressions of change (Stengers & Despret, 2011). What matters is creating an affirmative force of exploration and resistance—making a joyful fuss.

This session is designed to ‘make a joyful fuss’ within the context of adult education. We aim to bring together a collective of adult educators passionate about playing with the ambience, and challenging institutional logics to foster an environment conducive to transformation and growth. We welcome the stories of participants, who have experimented with different ways of knowing and learning within the context of adult education. We will guide participants through an ecosophic mapping activity, including the following steps. First, participants will be asked to map out their daily working space in order to deepen their understanding of the responsibility as adult educator. Generating a mapping allows them to crystallize their habitual ways of seeing and shaping their own world and document the material realities that shape the institutional life of adult educators. Secondly, we will ask participants to share the experience of mapping out their daily working space with other participants. Specifically, will ask participants to trace connections observed uniquely in their individual case of institutional life or across various contexts. This includes the exploration of policies, organizations, systems that shape adult learning practices and places, which will let their interrogation of power dynamics and structure emerge.

This ethical examination questions the prevailing educational crisis conditions, addressing adult learners’ paradoxical challenges of vulnerability and insecurity. By considering liminality as a transformative opportunity, despite its harsh realities, we aim to question how adult education can facilitate personal growth and societal equity. Ultimately, this session seeks to catalyze transformative learning through radical inquiry, opening up possibilities for reimagining “we “ as active contributors to the creation of generative forcefield for transformation.

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## Troubling Broken Systems Through Caring Conversations

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**Abstract:** The COVID-19 pandemic exposed deep isolation, inequities, and lack of care within our current systems. Neoliberalism's emphasis on profits over people has further disconnected us. We want to trouble this broken system through an interactive session introducing conference attendees to a card game called "Caring Conversations". This social technology, created by one of the presenters, has potential to transform systems by fostering what Chatzidakis et al. (2020) described as "promiscuous care". Through intentional questions and interactions, the game focuses on imagination, connection, and empathy across differences. It offers opportunities to share stories and engage in collaborative meaning-making, leading to mutual understanding. In doing so, the game surfaces and troubles underlying assumptions about individualism. Instead, it fosters recognition of our interdependence and interconnectedness, allowing us to care beyond kinship circles. In addition, the game cultivates connection and provides insight through reflective dialogue. By making space for open sharing, "Caring Conversations" can mend societal rifts and nurture collective care, creating the potential for transformation. In sum, this accessible, imaginative session spurs connection and empathy, and it disrupts broken systems through reflective, caring dialogue.

**Key Words:** Promiscuous Care, Broken Systems, Caring Conversations, Transformation

### Theoretical Perspective

The global response to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly among western industrialized nations underpinned by neoliberalism, is clear evidence that our systems are broken and warrant troubling. Neoliberalism by design, with its emphasis on profits over people, forsakes community and social welfare in favor of privatization and champions an archetype of individual responsibility and resilience, consigning care to the margins (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). In doing so, it has hastened our state of disconnection, giving way to a careless world (Chatzidakis et al., 2020).

Care is multifaceted, often discussed in the context of care work or care labor, as in 'caring for', or as a sentiment or feeling, as in 'caring about', and finally as an entanglement with moral theory, commonly discussed as care ethics (Tronto, 1998). Consequently, care can best be understood as having dual meanings, where care can be both action and disposition (Tronto, 2013). Given the complexity of the term, care, it is not surprising that there are several definitions. According to Fisher and Tronto (1990), care is best thought of as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web. (p. 40)



More recently, a group of scholars known as the Care Collective define care as “... our individual and common ability to provide the political, social, material, and emotional conditions that allow the vast majority of people and living creatures on this planet to thrive - along with the planet itself” (Chatzidakis et al., 2020, p. 6). Regardless of definition used or whether care is conceptualized as an action or disposition, what binds all of these imaginings together is they are all an expression of relationship, one that begins with connection (Tronto, 2013).

To mend our broken systems, we must learn to transform our current perspectives of and on care, as shaped by the structural violence and scarcity of neoliberalism, to an imagining of care that is capacious and promiscuous, meaning care that is indiscriminate, reaching beyond ourselves and our intimates to strangers (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). This radical transformation requires acknowledging our mutual interdependencies and interconnectedness. It begins with learning how to care promiscuously; it begins with caring conversations.

### Session Flow

**Table 1**

*Session flow for experiential workshop on caring conversations*

Time	Part	Content	Who
15 min	Introduction & Context Setting	<b>Welcome</b> We start by contextualizing care as a relationship between people on multiple dimensions (disposition, practice, ethics) and its opportunity for transformation.	DJ, Henriette
40 min	Caring Conversation Card Game	<b>Activity</b> The purpose of this segment is to create an experience of “Caring Conversations “ - a card game created by one of the presenters. Participants will get a chance to create relationships, empathy and connection through listening and sharing of experiences.  Structure of the Activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Participants are mixed to create groups of 4</li> <li>→ Each group selects a card (see sample card enclosed) and a question (use of dice); ~10 minutes max per question; all four participants “play “ at least one question and others can be invited to answer each card</li> </ul>	Kathrin, Henriette

		→ Activity ends when time is up or all participants play a pass card during one round or by consent	
10 min	Debrief	<b>Debrief</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What did you learn about yourself? Other participants?</li> <li>• Does connecting lead to caring? How?</li> </ul>	All
25 min	Meta Reflection & Key Learnings	<p>We close the session with a shared meta reflection on the “Caring Conversations “ and how this social technology has generated connection, cultivated empathy, and created potential of transformation.</p> <p><b>Prompts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do caring conversations make possible?</li> <li>• How can caring conversations work in different contexts, with different stakeholders?</li> <li>• What is the potential that care holds for troubling broken systems?</li> </ul>	DJ, Kathrin, Henriette

*Note:* We request the following equipment for our session, please:

- Small tables with four chairs each, scattered around the room (Conference organizer to provide)
- Fifty conversation cards (250 questions/prompts), pass cards and mic cards (Facilitators will provide these)
- 1 dice per group (Facilitators will provide these)

### **Caring Conversations and Transformation**

What can be learned, what can be transformed by using caring conversations to trouble (and possibly to mend) broken systems? Care is fundamental to human existence and relationships. Tronto (1998) describes care as a reality for all humans who both need and provide care. “The care relationships among humans are part of what marks us as human beings. We are always interdependent beings” (Tronto, as cited in Vosman, 2009, p. 4). We urgently need care in our complex world so we can live well together (Tronto, 1993).

By using caring conversations, facilitated through the social technologies of cards and dice, we create relationships potentiality. John Heron (1992) in his “theory on personhood “, describes four distinct ways of knowing. In the context of caring conversations, presentational knowing seems most relevant as it provides “empathic connections for learning-within-relationship “ (Yorks & Kasl, 2006, p. 52). Developing empathic connection can be very difficult

when the other's life experience is very different from one's own. Yet, in caring conversations, we encourage strangers to meet and get into a conversation on a topic they care about; they practice dialogue about hopes and desires during times of chaos and uncertainty; they create intimacy by listening to each other's worries, regrets, and sense of loss or grief. Those conversations embody humanity and how we are all connected as interdependent human beings.

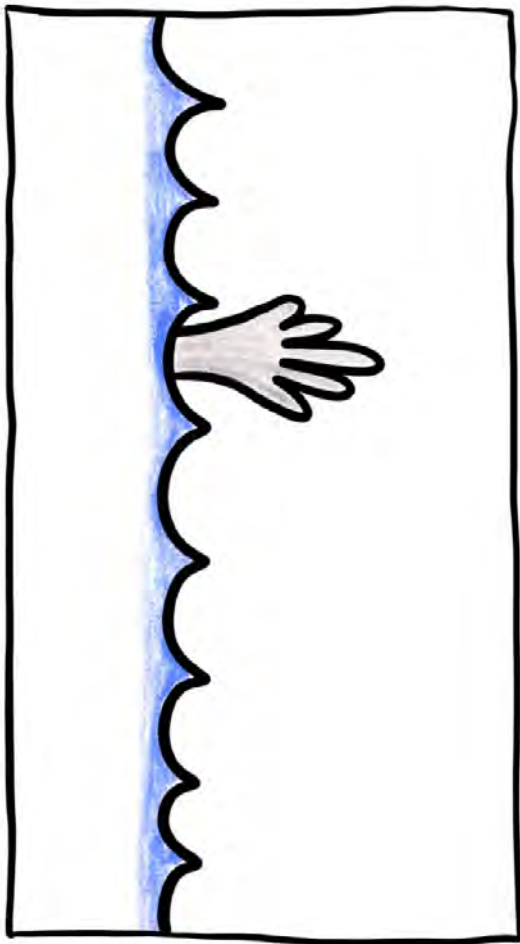










Caring conversations have transformative potential in both personal and political contexts. Communication and being with each other in our humanity is what will save this world. Care is important to our humanity. While caring conversations often occur in dyadic relationships, they can also be expanded to groups, organizations, and communities through border-crossing, networked relationships of support. In that sense, caring conversations are multidirectional, flowing between various interconnected individuals and groups.

The capacity to care requires developing imagination and empathy to understand diverse others across differences in time and space. Care can be understood as a communicative learning process in which meaning is negotiated (Habermas, 1987). As such, care parallels transformative learning; both care and transformative learning are collaborative, communicative processes that involve questioning assumptions, negotiating meaning, and reflecting collectively to create generative spaces while troubling broken systems (Brookfield, 2000; Southern, 2007).

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Sample “Caring Conversation “ Game Card (Design by Kathrin Achenbach)

	<p>When do you feel “under water”?</p>	 
	<p>How hard is it for you to ask for help and why?</p>	 
	<p>When have you ever lost control?</p>	 
	<p>Can other people count on you? How?</p>	 
	<p>Have you ever felt yourself in real danger? What happened?</p>	 

## Serious Play is Serious Work, an Experiential Session

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The LEGO® Serious Play® (LSP) method holds the potential to take learners through more significant learning through the creation of metaphors, stories, and critical reflection. LSP uses systems theory to explore the complexity and uncertainty of our world. Participants then engage their expert thinking to create the landscape using LEGO pieces, which then allows them to think in systems and employ their strategic imagination while working through challenges and opportunities. Pushing past the limitations of expert thinking and engaging in strategic imagination can get participants into good trouble by affording them the opportunity to push past conventional wisdom or commonsense ways of making meaning of the world that are not in their best interests (Brookfield, 2009). Unfortunately, serious play for learning continues to flounder as most events rank high on the cheese factor, infantilize professionals (Lyons, 2018), or worse, provide no real development opportunity. Although this method uses LEGO® bricks as a medium, it does not employ typical game motivators usually associated with poor gamified learning interventions such as points, badges and leaderboards (Toda, Valle, and Isotani, 2017). The method also treats participants as adults while they strive to achieve stated goals found in their work or higher education contexts.

This experiential session will demonstrate the possibilities serious play holds to create good trouble as it encompasses multiple methods recognized to allow participants to shed their self-limiting thinking as well as oppressive social and organizational constructs. The LSP method uses the power of play, building metaphors, engaging in critical reflection, sharing in storytelling, and sparking the imagination, all of which can lead to participants reassess “problematic frames of references—sets of fixed assumptions and expectations—to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change “ (Mezirow, 2003, pp.58-59).

The experiential activity will allow participants to sample one small exercise in a larger methodology. Although the participants will not conduct one of the LSP methods, they will walk through each of the core elements in a less complex way—building only one object instead of cocreating and exploring an interconnected landscape. The core elements of LSP work to engender transformative learning as described in these next paragraphs.

Firstly, play can lead to the psychological state of flow, or the optimal state for human experience and performance where creativity, productivity and happiness may occur (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Ashby, Isen, & Turken, 1999). Secondly, critical self-reflection—or the reassessment of how one poses problems, orients to perceive, know, believe, feel and act (Mezirow, 1990, p. 13), surfaces during the creation, questioning, and modification to the metaphor presented as a LEGO® model. Mezirow (1990) stated in his book *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood* that by reframing the definition of a problem through the creation of a metaphor that reorients, one might become critically reflective (1990, p. 12). In a later chapter, Deshler (1990) describes the connection between metaphor, critical reflection, and transformative learning. Deshler’s (1990) chapter and this experiential session share the purpose of attempting to demonstrate “how the recognition, identification, and creation of metaphors by adult learners can be the occasion for critical reflection and transformative learning. “ (p. 296). Thirdly, storytelling becomes powerful when all parties seek further depth, clarity, breadth, and

experiment with new meaning, which acts as a social process to foster transformative learning (Tyler & Swartz, 2012).

Lastly, imagination is an integral part of understanding the unknown and making meaning (Lawrence, 2012). LSP uses the participants' embodied knowledge while their hands lead them in the thinking process (Papert and Harel, 1991). Engaging the imagination and creativity inherent to artistic expression takes us "out of our heads and into our bodies, hearts, and souls in ways that allow us to connect more deeply with self and others" (Lawrence, 2012, p. 471). LSP enables participants to create and reflect on a physical thing that could represent their unconscious, emotional, and intuitive ways of knowing. And fortunately, one does not need to be an artist to fully express meaning because of the simplicity of the media, where one clicks bricks together. Our imagination allows us to work with very complex ideas with the simplified medium by allowing us to assign meaning to our creations, where one brick can represent a powerful idea. Then, by critically reflecting on and questioning the metaphor, participants may then physically change their stories and assumptions to a more ideal, tested, and validated configuration. By building new stories, metaphors and identities through this medium, one might experiment with new roles and relationships.

In this session, participants use six LEGO® bricks to build a metaphor and create a story to share with their group. Building ideas with LEGO® bricks allows participants to create three dimensional externalized representations of their thinking. Group members then use questioning to aid each other in reflecting on their thinking. After experiencing the core elements of the method—albeit on a very small scale—participants then engage in discourse around serious play for transformative learning.

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## Discovering the heART of Transformative Learning: An Interactive Session Where Art and Transformative Learning Intersect

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Incorporating art for inquiry and healing can deepen the impact of transformative learning. Visuals are some of the first known forms of communication. Before we can write, we can draw a picture. Drawings can overcome barriers that language cannot. On average, we remember 65% more information when an image is attached to the subject (Bradford, 2011). Utilizing art as an integral element of the transformative learning process uses imagery and metaphors that may connect in new ways that have previously gone unseen.

Art challenges strategic thinkers to be more creative and visual thinking to be more strategic, thus creating an opening to let go and to let come (Scharmer, 2018) and fosters transformative learning (Cranton, 2016). Visuals allow for a space that extends beyond our minds into our hearts and opens a person up to exploring within themselves at a deeper depth (Lawrence, 2012; Scharmer, 2018). Art provides alternative perspectives that may have gone unnoticed opening a window for reflecting in a new way (Lawrence, 2012). Art invites creative thinking and considering outside-the-box solutions. Join in to learn more about converging in the heART of transformative learning.

This session will introduce the concept of art, creative expression, and visual strategy and how integrating it into transformative learning has the potential to shift transformation to a new level of engagement, awareness, and success.

The basics of utilizing art and visual strategy will be shared during this session. Participants will be led through exercises to help them unleash the inner artists they can apply within themselves and those they work with. There becomes an awareness of each person's creativity, wholeness, and uniqueness for them to realize within themselves but also an awakening to these same identities of the people with whom leaders interact (Mohr & Hoover, 2020) through engaging the learner in each participant through art. Markers and paper will be supplied for participants to explore how visual strategy can be incorporated into their transformative leadership.

Utilizing art and visual strategy as a means of transformational learning brings to the forefront the idea that there are many different ways that people inquire, learn, heal, and transform. Barriers are removed, there is greater openness to exploration, and more pathways are made available to be considered when more options are provided to express oneself through art and illustration, thus providing more growth opportunities.

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## **Engaging Interview Matrix to explore the Next Edge of Transformative Learning: An Experiential Approach**

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**Abstract:** In this 90-minute experiential session, we will use the method of interview matrix to engage participants in generating insights into the next edge of transformative learning (TL), by troubling the very notion of TL itself and reimagining together what it means to transform and to learn transformatively. The field of transformative learning (TL) has evolved and expanded since Jack Mezirow's early conceptualizations of perspective transformation. The interview matrix is a participatory information gathering and analysis method that involves participants answering focused questions on a specific topic and generating high level themes. We invite participants to join us in this experiential session to trouble TL in dialogue with conference colleagues.

**Key Words:** Interview Matrix, Transformative Learning, Post-Traumatic Growth, Lifelong Learning

### **Extended Abstract**

In this 90-minute experiential session, we will use the method of interview matrix (Page & Bishop, 2023) to engage participants in generating insights into the next edge of transformative learning (TL), by troubling the very notion of TL itself and reimagining together what it means to transform and to learn transformatively.

The field of transformative learning (TL) has evolved and expanded since Mezirow's (1978; 1991) early conceptualizations of perspective transformation. As described by ; also Agger-Gupta and Etmanski (2014) and Etmanski (2018), over the decades, multiple authors have proposed "different taxonomies of transformative learning [that] contain essentially the same kinds of categorizations" (Kucukaydin & Cranton, 2012, p. 44). In general, these categorizations tend to include the four dimensions of transformation offered by Dirkx (1998): transformation as (1) consciousness-raising, (2) critical reflection, (3) development, and (4) individuation (pp. 2-8). In their study of a transformative doctoral program, Stevens-Long, Schapiro, and McClintock (2012) made use of these same "four major and sometimes overlapping streams of theory and practice in the literature on transformative learning" (p. 183), which they described as

- 1) The social emancipatory approach to education for critical consciousness and social justice (e.g., Freire, 2003);
- 2) The cognitive rational approach to changes in meaning perspectives through critical reflection (e.g., Mezirow, 1991);
- 3) The structural developmental approach to epistemological change through the lifespan (e.g., Daloz, 2012); and

- 4) The depth psychology approach to Jungian individuation and spiritual development through dialogue with the subconscious (e.g., Boyd, 1989).

Cranton (2011) suggested, “Although this appears to be a great divide in theoretical positions, there is no reason that both the individual and the social perspectives cannot peacefully coexist “ (p. 77). As TL theory grows within and beyond these categorizations, so too do the practices that offer the potential for transformation, evolution, post-traumatic growth, and lifelong learning. In this workshop, we invite participants to experientially co-create new TL insights using the interview matrix method and based on their own scholarly and lived experiences.

The interview matrix is a participatory information gathering and analysis method that involves participants answering focused questions on a specific topic and generating high level themes. According to O’Sullivan et al. (2015), the interview matrix began as a tool for strategic planning in organizations. It was later “adapted for use as a data collection method in research studies and community development to accommodate the voices of a large number of participants and facilitate engagement through group discussion (O’Sullivan et al., 2015, p. 618). From their 2015 study of the method, O’Sullivan et al. went on to express that a structured interview matrix technique can foster inclusive engagement, connectedness, collaboration, and relationship-building; “ (p. 620); develop an enhanced sense of micro and macro awareness among participants; and stimulate the “development of common ground, solution-oriented thinking, and motivation/intention to act “ (pp. 620–622). They identified that this method can help to build community resilience and adaptive capacity.

As we have used it in our facilitation, the interview matrix process provides a framework where:

Individuals ask and respond to questions, come together in small groups to identify themes, and then discuss in the whole group. In addition to the opportunity to view the responses and themes of others, this method creates ownership and buy-in from the participants. (Page & Bishop, 2023, para 11)

Page and Bishop (2023) further identified some of the key benefits of an interview matrix as an opportunity for participants to,

- a) practice and improve active listening, interviewing, and cooperative learning skills;
- b) demonstrate reflective practice skills by communicating reflections, opinions, and thoughts;
- c) demonstrate critical thinking by comparing and contrasting key themes related to collective conversations; and
- d) co-construct a collective understanding that identifies key course concepts and applications. (para 2)

This session will offer an opportunity to experience each step of the interview matrix method (one-to-one interviews, small group analysis, large group discussion) while contributing to the enriching dialogue that is possible in a participative session. As we seek to cultivate more settings where TL can occur, this session will allow each of us as contributors and co-creators of community and TL theory and practice to learn from one another in this dialogue of exploration and possibility.

Questions to be explored during the 90-minute session include:

- 1) DEFINITIONS: Think of an experience of transformation in your own life. Based on this experience, what is your understanding of what it means to transform yourself, community, and society as a whole? What would it mean if you were to radically question your current understanding of transformation? Consider, what is beneath the tip of the iceberg of transformation for you.
- 2) LANGUAGE: How might you, as an educator/researcher/scholar/practitioner’ “trouble “ your language for naming the phenomenon of transformation and TL?
- 3) CONTENT: How might you step outside your comfort zone as an educator/researcher/scholar/practitioner and become a learner with questions that could get you into good trouble? What do you see as aspects of transformation that have not been researched yet?
- 4) PROCESS: How might you chase your curiosity, explore your uncertainty and not knowing, shed some light on the dark side of transformation, and engage with ambiguity, being out-of-control, and the dangerous, risky, and existential dimensions of transformation? This could imply owning a sense of loss and new, unknown ways of being and living your life in the aftermath of transformation.

We invite participants to join us in this experiential session to trouble TL in dialogue with conference colleagues.

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## **Embodied Approaches to Differentiating and Integrative Transformation**

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**Abstract:** This experiential session draws on foundational concepts within Transformation Theory (Mezirow, 2000) to engage learners in embodied approaches to transformation that result in increasingly complex, differentiated, integrated, and socially just paradigms. It draws on our experiences and andragogical approaches teaching graduate students in social work and leadership programs. In the session, we will describe the conceptual framework used to design our courses, as well as the embodied andragogical strategies we use to evoke transformed perspectives for students. We will then engage session attendees in three exercises in order to experience the impact of this approach for adult learning. We will close by collectively harvesting and sharing the insights that have emerged for personal and andragogical application.

**Key Words:** Transformation, Andragogy, Leadership, Critical Reflection

### **Extended Abstract**

The graduate school classroom offers a fertile context for transformative learning. Our programs, an MA in Organizational Leadership (MAOL) and a Masters in Social Work (MSW), are located at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, MN. Ours is a mission driven institution with women, the liberal arts, and catholic at its core. We are unapologetically focused on social justice and to “serve the dear neighbor without distinction. “

In this context, our graduate students come to us with enthusiasm, commitment, insecurity, busy lives, and compelling dreams. Their purpose in seeking a graduate degree is to obtain new and more advanced roles, yet we know as instructors that adequate preparation for those roles requires substantive growth in the cognitive, emotional, and embodied aspects of their being.

Through their experience of the course content, they bump up against concepts and obstacles that challenge existing habits of binary thinking. For example, in social work and leadership classrooms, incoming students often hold frames of reference that social workers and leaders have the best answers for their clients’ and followership’s problems and needs. Still, this frame of reference is contrary to the ethical and empowering approach that mature, skilled, justice-oriented social workers and leaders use with their constituencies. Our curriculum and andragogy must aim to support them to develop more complex, accurate, and complete frames of reference, as well as critical and intentional meaning-making processes, that are at the foundation of Transformative Learning Theory’s conception of mature thinking to become “socially responsible, clear-thinking “ practitioners (Mezirow, 2000, p. 8).

The purpose of this session is to engage participants in experiential practices that reveal the impact of embodied approaches for fostering transformation in the graduate school classroom. To achieve this purpose, we engage a andragogical approach to the final question in the call for proposals (International Transformative Learning Conference, 2023):

How can we tackle our blind-spots, chase our curiosity, explore our uncertainty and not-knowing, shed some light on the dark side of transformation, and engage with ambiguity, being out-of-control, and the dangerous, risky, and existential dimensions of transformation? This implies owning a sense of loss and new, unknown ways of being and living our lives in the aftermath of transformation.

Through this session, we hope to contribute to the co-creation of the International Transformative Learning Conference (ITLC) Community in a way that engages core concepts of Transformation Theory in a ruthless focus on “good trouble “ to advance racial and social justice.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

Our andragogical approach - in our graduate classrooms as well as in the proposed experiential session - draws on basic principles of Transformation Theory (Mezirow, 2000) while simultaneously engaging a somatically- and emotionally- conscious approach to increasing mature frames of reference. Specifically, the type of social work and leadership curriculum we use integrates critical DEI concepts and regularly causes dissonance for our students, often to the point of creating what Transformation Theory refers to as “disorienting dilemmas “ It’s now commonly known through the neuroscience of the mind-body connection that information and experiences that result in disorienting dilemmas or triggering events enter the mind through the body, creating disequilibrium in both the body and the mind (Menakem, 2017; van der Kolk, 2014). As a result, we employ strategies that teach students to stay curious and grounded in the face of disorienting dilemmas, notice the reactions in their body and mind, and critically reflect on the dissonant information or situation in order to open to the possibility of transformation. Through these processes, we teach ourselves and our students to “disentangle ourselves’ (Oakeshott, 1989) from [the] urgency and crisis “ of disorientation and “trouble [their] explicit and implicit assumptions “ (International Transformative Learning Conference, 2023).

### **Workshop Format**

In this experiential workshop, we will begin by grounding participants in the relevant key principles of Transformation Theory and embodied awareness practice that are central to our session. Culled from our insights and challenges in teaching Integrative Psychotherapy and an immersive study abroad course, we will share the insights and challenges we have discovered as we invite our students and ourselves to engage our blind-spots; meet uncertainty and not-knowing with curiosity; engage with ambiguity; and enter dangerous, risky, and existential dimensions of transformation.

In the experiential portion of the session, we will offer three practices that guide participants into messy and unknown territory, deliberately inviting uncertainty, discomfort, vulnerability, and ambiguity to surface evolving and emergent personal and group outcomes. It is from this space of open possibilities and curiosities that we will enter and guide exploration to identify growth and find new insights.

The three experiential learning practices are (1) a touching discomfort and resourcing practice; (2) an interpersonal practice called insight dialogue; and (3), a curious questioning practice. The first involves bringing in support and resourcing and then exploring a difficult classroom (intrapersonal or interpersonal) experience that one feels was challenging, perplexing or where they felt they “failed. “ Participants will be guided through this practice and invited to share their experience and insights so that, individually and collectively, we can learn together. The second practice is one where participants are guided to explore an interpersonal challenging

classroom moment and then share and dialogue via dyads to see what insights and transformation may emerge. Finally, the curious questioning practice invites participants to identify and ask a “Question of Genuine Inquiry. “ We center participants in thinking about taking a curious stand, and identifying places in their mind and body where they feel curiosity, and engage them in crafting questions from that space. Through these experiences, participants experience how curiosity generates new perspectives and thinking, in ways that are radically opposed to habitual patterns of rhetorical, autobiographical, and challenging questioning. Each practice will build upon the previous one to deepen participants’ understanding and capacities in being more open and engaged, as well as nimble in their responses to circumstances that unfold in their classrooms and/or relationships.

We will close the session through a collective process to harvest and share new insights and implications for personal and andragogical application.

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## Wellness in Transition: Social Solidarity for Transformation

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**Abstract:** The deeply personal work of wellness, embedded in multiple social constructs, requires new perspectives to live fully and transformatively when entering and enduring transitions. Wellness and its absence have been well considered as a site of transformative learning (see for example Brendel, 2009; King, 2012; Hoggan, 2015). Wellness is linked to, but not synonymous with, both health and psychological wellbeing, and our experience of it is highly influenced by the 4.4 trillion dollar wellness industry. In a critique of the wellness and self-care complex, with its focus on individualism and consumerism, Lakshmin (2023) notes that “faux self-care gets wrapped inside the bubble of perfectionism, workaholism, and capitalism “ (p. 23). Self reflection on, as well as critique of and dialogue around existing wellness paradigms, may catalyze the development of new wellbeing frameworks that are compassionate, accessible, flexible, relational, and oriented toward liberation.

**Key Words:** Wellness, Transition, Transformation, Community

The ITLC 2024 Call invites proposals for “getting transformation into good trouble! “ John Lewis also spoke of necessary trouble and we take up this invitation with a focus on the necessary work of attending to wellness during transition(s) and the corresponding transformations which emerge. The deeply personal work of wellness, embedded in multiple social constructs, requires new perspectives to live fully and transformatively when entering and enduring transitions. An essential element of this learning process is the ability to engage in a learner’s stance and ask provocative questions.

### Wellness, Transition, and Transformative Learning

Transformative learning has roots in liberating practices and influences from humanism and emancipatory traditions (Freire, 1972; Illich, 1970) and critical theory (Habermas, 1981) (Formenti & Hoggan-Kloubert, 2022). Mezirow and other scholars (Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Mezirow, 1992) have been clear in considering the social context as relevant for adult learning, and in supporting transformation at multiple levels--individual, collective and societal (Formenti et al., 2022). Following other researchers who considered affective and relational components in addition to cognitive and rational approaches described by Merzirow, King (2011, 2012) includes mind, body, and spirit in the transformative learning process, and incorporates the perspective of collectivism to recognize not only individual transformation but the potential for community transformation. In an autoethnographic study of her experience of chronic pain, King (2012) writes:

The transformative learning experience resulted in my development of self agency and self advocacy and allowed me to seize control of new wellness decisions. Within this

scope, I realized that health included more than the absence of illness, and instead involves connecting and communicating among the mind, body, and spirit. (p. 49)

Wellness and its absence have been well considered as a site of transformative learning (see for example Brendel, 2009; King, 2012; Hoggan, 2015). Wellness is linked to, but not synonymous with, both health and psychological wellbeing; we define wellness using Goss et al.'s (2010) definition, an

active process through which the individual becomes aware of all aspects of the self and makes choices toward a more healthy existence through balance and integration across multiple life dimensions... a state of being in which a person's awareness, understanding and active decision-making capacity are aligned with their values and aspirations. (p. 5)

Formenti et al. (2022) warn, "in a commodified society transformation easily becomes a good, a promise of happiness, a new consumerist mantra" (Formenti & West, 2018, p. 106). In fact, the Global Wellness Institute found that the wellness industry was worth 4.4 trillion dollars in 2020 (as cited in Lakshmin, 2023). We follow Lakshmin's (2023) critique of the wellness and self-care complex, with its focus on individualism and consumerism: "faux self-care gets wrapped inside the bubble of perfectionism, workaholism, and capitalism" (p. 23). Challenging assumptions of wellness, the self care industry, and diet and beauty culture perpetuated by patriarchy is part of a transformative learning process that goes beyond commodification and consumerism. As Formenti et al. (2022) note, challenging these "dominant or hegemonic frames of reference [requires] shifts in self-understanding, the capacity to question normalized actions and positions...[and] critical awareness of assumptions that are not only personal, but socially shared and reinforced" (p. 106). Self reflection on, as well as critique of and dialogue around existing wellness paradigms may catalyze the development of new wellbeing frameworks that are compassionate, accessible, flexible, relational, and oriented toward liberation.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

Our work on wellness, transition and transformation is framed by Kasl and Yorks' (2002, 2012) holistic approach. In their discussion of pragmatist and phenomenological perspectives Kasl and Yorks describe how the phenomenological perspective treats experiences as a process, a verb rather than a noun. From a phenomenological point of view "experience is the state of being in a felt encounter" (Yorks & Kasl, 2002, p. 184).

The shift in worldview in the holistic approach is described as a holistic and enduring change in how a person affectively experiences and conceptually frames his or her experience of the world in order to apply new action in life contexts that are personally developmental, socially controversial, or require personal or social healing [*italics in original*]. (Kasl & Yorks, 2012, p. 509)

Grounded in the work of John Heron (1992) this approach brings attention to his theory of knowledge, which incorporates four ways of knowing: experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical. Experiential knowing is prelinguistic and subconscious and is linked to emotions, empathy, and felt resonance with presences both human and beyond human. Presentational knowing is the intuitive apprehension of imaginal patterns as accessed through various forms of artistic expression. Propositional knowing is expressed in intellectual statements that conform to the rules of logic and evidence. Practical knowing is manifest in the ability to

exercise some skill (Heron, 1996, p. 52). These ways of knowing frame transformative learning processes.

Yorks and Kasl (2006) use the term “expressive ways of knowing “ to describe “people’s intuitive grasp of what they perceive through images, body sensation, and imagination “ (p. 43). They offer a “taxonomy and framework. . . as a step toward conceptualizing the ways in which adult educators can use expressive ways of knowing to foster significant whole-person engagement in learning from experience “ (p. 61). Some of the expressive ways of knowing educators use are creating images and sculptures, storytelling, role playing, and guided visualizations. “We have found from our experience that fostering the artful interdependence of four ways of knowing—experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical—supports learners as whole persons and ultimately supports their capacity to learn deeply “ (Yorks & Kasl, 2002, p. 185).

### **Workshop Plan**

Our workshop is designed to engage participants in an exploration of wellness, transition and transformation using self reflection, presentational knowing activities and dialogue with supportive and non-judgemental peers. This method is modeled on the cooperative inquiry between the co-authors on these topics.

The intended outcome of the workshop is to deepen understanding of how attention to wellness can impact transitions.

Our workshop flow follows:

- Introduce topic (10 minutes)
- Community building (5 minutes)
- Individual work creating a visual representation of experience with wellness and transition (20 minutes)
- Partner sharing of visual representation (10 minutes)
- Journaling to deepen personal reflections/learning (5 minutes)
- Small group work (15 minutes): Connection and integration of wellness, transition, transformation
- Harvesting learning from small group work (20 minutes)
- Closing (5 minutes)

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## **The Bridge Between Transformative Learning and Empowering Sustainability Change Agents in an Educational Sustainability Doctoral Program**

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**Abstract:** The Educational Sustainability Doctoral program at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point is designed with transformative learning as the foundation for effecting change in systems. The required doctoral residency engages students through an experiential program and compels students to think holistically and differently in addressing issues and discovering solutions to wicked global problems. This session provides a snapshot of the student experience and engages participants in experiential activities designed to disrupt the traditional mindset.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Community, Sustainability, Sustainable Systems, Sustainable Change

### **Extended Abstract**

At the core of sustainable changes lies transformative learning, and at the core of transformative learning lies the community. Consequently, it can be deduced that community is fundamental to sustainable change.

The 8<sup>th</sup> international Transformative Learning Conference “addressed the need for transformative learning theory to inform sustainable education “ (Taylor & Cranton, 2012, p. 197). We would argue that educational sustainability drives transformative learning as evidenced by the intersectionality of doctoral student’s research and forcing us to get into “good trouble “ in effecting change for sustainable systems. The intersectionality within ideas and amongst student research (presented at different phases during the residency) is strong evidence of transformation in action and serves to weave an inextricable fabric to systemic change within societies, environment, and economies. The intent of this session is to think differently, look for intersections of understanding and connection, and leave with opportunities to contribute further to transformational learning. Each student is a part of the community and together, through embedding each project within broader society, we can achieve something grander, more audacious and fundamentally transformational.

The Educational Sustainability Doctoral program at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point is centered on community and inspiring sustainable change through learning. Students are challenged to identify wicked problems and frame their work and research around the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG’s) addressing the core tenets of sustainability: Societies, Environment, and Economies, leading to transformational change. The integration of community and exploration of transformative learning through the required four-day summer

residency is a core element of the program. A total of 75 students across three cohorts actively engage with university faculty and staff through experiential learning, colloquium, research, and community living.

Transformative learning theory, developed by Mezirow (1995), focuses on how individuals can undergo significant and often profound cognitive and emotional changes through the process of critical self-reflection and self-transformation. The Ed.D. residency emulates transformative learning as students are challenged to expand and/or modify their current thinking and belief systems, by engaging in academic sessions, collaborative discussions, self-reflection, community immersion, and experiential activities.

In addition to the ten phases as identified by Mezirow, a holistic approach to transformative learning (Papastamatis & Panitsides, 2014) is taking place as the program, and doctoral residency specifically, are designed to engage mind (academic discourse), body (experiential activities), and spirit (meaning making). Tisdell (1999) articulates that spirituality in the lives of adult learners is connected to the search for meaning that “gives our lives coherence”, further noting this is how adults create meaning in their relationships with others. She further notes that spirituality is a grounding place in working for social justice, a cornerstone of educational sustainability. Mind and body experiences in the doctoral residency are specifically designed for students to engage with one another and faculty in unpacking and understanding the disorienting dilemma.

Collectively this triad of engagement transforms student thinking and reorients their work and research towards the collective good. According to VanWynsberghe (2022), “Transformative learning bonds together our individual and collective potential in creative efforts to achieve a preferred future”. The Ed.D. residency lives out the individual and collective potential through creative efforts towards systemic and sustainable change for the betterment of a global society. This experience challenges students to push themselves outside their comfort zones through living in shared space, sharing their lived experiences with peers, faculty, and staff, and engaging with community partners, creating spaces of possibility as articulated by Oakeshott (1989), Dirkx (1998), and Taylor (1998).

Throughout the doctoral journey, students are in a constant state of evolution, transformative thinking and learning of themselves, and engaged with their peers in working to solve wicked problems-or a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1995). As an example, residency provides concrete, unique experiential activities (Kolb, 1985) that allow students to participate in various physical, social, and academic activities. Individual and group periods of reflection throughout the program provide opportunities for self-examination and critical assessments of assumptions in Mezirow’s phases of transformative learning. Through this reflective practice students deepen their understanding of themselves and their peers and facilitate personal and collective growth as they work towards solving complex challenges. Finally, this experience engages the holistic (Papastamatis & Panitsides, 2014) and spiritual (Tisdell 1999) aspect of transformative learning.

These scholars support Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning by emphasizing the social, spiritual, and narrative dimensions of the learning process. They advocate for creating spaces of possibility within communities and practice meaningful dialogue, self-reflection, and personal transformation which the residency is intentionally designed to do to support students’ transformational change.

## Session Design

This experiential session illustrates the bridge between educational sustainability and transformative learning. Participants in this session will experience the interconnectedness of ideas and research agendas, through learning by engaging in a community building micro-experience of the doctoral residency.

**Part I:** Participants in the session will see, through a visual model, interconnectedness amongst student research, United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's), and systems change while demonstrating a new approach to getting into good trouble, re-envisioning a sustainable future. Further they will witness the different systems (i.e., K-12, higher education, climate change, military, healthcare, municipalities) the students research impacted and recommendations for effective sustainable and transformative change.

**Part II:** Participants will be asked where their own research and/or professional interests lie in the field of transformational learning and educational sustainability, as it's connected to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and expectation for transformational learning. This will be done through an experiential process that literally builds a web or fabric of community connection. Participants will be moving throughout this process, identifying others whose research and professional interests connect with their own, and looking for the intersections to bridge them to each other.

**Part III:** A visual thinking process will capture ideas shared in the session. These ideas will be mapped through words and images, connected to the SDG's and each other. Participants will work in small groups to map individual ideas and themes first, then return to the large group where the full image is captured by the facilitator. The visual map will be sent out to participants after the conference.

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## Deep Time Walk as a Transformative Tool in Higher Education Institutions

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**Abstract:** New transformative learning tools are fundamental to facing the current planetary crisis. Integrating them into Higher Education is a challenge that requires transgressive pedagogies. While different strands are debated, e.g. transformation as consciousness-raising, as development and individuation, among others, several scholars agree that Transformative Learning (TL) is a process that provides critical thinking and a change of worldview. This proposal explores a unique TL tool to provide innovative ways of accessing scientific knowledge and philosophical reflections. Deep Time Walk (DTW) is a ludic and interactive activity that tells the story of the Earth while walking. For the proposed session, a DTW will be adapted to a static place, and participants will be motivated to learn and present creatively facts about this story, supported by provided material. The Deep Time Walk in ITLC will be co-constructed with the group, utilizing storytelling and embodied learning elements. Participants will experiment with and live the experience of a DTW, allowing them to understand the activity and to jointly discuss aspects of TL in the process and how to integrate it into Higher Education.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Transgressive Pedagogies, Deep Time Walk, Embodied Learning, Higher Education

### Introduction

Several scholars agree that Transformative Learning (TL) is a process that provides critical thinking and a shift in how one understands her/himself and how one relates to other human beings and the natural world (Wamsler, 2020; Boström et al., 2018; Hoggan, 2016; Dirkx, 1998; Mezirow, 1997). Different practices will constitute an important step to guarantee TL (Boström et al., 2018), leading to concrete actions towards sustainability (Rodríguez Aboytes & Barth, 2020).

By considering different aspects of individuals and the whole context one is inserted, transformative education for sustainability can be further developed (Walsh et al., 2020) and support Higher Education Institutions (HEI) to respond to sustainability issues (Lotz-Sisitka, 2015). Consequently, individual and structural changes will support substantial social transformation (Hoggan, 2016). The consideration of these dimensions still remains rare when it comes to HEI (Sterling, 2021). On the one hand, TL for sustainable development will require an overcoming of disciplinary divisions and the use of holistic approaches (Boström et al., 2018). On the other hand, curriculum change is a very complex process, which explains the big resistance for a systemic change in universities (Sterling, 2021). Therefore, transformation in



higher education requires disruptive capacity building and transgressive pedagogies (Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2015). In this proposal, a new TL tool is explored.

### **Object of Study**

Deep Time Walk (DTW) is an educational activity created in 2008 by Dr. Stephan Harding, Deep Ecology Research Fellow at Schumacher College (England), and his MSc student, the geologist Sergio Maraschin. In DTW, participants walk through the history of planet Earth from the formation of our Solar System, passing through - among other marks - first forms of life, evolution, big extinction events, first humans, ending with the current days. It is a walking metaphor in which each step is equivalent to one million years, telling the 4,6 billion years of the story of the Earth. While people walk, the displacement in space represents the passage of time, which allows a better perception of geological time in millions and billions of years. These are elements of embodied learning (Nathan, 2022), engaging simultaneously the self (body and mind) with the inner and outer environment (Munro, 2018). It is a ludic and interactive activity that happens outdoors, promoting nature contact and connectedness.

Ludic activities offer the possibility for people to be creative and bring an appreciation that can make an individual feel that life is worthwhile (Winnicott, 2019). Furthermore, the stories have the power to connect and enable insights into one's practice through moments of trust and vulnerability (Vettraino & Linds, 2018). This educational tool is also built upon ideas of Deep Ecology, which is an environmental philosophy that understands that all living beings have intrinsic value (Naess, 1973). DTW gives the opportunity for a deep reflection on our connection and interdependence with all life on the planet, in addition to questioning the legacy we want to leave. Recently, Harding & Woodford (2024) published a quantitative study showing the effectiveness of DTW as a powerful educative tool for strengthening ecological awareness and fostering hope for action for the Earth in this moment of climate crisis.

### **Proposal to International Transformative Learning Conference**

The primary objective of this activity is to, collectively, demonstrate and explore the aspects of DTW. Attendees will be exposed to a systemic comprehension of the Earth, which could also lead to personal transformation. This work is part of an ongoing PhD research, about transformative learning tools and their applicability in higher education, with a focus on the DTW. This PhD project aims to research and develop actions for strong sustainability, through the strengthening of human-nature relationships.

For this session, a Deep Time Walk will be adapted to a static place. In that version, there will be a line on the floor, equivalent length to represent the 4,6 billion years of the Earth's history, with 12 so-called "Earth stations" with relevant facts for this story. Participants will be divided into groups among these stations, where material will be provided with information about the related period of time. The group will have 15 minutes to study their Earth Station (with support of the material and the facilitator) and finally, each group will tell their part of the story in a creative and ludic way. They will be motivated to bring curiosities from that time and illustrate important facts with movements or demonstrations. The DTW in ITLC will be co-constructed by the group of participants, utilizing elements of storytelling and embodied learning. In the last 25 minutes, the group will discuss together the two main questions:

- Which aspects make DTW a Transformative Learning process?
- How can it be integrated into Higher Education considering the challenges of changing the curriculum?

Summary (total duration = 90 minutes):

- Introduction (10 min.): Participants will be contextualized about the activity and orientation will be given
- Organization (3 min.): Division into groups
- Preparation (15 minutes): Material distribution and explanations
- Embodied storytelling (35 minutes): Creative “Earth Station “ presentations
- Reflection (25 minutes): Discussion about the activity and its transformative learning elements, also thinking of ways to integrate it into HE
- Conclusion (2 minutes): Closing and acknowledgment

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## **Expanding the Practices of Transformative Learning: A Collective Responsibility to Foster Spaces of Possibility through JEDI Dialogues**

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**Abstract:** This experiential session uses a World Café (WC) design to apply the practices of Transformative Learning (TL) for troubling, re-inventing, and re-imagining Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) work on a global basis. Diversity, equity, and inclusion work is presently facing backlash from many directions, reflecting the larger systemic issues at play in social, political, organizational, and educational realms. We believe transformative learning as an applied theory is uniquely aligned to support efforts that challenge and expand existing worldviews related to JEDI. This World Café activity will actively engage participants in dialogues that support both unlearning and re-learning ways that foster collective action. By actively applying five transformative learning practices (self-reflection, critical thinking, empathic dialogue, praxis, and cultural responsiveness) that promote perspective transformation, JEDI work is better positioned to have a greater impact.

**Key Words:** Transformation, Diversity, Inclusion, World Café

### **Re-Inventing and Re-Imagining JEDI Work**

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are facing backlash from many directions (Brannon et al., 2018). This reflects larger systemic issues at play in social, political, organizational, and educational realms. “The terms ‘backlash’ and ‘resistance’ can be used interchangeably to refer to any form of resistance toward progressive social change “ (Flood et al., 2021, p. 2).

While research has shown that JEDI benefits the bottom line and makes a difference for Stakeholders, organizations, and society (McKinsey, 2020), some organizations are stepping back from their JEDI initiatives. To address the JEDI backlash, the time is now for organizations to get into good trouble and consider strategies that unite their audiences. Good trouble entails having courageous conversations, which requires a willingness to explore frames of reference through reflection, dialogue, and empathy.

To understand the different approaches to JEDI globally - specifically in Europe, Australia, the U.S., and Canada - it is important to start with a dialogue about what we understand about the geo-political landscape. From an organizational perspective, leaders “who frame their diversity values, either transactionally or transformationally, may promote different levels of buy-in “ (Williams, 2023, p. 301) that affect the extent that inspires meaningful engagement and increases diversity goals.

### **TL Practices: A Process for Troubling, Re-Inventing, and Re-Imagining JEDI Work**

TL as a theory is uniquely aligned to support efforts to challenge and expand existing worldviews related to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI). Mezirow (2000) noted that transformative learning theory “. . . transform[s] our taken-for-granted frames of reference. . . to

make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally able to change, and reflective, so they generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action “ (p. 7). Geller (2005) reviewed existing literature and named five practices that support “perspective transformation: self-reflection, critical thinking, empathic dialogue, praxis, and cultural responsiveness “ (Geller et al., 2023, pp. 41-50).

- 1) Self-reflection - Dewey (1910) described that “*reflective thought* is active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it “ (p. 6). Taylor (2009) noted that *critical reflection* leads to challenging deeply held beliefs that emerge from one’s family of origin.
- 2) Critical thinking - Brookfield suggested that critical thinking focuses on the “assumptions under which we, and others, think and act. . . of claims to universal truth [and] become open to alternative ways of looking at, and behaving in, the world “ (p. ix). hooks (2010) noted that “critical thinking requires discernment. . . to understand the core, underlying truths, not simply the superficial truth that may be most obviously visible “ (p. 9).
- 3) Peer-to-peer dialogue and empathic feedback - Freire (1970) noted: “True dialogue . . . perceives reality as a process of transformation “ (pp. 92 -93).
- 4) Praxis-Schön (1987) posited that relying on tacit knowledge without conscious thought does not work when outcomes go awry. This calls for reflection in (and on) action to identify corrections.
- 5) Cultural responsiveness - Hofstede (1997) suggested that the socio-cultural beliefs, values, and perspectives we acquired in our family of origin and culture become the basis for the worldviews that guide our adult interactions.

These five transformative learning practices consciously applied JEDI interventions, may lead to better outcomes.

### **Our Experiential Process**

“The World Café (WC) method creates a safe, welcoming environment to connect multiple ideas and perspectives on a topic “ (Brown & Issacs, 2005). WCs engage participants in small-group dialogues that shift habitual ways of thinking and acting. Our ILTC design draws on Brown and Isaacs’ (2005) seven design principles for the WC.

#### **Room Set-up**

Three tables covered with brown paper and multiple markers. Each table will have 4 - 6 participants.

#### **Opening**

- 1) Set the context –meeting’s purpose and parameters.
  - 2) Create a hospitable space – where people feel safe.
- (Brown & Issacs, 2005)

#### **Opening Process**

Introduction to JEDI at the intersection of TL practices

#### **Small Group Dialogues – World Café Tables**

- 1) Explore questions relevant to the group’s real-life concerns.
- 2) Encourage everyone’s contribution –leading to better outcomes.
- 3) (Brown & Issacs, 2005)

### ***Small Group Dialogues Process – World Café Questions***

- To get into good trouble in JEDI transformation, what do we need to unlearn and re-learn to get to collective action?
- What do we need to understand about the geo-political landscape that troubles JEDI work?
- How might we collectively expand the boundaries of TL to create new spaces of possibility through JEDI dialogues?

### **Sense-making**

- 1) Connect diverse perspectives –Hearing unfamiliar ideas will break habitual thinking patterns.
- 2) Listen together for patterns and insights –Sense a connection to the larger whole.
- 3) (Brown & Issacs, 2005)

### ***Sense-making Process***

One person from each WC team goes to each table, and the new table group is asked to create a rich drawing that integrates the ideas presented in the table notes (20 minutes). Each team will present their drawing (and a synthesis of the responses) to the larger group. New teams synthesize notes and create a drawing.

### **Closing**

How will the experiential activity contribute to participants' ideas?

- 1) Share collective discoveries – reflect and build on ideas further.  
(Brown & Issacs, 2005)

### ***Closing Process***

We have started a conversation: How will you transform JEDI within your sphere of influence?

Note: Total Time: 90 mins

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## **Experience: Action Learning Conversation to Learn Knowledge, Creativity and Respect for Other People's Position: Research Through an Experience at the University of Bergamo**

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**Abstract:** It is increasingly necessary to promote emancipatory pedagogical processes in order to encourage students to learn new visions of the world through critical reflection that includes knowledge, creativity and respect for other people's position. The post-Covid 19 society and the geopolitical turbulence in many regions of the world have increased inequalities and hardship among the youth population. Overall, the new generations appear more fragile and disoriented even during common daily activities. For this reason pedagogical research was drawn upon to identify methodologies and techniques to strengthen the ability to self-assess and reflect on one's own Habits of Mind with a view to adaptability and flexibility, through situated and generative learning. Through the use of Action Learning Conversation and role simulation within small groups of 6 members of students of 20-25 years old (over a class of 80 students) expressing their experiences in difficult contexts, the project aimed to increase in each participant the ability to react positively to situations of a complex nature without stopping at the disorienting dilemma phase.

Dramatization as well as impersonation of a role have been proposed as possible answers to specific unanswered questions posed by participants in each group with the aim to engage in critical reflection and to gain the capabilities to move forward with new Habits of Mind. The idea has been to decide with the entire group common shared dilemmas, with one student in each group designated as possible facilitator with the role of posing open questions to involve each participant in the debate.

The topics, shared by the students, have been the following: 1. The behavior of the employer after the Covid-19 towards the workers. 2. Answering to the dilemma of students who are marginalized in classes and who are evaluated negatively, risking failure just because they made a mistake in their initial choice of study path, feeling discomfort. The group decided to follow the second dilemma. The final results of the discussion phases have been carried out in front of the entire audience of the class with the aim to understand if similar reflections came out in each group. To achieve desired results, music, pictures, videos and form of dialogues have been used as technique forms with the aim to carry out the awareness generated by the exchange of experiences between the participants.

**Key Words:** Transformation, Awareness, Critical Reflection, Creativity

### **Level 1 Sharing Experiences Between the Participants to Focus the Possible Dilemmas**

The first step was characterized by a common reflection within the entire class participants over the possible dilemmas influencing the life of each person. The group



highlighted that a growing dilemma can emerge regarding the mismatch between a choice made, for example a study path, and what is studied in that path. The disorienting dilemma, according to the group's participants, arises when the proposed study subjects do not correspond to the expectations and abilities of some students.

### **Level 2 Identification of Questions By Facilitators Through Knowing the Members Of The Group (Made Up Of 6 People) – Ice Breaking Moment**

For identified dilemma, questions were asked to the members regarding their own experiences linked to forms of satisfaction or discomfort felt in learning situations. The group also examined in particular the cases in which the lack of motivation and the inability to participate in lessons produce isolation or even forms of aggression. The facilitators decided to continue not by focusing on the story of personal experiences but introducing cases, images and short movies of punished and isolated students without any help to share the reasons of these behaviors.

### **Level 3 Impersonation Through Creativity with Videos and Images**

To each participant has been asked to represent situations of discomfort in school contexts, experienced or imagined. The methodology required is the dramatization.

Each facilitator had to put himself in the teacher's shoes and find alternative methods to punishment or a negative grade, encouraging critical awareness of their own discomfort in students in difficulty.

The questions posed to the members: what interests do you have outside of school hours? Which study subject do you like the most and which do you like the least? How did you get along with your classmates during your studies and during your free time? Have you had the opportunity to get to know other study paths and schools other than the one presented?

### **Level 4 Reaching the Awareness Through Transformation of the Habits of Minds**

It was proposed to verify the overcoming of the manifested dilemma through discomfort or aggressive behavior by creating different study and relationship situations: different study path, different school, different classmates.

The facilitator, who verified this change, impersonated the adult, teacher or parent or both, who in this way favored the student's internal growth which transforms an existential negativity into a new beginning strengthened by the awareness of having carried out a second choice. This time in a more conscious way and more suited to one's aspirations.

### **Results:**

Each group wanted to end the experience by presenting their reflections to the other groups through elaborated images of students with problems (at the beginning of the path) who overcame school difficulties through the tool of Action Learning and final self-evaluation. These helped them to become aware of the mistakes made both with reference to the choices of study areas as well as towards the behavior adopted towards their classmates and of teachers.

During the presentation of the experience will be shown the pictures prepared by the students and the examples of dramatization organized in the class.

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## **Drawings and Narratives of Life Crises as a Transformational Process**

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**Abstract:** This experiential workshop employs drawings and narratives of life crises as a process of transformation. The process of transformation from immaturity to maturity encounters several internal and external obstacles. Gould (1978) suggested that maturity in itself is a “risky act “ as children’s fantasies, obsessions and assumptions invade the consciousness and inevitably induce mental pain. This is moreover the case, when people are exposed to real life traumas in their developmental pathways that they need to deal with. Mezirow (1978b, pp. 11). This experiential workshop employs individual and group dynamic techniques for facilitating participants through their own life narratives and mapping of crisis moments, choices made and pathways to change. Through mapping their own pathway and life course, participants are also asked to map the pathway and life course of the other (the stranger) (Bauman, 2016) in order to understand similarities and differences, find analogies and cultivate empathy.

**Key Words:** Transformation, Epistemology, Leadership, Critical Reflection

### **Introduction**

According to United Nations reports, refugee flows have increased significantly in the last decade and refugee children make up 50% of the world’s refugee population. Refugees are exposed to traumatic events, some have lost their families, some are victims of trafficking and others were child soldiers in war zones. These experiences are traumatic and are often related with mental health disorders, post-traumatic stress, depression and anxiety (Almqvist & Broberg, 1999; Ahearn 2000; Beans et. al., 2007; Bronstein & Montgomery; 2011; Björkenstam et. al., 2020; Oppedal et. al., 2020). However, according to Fazel & Betancourt (2018) studies focusing on mental health of refugees are relatively few, the mobility of the refugee population is high and therefore it is often difficult to locate them and the cultural conditions in the host country are complex, resulting in relatively little access to mental health services. In order to understand the effects of the refugee phenomenon, it is important to use a model that links the events before, during and after the refugee experience.

### **Structural Inequalities**

Structural inequalities and barriers to integration are of particular importance as much as the way in which adult education and support is offered for refugees’ integration. Anxiety about the future, the long process for asylum application, fear of rejection is associated with depression and anxiety disorders. In addition, refugees face stress in the process of integration in the new culture. In this process it is important to both, preserve the identity of their cultural heritage and strengthen their intercultural identity that connects the past with the present. In addition, stigma and discrimination that some refugees may face also play an important role, particularly in relation to the development of mental health problems. Some refugees face many mental health issues especially in the first years of their settlement in the host country. Relevant studies have

been conducted since the 1990s (Gonsalves, 1992), showing that it takes at least five years from the date of settlement to reduce mental health issues linked both to the difficulties of settlement and acquiring a new intercultural identity, since the traumas of war are often untreated and thus unresolved. Developing an intercultural identity, that includes both the respect for the cultural heritage that refugees bring along with them, as well as the possibility of substantial integration and the acquisition of a new identity in the host country, is very important for the cultivation of mental resilience. However, this is not an easy process, as refugees may come across the resistance of some of the local populations on equal terms integration. Thus, the occurrence of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and other psychosomatic problems, as well as the vulnerability of the population to psychological and psychiatric problems, is expected (Ulrich, *et. al.*, 2022; Blackmore, *et. al.*, 2020; Ellis *et al.*, 2018). In Greece, the long fiscal crisis has affected in a negative manner the refugees integration processes (Anagnostopoulos, *et. al.*, 2016). Most agencies working directly with refugees are mainly non-governmental. Their main interventions are to provide interpretation and legal services, psychosocial support and cultural and educational programmes aiming to promote educational and social inclusion. Nonetheless, most interventions seem to lack coping with trauma and improving mental health practices.

### **Psychosocial Support**

Psychological support mechanisms can be provided, since most European countries have agreed to co-shape a common integration policy to be implemented at the European and the national level. Therefore, comprehensive psychosocial interventions are required as well as the restoration of the relations with the social environment in the host country. The indicators that can explain risk factors and protective factors in mental health issues according to Fazel & Betancourt (2018), are two: a) exposure to ongoing unprocessed past trauma and b) the complexity of the host country environment including education, discrimination and the restructuring of family life. Mental health problems, depression, anxiety and disturbed sleep, affect refugees' ability to adapt to the new environment and especially their willingness to learn the language of the country of settlement (Iversen, *et. al.*, 2014). Post-traumatic stress affects development even ten years after settlement in the new country (Carlsson *et t. al.*, 2006). Relevant studies conducted 60 years after the Second World War, showed that mental effects following situations that endanger a person's life and rights followed him/her for the rest of his/her life (Strauss *et al.*, 2011). The effects of post-traumatic stress are transmitted from generation to generation (Sack *et al.*, 1995), while other behavioral problems such as substance abuse (Ezard, 2012) may also manifest themselves. However, resilience of some refugees who may have experienced great losses and hardships and managed to overcome them is also a fact. Almqvist & Broberg (1999), focused on protective factors for mental health and social adjustment and argued that the ability to adapt is related with many different factors and especially with the relationships people develop with their own peers. Fazel & Betancourt (2018), focus particularly on the concept of resilience as a dynamic process dependent on time and space, individual and family characteristics, cultural influences, education and social support networks.

Interventions should focus as much on learning a new language and making friends as on resolving citizenship issues and accept referrals to mental health services. The importance of learning the new language in the country of settlement has been proven by numerous studies to be particularly important for integration and job search. Refugees and migrants are often economically deprived and feel cut off from the environment in which they live and work. They often live in deprived urban areas where violence can be breaded accompanied by severe mental

health problems. Often, barriers to finding a job is followed by frustration, anxiety and depression. The sense of alienation from the environment is a particularly important predictor of mental health problems, just as the feeling of “ belonging “ is a factor in the prevention of post -traumatic stress and other mental health issues. However, accessing mental health services is particularly difficult as there is personal, family, social and cultural factors that are barriers to access. Especially when refugees come from a culture that stigmatizes mental health issues, it is harder for them to trust services and as a result they often seek informal psychological help from their friends (Piwowarczyk et. al., 2014).

Successful interventions are relatively limited and mainly concern prevention strategies (Anders & Christiansen, 2016) that focus on a) the use of drama and visual therapy, b) trauma-focused cognitive- behavioral therapy and c) narrative therapy. However, there is insufficient evidence that these interventions reduce post -traumatic stress as external stressors seem to predominate. Another important parameter is the acceptance of refugee and immigrant families in the host and settlement country. Several studies support that when families speak the language of the host country and have the necessary skills that can help them integrate into the labor market, then the results are very positive (Ager & Strang, 2008; Stoltz, et. al., 2015). Ager & Strang (2008) argue that the factors contributing to meaningful inclusion are divided into four categories: a) Means Offered such as education, work, housing and health, b) Social Relations that include social ties, social connections and bridges c) Facilitating Factors such as knowledge of the new language and culture, security and stability and d) Fundamental factors, such as rights and citizenship.

### **Experiential Workshop**

The current experiential workshop employs drawings and narratives of life crises as a process of transformation. The process of transformation from immaturity to maturity encounters several internal and external obstacles. Gould (1978) suggested that maturity in itself is a “risky act “ as children’s fantasies, obsessions and assumptions invade the consciousness and inevitably induce mental pain. This is moreover the case, when people are exposed to real life traumas in their developmental pathways that they need to deal with. Mezirow (1978b, pp. 11) has argued that “*for a perspective transformation to occur, a painful reappraisal of our current perspective must be thrust upon us* “ and in his original study with women at re-entry to education and labor market, suggested that ‘*there are distinctive psychological patterns of re-entry*’ (1978, pp. 12) and concluded that a “*woman becomes a transformation learner when she realizes how the culture and her own attitudes have conspired to define and delimit her self-conception, her life style, and her options in terms of a set of prescribed, stereotypic roles. As a result of recognizing these taken-for-granted cultural expectations and how they have shaped the way she thinks and feels about herself and her relationships, the transformation learner comes to identify her personal problem as a common one and a public issue.* (1978, pp. 15). However, the risk for fixation to old dysfunctional assumptions is always present. Fixation is a classic psychoanalytic term suggesting that adults who remain fixated on the past may be highly dependent on others, and they are very rigid and strict with themselves and others, often feeling disappointed and frustrated by the demands of external reality. Fixation (Gould, 1978) is reinforced by experiences and internal and external conflicts that cause mental pain and prevent initiatives and action taken. Psychological pain is observed through uncontrollable self-destructive behaviors that limit the capacity for change and the ability of adults for self-fulfillment and self-directed learning. Psychic pain is usually not conscious, and it reappears often in adulthood with a subversive form creating the fear of the uncanny (Freud, 1919). In educational settings, psychic pain might be

manifested as anger towards the adult educator or the group. Adult educators need training in order to understand the difference between adult learner's stress related to actual external pressures and anxiety that is rooted on childhood myths that adults may unconsciously use to construct a defense mechanism against stress. The process of understanding these mechanisms is very important for reaching transformation of false assumptions. Adult learners experiencing fixation at particular developmental stages need counseling or even therapy to process deeper feelings and thoughts that keep them fixated on the past and place obstacles in taking initiatives and action in the present (Tsiboukli, 2020). Mezirow suggests ten phases an individual has to go through in order to reach transformation. These include the exposure to a disorienting dilemma, self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame, critical assessment of assumptions, recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared, exploration for options for new roles, relationships and actions, planning a course of action, acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans, provisional trying of new roles, building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships and reintegration into one's life on the basis of the conditions dictated by one's new perspective.

### **Method**

This experiential workshop introduces participants (up to 20) to a new method for understanding their internal and external crises and the ways these may lead to change. The workshop employs individual and group dynamic techniques for facilitating participants through their own life narratives and mapping of crisis moments, choices made and pathways to change. Through mapping their own pathway and life course, participants are also asked to map the pathway and life course of the other (the stranger) (Bauman, 2016) in order to understand similarities and differences, find analogies and cultivate empathy.

### **Aim**

In the present experiential workshop, the aim is to cultivate empathy and change dysfunctional attitudes in relation to the refugee crisis. Jack Mezirow's theory of dysfunctional assumptions in relation to religion, ideology and culture is employed in order to understand our personal dysfunctional assumptions. Mapping life crisis and dilemmas is significant for changing habits of mind and understanding the perspective of the other (the stranger). Towards that goal group dynamics are employed together with mapping and representations.

### **Conclusion**

The refugee crisis is a timeless and universal phenomenon with serious consequences at the psychosocial level for the people who experience it. Over the years refugees might be exposed to other aggravating factors along with being a refugee (e.g. abuse, rape, unwanted motherhood). In these cases, the risk of passing on the trauma to the next generation is concrete and visible. In this context, educational attainment, employability, housing and access to health, mental health, social welfare and education services are of particular importance. Therefore, intervention programs need to be long-term and comprehensive in order to be effective. In addition, education and integration interventions are important to consider the need to cultivate and respect intercultural identity, the cultural background of the refugees and the opportunity to integrate in a new culture. In this context, Fazel & Betancourt (2018), ask some important questions that need to be answered in relation to the ability of the interventions targeting refugees when they arrive in host countries to improve community participation and social inclusion, by taking into consideration the particular cultural sensitivities of different groups of refugees. Questions on how to improve refugee's access to health, education and welfare services, remain open. Steps towards resolving stigma and increasing the quality of education and prospects for

integration, are important. Adult educators need to explore various dysfunctional assumptions. This is not an easy process and requires other than didactic means.

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## Exploring Passageways into Transformation Through Storywork

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**Abstract:** This experiential session engages participants in participatory storytelling to explore new passageways into transformation. Our goal is to provoke and evoke meta-cognitive narratives that could further illuminate our understanding of transformation possibilities beyond the traditional understanding of Transformation Learning (TL), focused on worldview shifts/perspective transformation, which occurs through critical reflection and rational discourse. Participants use “Storywork” to engage with four new propositions that expand current understandings of TL to understanding transformation as both process and outcome that are realized in context, relationship, action, and in holding the ambiguity of non-knowing in the transitional spaces. The outcome of the session is to generate a meta-narrative of implications for the field as a result of holding the four perspectives of transformation together.

**Key Words:** Transformation, Transformative Learning, Storywork

### Introduction

The call for the 2024 ITLC invites us to restore, revive, and reimagine our community. It directs our attention to becoming learners with questions as we seek a new understanding of transformation and Transformative Learning (TL), troubling our explicit and implicit assumptions. And it encourages us to consider positions and perspectives to reframe transformation and TL as a process for troubling, re/search/ing, re-inventing and re-imagining, and re-living.

Our experiential session attends to each of these points in the call. Drawing on the four propositions that emerged from an analysis of the chapters in *The Palgrave Handbook of Learning for Transformation* (Nicolaidis, et al., 2022), we engage participants in discussions that connect the propositions to their lived experiences through asking evocative questions and storytelling. The editors of the Handbook use metaphors of passageways as a frame for the many perspectives on transformation offered by the contributors. As the authors of the concluding chapter we note that “we have arrived at our next threshold. We invite you to join us and explore these propositions as we invent new language from the living theory of transformative learning, and new passageways into transformation” (Gilpin-Jackson & Welch, 2022, p. 937). The conversations and stories in this workshop are an opportunity for participants to actively join in exploring the propositions.

### The Four Propositions

#### *Proposition I:*

Transformation occurs at the nexus of the individual and collective, requiring structural change and collective effort to transform systems. Transformation-in-Context.

This proposition emerged from the first section of the Handbook. It speaks to the dance between individual and collective transformation. There is something about individual

transformation that opens one up to collective transformation. And there is something about collective transformation that pulls one into individual transformation. That is to say, the personal is embedded and entangled in the social. (Gilpin-Jackson & Welch, 2022, p. 937)

*Proposition II:*

The passageway to transformation is the relational ecology (connection, collective engagement) that evokes the interconnected being and becoming of humanity. Transformation-in-Connection.

The chapters in the second section of the Handbook reveal “the range of settings and processes used to evoke transformation in response to the complexities of organizational life and the imperative for social change “ (Gilpin-Jackson & Welch, 2022, p. 924). It is only in the chapters in this section of the Handbook that the word ecology is found: “This tells us that the relational ecology and experience between people is a significant condition and portal to transformation “ (Gilpin-Jackson & Welch, 2022, p. 927).

*Proposition III:*

Imaginal expressions of marginal experiences evoke storytelling and witnessing, sparking personal and collective identity (re)storying and action. Transformation-in-Action.

Through this provocation, the use of language, stories and storytelling evokes a deep knowing of self and others through imaginal engagement, the power of witness, and joining the other. This deeper exploration of self-in-collective generates the emergence of previously unknown awareness and knowing, a dance at the edge of the (un)known, where actors choose agency in dire circumstances. The unique voices of indigenous worldviews and postcolonial stories of resistance is evident as validated in the qualitative keyword analysis of the chapters in this provocation (Gilpin-Jackson & Welch, 2022).

*Proposition IV:*

It is in dwelling in the unknown spaces between multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary ways of knowing that transformation emerges. In-Transformation

The chapters in the last section of the Handbook cross disciplines and encourage us to think of ourselves as dwelling in the ambiguity of being in-transformation, in the place in-between knowing and not knowing, until a new way emerges (Gilpin-Jackson & Welch, 2022).

### **Connecting the Topic to TL**

Jack Mezirow founded the Transformative Learning Conference as a place to grow a living learning theory of TL, a place where conversations among scholars and practitioners would contribute to the evolution of TL theory. Some would say that the conversations has become stuck in Mezirow’s views of TL. The propositions from the Handbook speak to what is emerging at a new threshold, “which we hope will allow this field to step into the promise of transforming itself “ (Taylor & Cranton, 2013, p. 915). This promise for the field of TL transforming is reflected in the call for this conference.

For the field to transform it is essential that we look beyond known discourses of TL to make space for new discourses and language through the phenomenon of transformation. The propositions described above provide a framework for engaging in these discourses; discourses that will continue well beyond ITLC 2024. We offer this experiential session as a way to build on what is emerging across disciplines.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

While the topic of the session is about TL, the theoretical perspective that frames our process is storytelling. We see story as “a process of humanizing complex social phenomena that may be outside the understanding of those who are trying to sensemake and grapple with the systemic implications of such issues “ (Welch et al, 2020, p. 871). We will use “Storywork “ as per Denzin (2018) to engage participants in sharing stories that could produce meta-cognitive knowing and reveal transformative possibilities through participation in the experiential dimensions of storytelling.

Atkinson (2002) explains the experience of narrating a life story is associated with benefits such as meaning-making, greater self-understanding, and disclosure that promotes healing and increased understanding of social and community phenomena.

### **Workshop Overview**

We invite participants to explore the thresholds they are encountering within/between/around the four propositions. We encourage expression of dialectics of theory and practice, ways of engaging the complex and ever-changing world in which we live.

We start with introductions and community building, with attention to creating connection between the participants that is essential to creating the container for storytelling. We then introduce the topic and provide an overview of the propositions.

Working in small groups participants will choose which of the four propositions they want to discuss. Telling stories of their experience with the proposition they chose participants will look for connections between the proposition and their lived experience.

The participants will reconfigure into new small groups with one person from each of the first small groups. In the reconfigured groups they will identify stories of connection between the propositions.

Reconvening as a full group we will discuss the implications for the future of TL.

### **Conclusion**

The workshop engages participants in contributing to thinking about the praxis of transformation, using their lived experiences to connect to the propositions for the field. Our hope is that the result will be a deeper understanding of the nexus of dialectical knowing and in many ways helping scholars and practitioners take the journey of being in-process towards the required transformations of our field, of their communities and of these times. Additionally, our work together may reveal bridges across the propositions. Through using storywork as a bridge, evidence to inform practices for transformation could emerge.

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## Transformative Leadership: Getting in Good Trouble as Transformative Learners

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**Abstract:** We propose getting into good trouble by using embodied and interactive activities to explore various ways that transformative learners might begin to imagine themselves becoming transformative leaders, particularly through engaging creativity, diversity, and systems thinking. Engaging our creativity through various exercises, strategies, games, and participatory art experiences can prompt us to question our assumptions, notice our mindsets, and ultimately, help us to re-think, re-form, re-invent, re-shape *ourselves* (transformative learning) and our *worlds* (transformative leadership). Transforming our worlds with systems thinking is a way transformative leaders work with stakeholders to improve complex, messy situations. Rather than defining a problem, we choose to begin with curiosity and work with stakeholders to understand a situation in context- e.g., historical, economic, social, and environmental (Ison, 2017). We ask questions of stakeholders to uncover the what, how, why, and purpose to facilitate actions which are systemically desirable and culturally feasible. To make change in the world, transformative leaders strive to be as inclusive as possible to better understand complex issues. They value stakeholders' perspectives and embrace divergent and contradictory viewpoints, appreciating the diversity of other people as co-learners and co-leaders. Transformative leadership is transformative learning *in action in the world*.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Transformative Leadership, Systems Thinking, Creativity, Diversity

We propose getting into good trouble by using interactive activities to explore various ways that transformative learners might imagine themselves becoming transformative leaders through engaging creativity, diversity, and systems thinking. Mezirow (2000) proposes that Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action (pp. 7-8).

If the goal of transformative learning is to develop greater capacity for change in hopes that our habits of mind guide us to truer action, transformative *leadership* is an articulated set of principles for living into greater capacity for ongoing change in our lives and in the world. Transformative leaders “are everyday citizens [who] choose to engage in a transformative process to mobilize their creativity so that they may ‘lead’ their own lives [. . . and] make a creative contribution towards leading society towards what they consider a better future “

(Montuori and Donnelly, 2017, p.3). Transformative leadership is premised on the belief that experiences of transformative learning are necessary to develop the capacity to become transformative leaders.

Like transformative learning, the development of a transformative leader involves a willingness to interrogate one's personal ways of being, relating, knowing, and doing and having the courage to intentionally change these ways (Montuori, 2010; Nicolaides & McCallum, 2014). Transformative leadership is transformative learning *in action in the world*. "The basic premise of transformative leadership is that everyone can lead, and that particularly in this transformative moment, everybody contributes to, and in fact co-creates, the world we live in" (Montuori & Donnelly, 2017, p. 3).

Transformation requires that we notice and examine tensions as they arise, allowing ourselves to experience "constructive disorientation, a feeling of arousal brought about by a perceived disconnect between the current and a desired state, accompanied by a sense of efficacy that one is capable of dealing with that disconnect" (Wergin, 2019, p. 57). Transformative leadership is based on the conviction that humans have a dual purpose in life—to engage in personal transformation by developing our individual human potential, and to lead social transformation by contributing to the advancement of civilization (Anello et al, 2014).

Creativity is an essential component of transformative leadership also reflected in transformative learning, one that helps us prepare for, pursue, and reflect on constructive disorientation. Activating our creativity through various exercises, games, and participatory art experiences can prompt us to question our assumptions, notice our mindsets, and ultimately, help us to re-think, re-form, re-invent, and re-shape *ourselves* (transformative learning) and our *worlds* (transformative leadership). Similarly, Wergin discusses the importance of art and aesthetic experiences in creating the conditions for deep learning and suggests that aesthetic experience is one of the most helpful ways to "turn disorientation into constructive disorientation" (2019, p. 174) because it invites imagination and is an invitation to see things differently.

When looking to make changes in the world, transformative leaders strive to be as inclusive as possible to better understand complex issues. They value stakeholders' perspectives and embrace divergent and contradictory viewpoints, appreciating other people as co-learners and co-leaders. Conversations in diverse groups can provide an opportunity for constructive disorientation, welcoming the good trouble that comes from the discomfort of having our assumptions challenged by new or different points of view or mindsets. Wergin suggests that when we are gathered with others who think and behave similarly, "norms for acceptable deviations are narrow and impermeable, and those who stray beyond their confines will face social pressure to conform" (2019, p. 90). To avoid maintaining social confines, transformative leaders evaluate personal ways of being, relating, knowing, and doing. By seeking intersectionality and acknowledging pluralism, transformative leaders open themselves to considering difference in order to inform critical self-reflection. This is transformative learning in the context of choosing to be change agents leading systemic evolution.

Systems thinking is a relational approach to improving complex, messy situations. Rather than defining a problem, we begin with curiosity and work with stakeholders to understand a situation in context, e.g., historical, economic, social, environmental (Ison, 2017). We ask questions about the relationships between parts and the whole, examining the what, how, and why. Systems thinking helps transformative leaders facilitate intentional action which is systemically desirable and culturally feasible.

“Transformative leadership is, at its heart, a participatory process of creative collaboration and transformation for mutual benefit “ (Montuori & Donnelly, 2017, p. 3). In choosing to work towards transformation for mutual benefit, it is necessary to use creativity, diversity, and systems thinking to shift from transformative learning into actions of transformative leadership.

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## **Transformative Listening in Dyads: Creating a Space for Getting into Good Trouble Together**

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**Abstract:** The Transformative Listening Collaborative, formed to create a ITLC 2018 listening experience, continues to expand the application of our Transformative Listening Protocol in a variety of contexts. At the center of our work is the role of listening in dyads to create connection and understanding. We invite you to experience the Protocol to reflect on learning at the conference and ways to continue to get into good trouble together.

**Key Words:** Embodied Listening, Connection, Storytelling, Practice-Based Methodology

### **Introduction**

The notion of getting into good trouble, troubling our perspectives and ways of seeing and being in the context of transformative learning is exciting to us. The ITLC conference in Siena, Italy affords us the unique opportunity to disrupt and challenge the status quo. As a community, we are called upon to step out of our comfort zones, engage as learners, ask questions and examine our perspectives and ideas. Our troubling together holds within it the potential for the emergence of unimagined and untold stories.

Drawing from Haraway (2016) (as cited in Flint & Toledo, 2021, p. 730) the term trouble “derives from a thirteenth-century French verb meaning to ‘stir up,’ ‘to make cloudy,’ ‘to disturb’ “. John Lewis, American activist and politician, suggested getting into good trouble, or troubling, is “about how we find ourselves in connection to others, how we respond, how we make and sustain connections “ (p. 731), seeing the value of story through intra- and interpersonal connection as a means to change ourselves and change society. Troubling is embodied, experienced, intersectional, and demonstrated through persistent, continuous action, speaking out, and being present. (Flint & Toledo, 2021)

Telling is only one part of the dynamic; consider the value of listening, specifically transformative listening, as the equal partner of speaking out to give voice to injustice. Engaging in storytelling and listening to the voice of another can play a key role in creating spaces to facilitate true and authentic connection, foster deep sensemaking and deeper understanding of self and others (Lipari, 2014). Listening through storytelling, with its focus on attention and presence, can open us to the experience of another and transform how we view and act in the world as positive change agents. Change happens when creating connections and relationships across intersections of race, class, gender, ethnicity as well as cultural, national, generational, functional or disciplinary boundaries. In essence, transformative listening is a catalyst to getting into good trouble!

## **The Transformative Listening Collaborative**

The Transformative Listening Collaborative, a group of interdisciplinary global scholars sharing a passion for bridging divisions, creating connection and understanding across differences developed a Transformative Listening Protocol (Protocol) in 2018 (Anderson Sathe, L., et al (2021)). We volunteered for a planning group for the ITLC 2018 troubling the intersections of listening, storytelling and transformative learning. We continue to research and facilitate the Protocol in a variety of contexts. We offer that listening, as a core competency, can be learned. Using the Protocol in dyads improves one's listening capacity, facilitates embodied listening, and generates spaces in which dyads may connect with and seek to understand another, and/or learn more deeply about oneself.

### **Theoretical Framework for the Transformative Listening Protocol**

Transformative learning theory and embodied listening in dyads provide the theoretical framework to support the original development and interpretation of our findings around the effectiveness of the Protocol as a tool in both facilitating a *process* to improve listening and in creating a *space* of practice that allows for enhanced learning, listening and connection. Our unique practice-based research design and iterative prototyping methodology informs research on the Protocol and design changes.

### **Transformative Learning and Embodied Listening**

At its core, the Protocol is framed by transformative learning theory which argues that experiencing and applying a change in one's perception of the world from one frame of reference to a new one facilitates meaning making (Mezirow 1991) through the learning process of a person involved in a transformative experience and the practices that evoke or support transformation (Anand et al., 2020). The Protocol is grounded in a holistic embodied framing of transformative learning that Anderson Sathe et al (2021) argue: recognizes the cognitive rational and extra rational, intuitive and deep reflection, imaginative, emotional, and social aspects of learning (Cranton & Roy, 2003; Dirkx, 2012); adult learning, in the context of storytelling, deepens and transforms (Tyler & Swartz, 2012); promotes holistic attention and connection to oneself and another (Taylor & Cranton, 2012) and, helps us connect with one another and find new meaning (Heron, 1992; Jacobs & Heracleous, 2005; Kofman & Senge, 1993; Wheatley, 2002). We focus on the embodied perception of listening because this enhanced understanding is likely to have immediate consequences in interpersonal relationships through a sense of mutual connection, intimacy, reciprocal compassion and care of self and others (Kluger, et al., 2021, p. 1049), and is an essential element of transformative learning, building deeper connections across differences and cultivating trust.

### **Story Listening in Dyads**

Anderson Sathe et al (2021) characterize stories and conversations as a form of meaning-making processes through which one's experiences are transformed into knowledge (Kolb et al., 2002; Wenger, 1998) that forms a space where listening for understanding can emerge (Bhabha, 1995) and differences in another person can be heard which can be difficult in a world where speech is often privileged over listening (Jacobs & Coghlan, 2005) and the role of listening assumed but not always specifically addressed (Pery, Doytch & Kluger, 2020). Our work centers on the role of listening in dyads to create connection and understanding through interpersonal storytelling, allowing for listening to individual voices and perspectives. Kluger et al (2019) argue listening and speaking quality are reciprocated or intertwined at the dyadic level, but only listening quality, and not speaking quality, predicts intimacy and consequently willingness to

help. Seizing an opportunity to advance research on the understanding and quality of listening through story in dyads, our scholarship addresses a specific gap in the literature to understand the experience of listening through story as a leverage to open up spaces for transformative insights in dyads (Pery, Doytch, Kluger, 2020).

### **Practice-based Scholarship on Transformative Listening**

Romano et al (2024) articulate a practice-based interpretative framework for the Protocol development as a general conceptual umbrella (Candy, 2006; Gherardi, 2019) with an emergent iterative prototype inquiry process (Bogers & Horst, 2013). We iteratively developed the Protocol to intentionally create spaces for listening. We investigate how practicing listening through the structure of the Protocol can generate new knowledge about how to facilitate those practices through the collection of qualitative data from participating dyads (an online survey, anecdotal conversations, and facilitator notes).

### **Pre-Conference and End of Conference Workshops**

Two experiential sessions book end the conference using the Protocol to co-explore and expand participant capacity of transformative listening in dyads: a pre-conference virtual session March 21, 2024 to create community before ITLC 2024 and an in-person session to reflect on learning at the conference. Participants actively engage with each other in dyads sharing stories of “getting into good trouble “ as storyteller and a story listener using the Protocol (dyad stories are confidential). Participants then join a group conversation to reflect on their experience and insights of using the Protocol, discuss how the Protocol might fit into and expand the broader context of listening for transformation, and consider what getting into good trouble is as individuals, the ITLC 2024 community and our own communities.

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## PAPER



## PAPER

Presentations from  
multiple authors around  
a common theme

## **Linking Transformative Learning and Collective Agency: A Participatory Research on Internship in Education**

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**Abstract:** The relationship between learning and transformation in complex contexts of practice can be understood through a dialogue between theories that allow to conceptualize the relationship between epistemic change and the transformation of conditions of oppression (personal, inter-subjective and systemic) permeating norms and institutions. Activity Theory and its applications make it possible to observe the link between transformative learning, social dimension and collective agency, offering a model that allows for the analysis of collective actions and their dynamic evolution. Human activity contexts are thus considered potential spaces for “expansive learning. “

Basing on transformative learning theory and activity theory, the paper explores the undergraduate internship in Education as an activity system and focuses on the multi-method research carried on within a Change Lab carried aimed to design a new model of internship accompaniment involving students, faculties and professionals. The system and its evolution are analyzed with a specific focus on the material and symbolic positioning of students, in order to understand both the individual trajectories of learning and participation, and the institutional conditions that position them in the internship, defining a space for their voices and perspectives on the experience.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Collective Agency, Activity Theory, Change Laboratory

### **Linking Transformative Learning and Collective Agency: A Participatory Research on Internship in Education**

A dialogue between Mezirow’s transformative learning and Vygotskian perspectives, especially from the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), is particularly fruitful for an ecological understanding of learning: “for both TL and CHAT research programs, there is something unique about dynamic and reciprocal activity between humans and their conditions “ (Friedman, 2022, p. 8). These approaches have focused attention on the importance of conflict and contradiction in learning, and of re-conceptualization of contents, norms and practices. In different forms, they have given importance to the interpersonal and contextual determinants of learning, TL with a perspective that assumes the individual learning process (embedded in wider structures) as fundamental unit of analysis (Mezirow, 2016), CHAT putting at the centre the “activity “ as a collective endeavour. Our research is focused on a complex object that needs to be observed both as a transformative learning process (the construction of a professional knowledge for prospective educators dealing, for the first time, with the challenges of educational practice) and as an organizational learning, involving the whole system that is engaged in training the students in Education. This ecology is understood as an activity system, a context of joint human activity that can support expansive learning, initiated when people involved in a collective activity transform the activity system itself, through the reconceptualization of their object and motive for the activity, embracing a broader horizon of

possibilities than the previous activity model (cfr. Engeström, 2001, p. 137). Activity systems are also sites of contradictions, seen as possibilities for understanding and transforming activity itself. Contradictions are “historically accumulated structural tensions within and between activity systems “ (Engeström, 2001, p. 137). They generate discomfort and conflict, but also attempts at innovation. Within this model, Engeström and Sannino (2010) developed a transformative research methodology called “Change Lab “: researchers, practitioners and key actors in a system interact starting from their “common object “ of work and through their interaction expand and refine it, thus elaborating new courses of action that are progressively consolidated. As Formenti and Hoggan-Kloubert point out in their reflection on transformative learning, “an epistemological leap is needed to [...] develop communities of practice where students, academics, citizens, service users, and many other actors can participate in building their knowledge and identities “ (Formenti, Hoggan-Kloubert, 2023, p. 106).

### **Research Object and Questions**

The paper explores the undergraduate internship in Education as an activity system that involves undergraduate students in Education (engaged in training as early childhood and community educators), institutional actors at the University (undergraduate course board, faculties, tutors) and professional educators acting as supervisors in the internship within the educational services. The system and its evolution are analyzed with a focus on the material and symbolic positioning of students, to understand both the individual trajectories of learning and participation, and the institutional conditions that position them in the internship, defining a space for their voices and perspectives on the experience. What role do they act in the formative ecology of the internship? What contradictions can we detect if we analyze the positioning of students in the framework of the Activity System? Shardow and Doel suggest recognizing students as agents of self and context transformation, protagonists in the relationships and actions of inter-institutional formative partnerships that they simultaneously investigate and help to construct. What tools, spaces, norms and relationships can enable trainees to take on this mandate and form themselves within it?

## Figure 1

*The two drawings, made by the trainee Elisa Andreani with the supervision of the artist Chiara Schiavon, are inspired by the postures performed during the focus groups.*



### Method

The multi-method study consists of a descriptive phase and a transformative research phase, oriented to produce a model of internship accompaniment based on the research and participation of university teachers and tutors, tutors from host institutions, and students. The research activities were divided into two macro-phases with a total duration of 24 months, thanks to the constant participation of 35 trainees, 25 mentors, and 7 academics. In the first phase, a questionnaire (82 responses) was disseminated among the students to survey their views on orientation, planning, service entry, and the areas of experience and skills they had explored. The interviews and focus groups aimed to deepen the ongoing internship experience through shared analysis of critical incidents and elaboration of the accompanying practices. A questionnaire was distributed to the supervisors in the educational settings through the University Internship Office (130 responses), and 4 focus groups were conducted to discuss resources and critical issues of the interconnection between the University and the institutions, as well as the supporting practices implemented by the internship institutions. During the second year of the research, following the method of transformative research (Virkkunen, Shelley Nenham, 2020), three Change Lab meetings were organized with students, professionals, and faculties aimed to identify and discuss contradictions and to design a new model of internship accompaniment.

### Main Results and Discussion

The internship is widely regarded by students as a genuine turning point in the educational journey. The research reveals profiles of students who seek answers to essential questions in the internship experience: ‘Who am I? What do I know how to do? How do I put my academic learning to good use? Am I really fit for this work?’ A dimension of the self is explicitly named, in a transformative journey that traverses fear, loneliness, radical dilemma while opening to the unexpected. In particular, analyzing with the students their symbolic and material postures, the dimensions of invisibility and smallness, silence and disequilibrium emerged recurrently as ways of living the internship experience. A complex interpretation of these



positionings is possible if we look at internship as a system from the students' perspectives. First, it emerges how students dispose of resources and tools of different kinds (educational, professional, subjective). However, in the overall picture, these opportunities are weakened by a lack of clarity about explicit and implicit rules, the use and purpose of the tools, as well as a scarcity of relational spaces of both academic and professional reflexivity. Being at the center of various asymmetrical relationships in terms of age, experience, hierarchy, students particularly suffer the effect of discontinuity and gaps between elements in the system. Through the discussion with the students, the focus shifted to the conditions of legitimacy of the trainee's voice. The analysis of the contradictions showed how the focus of the problem could be transformed: it is not a matter of acting on an alleged poverty of tools and skills of the trainee but on the qualitative and collective transformation of the organization of the internship which, to date, does not provide enough space for shared elaboration of meaningful experiences neither at most of the intercepted services nor at the university.

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# Disruptive Seeds on Digital Ground: Exploring Virtual Exchange as a Transformative Space for Sustainability

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**Abstract:** Amid the current ecological crisis, there is a call for higher education institutions to create spaces that enable deep, structural change toward sustainability. Such spaces engage the various human dimensions—cognitive, affective, psychomotor—and are characterized by liminality, where diverse and even conflicting meaning perspectives intersect; only from their intersection can paradigmatic tensions emerge and be subject to the critical reflexivity and discourse that engender radical transformation. An example of such a space is found in Virtual Exchanges (VEs), educational programs that integrate online interactions between learners representing diverse cultural or geographic backgrounds—thereby allowing opportunities for thinking, feeling, and experiencing *otherwise*. Amidst the abundance of research on VE as an effective pedagogical practice, few empirical studies investigate VE from the dual lens of transformative learning and sustainability. Using a qualitative methodology grounded on critical realism, this case study explores the potential of a VE between two universities representing the Global North-South divide for transformative learning. It argues that VEs, by fostering epistemological plurality, a glocal paradigm, and more inclusive educational practices, are indeed disruptive spaces that can be the seedbeds of sustainability transformation.

**Key Words:** Virtual Exchange, Transformative Learning, Education for Sustainability, Critical Realism

## Introduction

Climate change threatens higher education (HE) in many ways. It poses not only a manifest risk to an institution's physical structures, organizational make-up, and policies but also a conceptual and existential one that could put into question its role in and responsibility to a rapidly declining world (Fazey et al., 2021). HE must therefore respond at diverse fronts and depths—the most profound of which calls for a paradigm transformation (Sterling, 2011).

### Transformative spaces for sustainability learning

Transformative learning (TL) theory is a useful framework in guiding sustainability transformation in HE, as it entails precisely that deep, paradigm shift triggered by a disorienting dilemma and nurtured through reflection, discourse, and continued reflexive action (Lange, 2019; Mezirow, 2000, 2006). University classrooms could potentially be transformative spaces when enabled by the aforementioned learning conditions (McCowan, 2023) through approaches that tap into students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains (Sipos et al., 2008). In addition, "*transperspectival* " strategies (Wals, 2011, p. 177) that involve switching from different *gestalts* (cultural, disciplinary, temporal, and spatial)—what Bakhtin refers to as "orchestrated polyphony " (Bakhtin, 1981), would provide room for the multiplicity of conflicting and complementary voices that could spark the very contradictions and tensions essential to transformation (Lange, 2019; Wals, 2011). Only at the convergence of different, even

conflicting meaning perspectives within a “*safe enough*” (Pereira et al., 2020, p. 162) space can paradigmatic tensions freely emerge and be subject to the critical reflexivity and discourse that engender radical transformation (Lange, 2019).

### **Virtual exchange as transformative pedagogy**

Such a space that could foster TL is Virtual Exchange (VE), a term that encompasses the “numerous online learning initiatives and methodologies which engage learners in sustained online collaborative learning and interaction with partners from different cultural backgrounds as part of their study programs and under the guidance of teachers or trained facilitators” (O’Dowd, 2022, p. 13). More than being a technology-enhanced pedagogy, VE is an opportunity to “learn from difference” and “be taught by difference” (Stein, 2020) through the presence of multiple epistemologies. By bringing to the fore a plurality of insights and experiences, VEs could broaden perspectives, challenge stereotypes, create opportunities for intercultural awareness and sensitivity, encourage collective action—and pave the way for sustainability transformation (O’Dowd, 2022). VEs could be disruptive in how they provide a space for voices that are often less represented in sustainability discourse.

### **Critical Realism as the underlaborer of TL**

There is a prolific amount of research on the effectiveness of VE as a pedagogical practice, yet less that explores VEs from the dual lens of TL and sustainability. This study is an attempt to fill that gap by investigating the transformative potential of a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) type of VE between two universities that represent the Global North-South divide, using a qualitative methodology grounded on Critical Realism (CR). CR, conceptualized by Roy Bhaskar, is a metatheory that separates how humans perceive the world and how it actually is (De Souza, 2018). Supported by Archer’s morphogenetic approach that explores the interplay between structure, culture, and agency, CR could better explain the emergence of social phenomena by theorizing their underlying “natural and social structures, the causal mechanisms, and the conditions that need to exist that would explain the occurrence of the observed events” (De Souza, 2018, p. 26). This makes CR the appropriate complement to the investigation of TL processes.

## **Methods**

The case under study is the “Integral Ecology for Socio-ecological Problem-solving” COIL co-designed by two universities from Finland and the Philippines. It ran from September to December 2023 and had a total of six online discussions. It will investigate the COIL’s transformative potential by asking the following research questions:

- 4) Which pedagogical approaches and learning conditions foster/hinder TL for sustainability?
- 5) How are students’ sustainability paradigms transformed through VE?

While the researcher posits that the space for reflection and dialogue as well as the *transperspectival* nature of the VE would contribute significantly to TL, to be aligned with CR’s tenets of epistemological relativism and judgment rationality, this hypothesis will be suspended to make way for alternative explanations. Data was collected through participant observation of all online discussions as well as qualitative surveys and semi-structured interviews at the end of the COIL. Data analysis will follow the five stages in CR explanatory qualitative research that Danermark et al. (2002) propose—Description; Analytic resolution; Abduction; Retroduction; and Retrodiction and Contextualization. Key to this process that is not as explicated in other

qualitative methods is the last three stages, where the data gathered undergoes trial and error to justify the analysis.

## Results

Initial results from the data analysis show three general themes. First, COIL fosters TL for sustainability by being a space where students can explore and confront diverse and diverging realities concerning sustainability issues. By using cases from the two countries, students more clearly saw the Global North-South divide in terms of the conceptualization and operationalization of sustainability issues, and rather than agreeing on one approach, it affirmed the importance of context and the inclusion of multiple epistemologies in sustainability-oriented practices. This was accompanied by separate sessions that allowed students to reflect on their discussions—however, the presence of critically reflective practice was recorded in only one university. A second theme is how, ironically, the *virtual* interaction with students *within* their context made the situation *real* to participating students. Students mentioned the importance of engaging with *actual* people to increase the relevance of a phenomenon. Lastly, COIL must be well-coordinated and organized to maximize its effectiveness, as it had varying levels of impact, and this was dependent on how it was integrated into the curriculum.

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# From Feelings to Actions: Exploring the Role of Emotions in Transformative Learning Experiences

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**Abstract:** This article delves into the significant impact of emotions on transformative learning. It emphasizes that emotions are not peripheral, but integral to the learning process. The research contends that acknowledging and engaging with emotions can facilitate a more profound and lasting transformation. It highlights the importance of creating a safe and supportive learning environment that allows learners to express and process their emotions. A qualitative approach was adopted for this study to understand how emotions and feelings shape the perspectives of the participants. Twenty-four people who joined in new social movements were interviewed in the scope of this study to see the role of emotions and feelings in transformative learning experiences. The findings indicated that participating in new social movements brought about transformation in their emotions and feelings, which had reflections on behaviors and habits. The findings revealed that several participants needed to reformulate their old-established assumptions through critical reflection.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Social Movements, Emotions

## Introduction

Social movements, addressing a wide array of crucial issues, have consistently played a pivotal role in shaping individuals' interactions with their environment. These engagements lead to social development and transformation. Within the spaces created by social movements, individuals can access knowledge and power concurrently. As cited in Cunningham, 1998, Holford (1995) argued that in the space that people operate in the cracks of superstructures, knowledge and power could be reached at the same time. This dynamic process potentially leads to personal transformation. Moreover, it emphasizes that meaningful learning occurs when individuals are motivated by genuine need and desire for information, enabling them to internalize behaviors effectively through practice.

Mezirow (1997), a prominent figure in transformative learning, asserts that adult education aims to cultivate independent thinkers who act based on their own values and goals. The process of transformation starts with the encounter with a dilemma or new information that contradicts their existing experiences and beliefs, and it is followed by revising traditional norms (Cranton, 2006). The transformative process initiates with encounters that challenge existing beliefs, followed by the revision of established norms. This encounter often arises from contradictions in a rapidly changing society, prompting individuals to reevaluate their perspectives.

The study under discussion focuses on participants' experiences in three distinct new social movements: Pride parades, feminist movements, and environmental movements. The Gezi Park protests, a significant environmental movement in Turkey, featured prominently in the interviews. The research seeks to explore how participation in these movements, particularly in relation to emotions, influences individuals' later lives and contributes to transformative learning

experiences. It emphasizes the significance of emotional engagement and encounters with conflicting information in this process. The study aims to delve deeper into these dynamics within the context of specific social movements.

### **Adult Learning**

There have been many categorizations related to adult learning forms depending on learning types, models and environment. As adults can learn in different places and in various ways, the forms of adult learning were categorized as formal, non-formal, informal, and incidental learning by Rogers (1992). Although formal and non-formal learning could be regarded as the core of adult learning as both of them are organized educational activities that are typically institutionally sponsored, Tough (1999) claims that 20% of all learning activities of adults are institutionally organized and 80% of them are informal.

One important characteristics of informal learning according to Marsick and Watkins (1990) is that it occurs not only outside of the formal institutions but also inside them as well.

Transformative learning can be regarded different from learning in terms of its scope, duration and the effects on the future life. Experiencing transformative learning, people will change and start behaving in a different way compared to their past.

### **Transformative Learning**

Paulo Freire (1970) introduced a theory of conscientization or consciousness-raising in 1970s, which influenced thoroughly the construction of transformative learning theory. Freire (1970) believes that learning opens a way for adults to develop a deeper understanding of social structures and its influence on them. Through praxis which Freire defines as a process consisting of action and reflection in dialectical relationship with each other, individuals reflect on their world and try to change it. Dialogue and praxis, reflection and action are key terms in Freirean critical pedagogy. Freire (1970) states that transformative learning is emancipatory at both personal and social level. In order for the world to become a more equitable place for all to live, individuals as subjects continuously reflect and act on the transformation of their world. This transformation is a never ending and dynamic process (Taylor, 1998).

Mezirow is one of the most well-known scholars in transformative learning field. Mezirow (1991) put forward a transformative learning theory based on cognitive and developmental psychology. For him, our experiences are the sources of the meaning and through reflection, critical reflection and critical self-reflection; perspective transformation is practiced. Perspectives are sets of beliefs, values and assumptions acquired through experiences and they affect the way we perceive and understand the world and ourselves. In this process, critical reflection enables to reformulate these perspectives.

Mezirow (1996) defines transformative learning as uniquely adult, abstract, idealized, and grounded in the nature of human communication. The way our expectations, assumptions, and presuppositions directly affect the meaning coming from our experiences. Experience, critical reflection, rational discourse in meaning structure transformation process are at the heart of Mezirow's theory. Mezirow (1996) emphasizes critical thinking while discussing adult learning. A new perspective develops with critical thinking together with experience.

While discussing transformative learning as a theory, it is important to note that different models of transformative learning have contributed to the development of the theory. In addition to Freire and Mezirow, other theorists have studied transformative learning theory. Daloz (1999) analyses the interplay between education and development and observes that learners are



frequently in a developmental transition. and Dirkx (2001), formulated their theories based on Carl Jung's concept of individuation. Jung (1921, quoted in Jacoby 1990) defines individuation as a "process by which individual beings are being formed and differentiated ...having as its goal the development of the individual personality " (p. 94). It is a process through which individuals become aware of themselves and differentiate from the collective of humanity. Differentiation is described as the ability to use one function independently of another and individuation is accepted as a process of differentiation. As a result of individuation, individual personality develops. The forces of individuation are generally unconscious within the emotional, affective and spiritual dimensions of life. Cranton (1994) uses Jung's eight personality types to show how personality type can affect individuals' learning styles.

An additional perspective on transformative learning was developed by Robert Boyd and his colleagues based on Jung's conceptions of individuation (Boyd 1989, 1991; Boyd and Myers 1988). Boyd (1989) mentions a personal transformation which is described as "a fundamental change in one's personality involving conjointly the resolution of a personal dilemma and expansion of consciousness resulting in greater personality integration " (p. 459). Boyd (1989, 1991) tries to understand the expressive or emotional-spiritual dimensions of learning and integrating them more holistically and consciously in our life. Boyd claims that transformative learning fosters the process of individuation naturally through imaginative engagement with different dimensions of unconscious life. Boyd's viewpoint emphasizes emotional and spiritual aspects of transformative learning.

Dirkx (1998) is another theorist who studied transformative learning. Central to his understanding of transformative learning, there is "the emphasis on actualization of the person and society through liberation and freedom " (p. 8). Dirkx (1997) suggests a more integrated and holistic view of subjectivity with a focus on the nature of the self and the various ways of understanding our senses of self, and this view reveals the intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual dimensions of our being in the world.

Boyd (1991) also emphasizes the importance of consciousness in adult learning like Freire. However, his main concern is the expressive or emotional-spiritual dimensions of learning and integrating these dimensions more holistically and consciously within our daily life. While doing these, learners use symbols which are powerful images or motifs representing deep-seated issues and concerns. These images are given meaning through the processes of recognizing, naming, and elaborating consciously. Through transformative learning process, learners identify these images and establish an intrapersonal dialogue with them. This dialogue is a part of individuation process.

Boyd (1991) was not the only scholar who emphasized the significance of emotions in transformation process. Dirkx (2001) also affirmed the importance of emotions claiming that "emotions and imagination are integral to the process of adult learning " (p. 63). Dirkx argues that meaningful learning develops from the adult's emotional link with the self and the social world. Emotions can either hinder or enable learning. Like Bold, Dirkx (2006) also mentions the process of individuation that helps each person understand deeply, realize and appreciate themselves without social and cultural pressures. For Dirkx (2006), "the process of individuation is mediated largely through emotion-laden images " (p. 18). These images are "affective, imaginative, and unconsciously created representations of our experience that arise spontaneously in awareness " (p. 18). Along the same lines, Taylor (2001) thinks that the role of emotions and feelings are underscored in the process of transformation. Taylor (2001) claims that there is a highly prominent relationship between emotions and reason. For Taylor (2001),

transformative learning is not only rationally driven and highly relying on critical reflection, but also dependent on the examination of emotions.

Mezirow's transformative learning theory has been studied on a wide range by scholars. Many studies on this topic found different stages for transformative learning. Frank (2005) states that the participants experienced transformative learning individually and experienced learning by involving emotional and spiritual selves. Wilson (2004) found that the process of transformative learning was both emotional and rational and it was triggered by an external event. Wasserman (2004) concluded that transformative learning can be fostered by reflection, storytelling, and dialogue. McEwen (2004) discovered that emotional, intuition, spiritual, body-awareness, and cognitive learning are involved in her experience. Harvie (2004) states that transformative learning starts as socially rather than individually and cognitive-affective and cognitive-behavioral results are gained as a result. According to Mezirow, people develop meaning perspectives out of interaction, culture and language. Thus, meaning perspectives do not develop independent of social contexts and this shared nature of meaning perspectives develop bonds between people (Hoggan, Mälkki & Finnegan, 2016).

With the help of Boyd, Dirkx and Taylor's conceptions, the expressive or emotional-spiritual dimensions of transformative learning are explored in this study.

### **Methodology**

This study aims to explore the experiences of people who took part in new social actions at least once in their life. As there could be many people appropriate for the purpose of the study, the most suitable sampling technique is tried to be employed. In order to decide on the subjects of this study, purposive sampling technique is used to ensure that certain types of individuals displaying certain attributes are included. People with different backgrounds and various demographic characteristics are aimed to be included in the study in order to ensure variety in the collected data. Thus, 24 individuals who have different backgrounds, ages, gender and occupations are selected purposefully, and through snowball sampling technique from among people who actively participated in new social movements.

### **Findings**

The following theme emerged from the data is transformation in emotions and feelings which categorizes emotions and feelings that the subjects of the study felt while struggling or after. Accordingly, the subjects of this study mentioned many emotions and feelings that affect their perceptions.

#### **Transformation in Emotions and Feelings**

The participants of this study mentioned many emotions while talking about their experiences in new social movements. From what they said and what they expressed, it seemed that their emotions and feelings can be grouped into two dimensions which are emotions and feelings felt during the action and those that continue to be felt after the action.

#### **Emotions and feelings felt during the action**

The subjects of this study mentioned many feelings and emotions while talking about their experiences in social movements. Accordingly, the feelings and emotions they specified are happiness, courage, empowerment, freedom, safety, trust, emotional healing and pride. Among these, there is one basic emotion that 18 out of 24 participants mentioned, which is happiness. Happiness is included in basic emotions with five others by Eckman during 1970s after his

research on universal recognition of emotion from facial expression. This list of basic emotions has been shortened or expanded over the years but happiness has always been in the list as it is a very important and fundamental emotion (Piórkowska, & Wrobel (2017). Nevertheless, saying that the participants of the study felt similar emotions does not mean that these people got content because of the same reasons. They got happy for many different reasons. First of all, we can mention the subjects who got happy since they had a chance to experience a new way of life together with many people.

Apart from people who got happy as they had a chance to experience a new way of life, some others felt glad to see a great number of people come together. Namely, seeing many people who come together to show their reaction to the decisions taken by the authorities could make people happy.

### **Emotions that continue to be felt after the action**

Almost all the participants mentioned how their emotions regarding the future after participating in new social movements changed and affected their views for future. As many of the participants joined at least one massive social movement in their life, seeing many people who feel as they feel or who oppose what they oppose made them hopeful for future as they started to believe that things might change in the future and this could be possible with the help of everyone around them. The first emotion almost all the participants mentioned in their interviews was hope. 23 out of 24 subjects stated that they now feel very hopeful for future as they see many people feeling as they feel in the streets (One participant remarked that she did not feel very hopeful for future because of the general political and economic atmosphere of the country). Although they thought in the past that people around them were indifferent to all the injustice in the country, which made them hopeless for any kind of change in the future, they observed personally that this was not the case and many people cared what happened around them and they could take action if necessary. This kind of transformation in their ideas made the participants hopeful for any future change in their lives.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

In his early writings, Mezirow (1991) regards transformative learning as “an enhanced level of awareness of the context of one’s beliefs and feelings, a critique of one’s assumptions, and particularly premises, and an assessment of alternative perspectives “ (1991, p. 161). In his recent articles, Mezirow states that “transformative learning is learning that transforms problematic frames of reference—sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets)—to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change “ (2003, p. 58). Accordingly, Mezirow claims that transformative learning is about figuring out our experiences; it is a meaning-making activity. In this meaning-making process, the role of emotions cannot be disregarded as they play a significant role on our perspectives. In order to analyze the perspective transformation experiences of the subjects of this study in terms of emotional transformation, the typology applied to Mezirow’s description of perspective transformation which was prepared by Hoggan (2016a) is used in this study.

In the typology of Hoggan (2016a), there are two sections, one of which is outcome type and the other one is specific change within broader type. There are four outcome types, and the one that relates to this study is ontology. Ontological changes mean changing the way of existence, transforming the profoundly established mental and emotional inclinations that influence the overall quality of existence. From Mezirow’s perspective, people become emotionally capable of change or more self-directed to experience ontological changes. Even

though it might not be possible to claim that the subjects of this study have undergone a process including ontological changes, many participants of this study clearly stated that their feelings affected them very much while conveying their experiences or how they emotionally react to their new experiences. They mentioned many feelings that they felt during and after the action. During their participation in social movements, they felt happiness, courage together with empowerment, freedom, safety, trust, pride or felt emotionally healed. Some years after the action, they were feeling hopeful for the future and restored their faith in people and started to believe in the power of people to transform and rebuild their future.

Dirkx (2001) claims that recent research done in the area of adult education indicates that emotions and feelings are doing more than only motivating learners. In addition, he proposes that brain-based theories and emotional intelligence concept show that emotions and feelings play a great role in all the stages of learning. This study has demonstrated that emotional-spiritual dimensions play a great role in learning experiences of the participants. The participants of this study mentioned how they felt during and after the action while conducting interviews while talking about their experiences in new social movements. The emotions that mentioned are divided into two while analyzing the findings. In the first group, there are emotions felt during the action. The subjects of this study felt happy, brave, empowered, free, safe, proud and emotionally healed during their participation in a social movement. In the second group, there are emotions that continue to be felt after the action which are hope and faith. After analyzing what they said about their emotions and feelings, it is clear that all of them are positive emotions and feelings that contribute to their learning experiences.

Finally, this study has demonstrated that emotional-spiritual dimensions play a great role in learning experiences of the participants. The participants of this study mentioned how they felt during and after the action while conducting interviews while talking about their experiences in new social movements. All the feelings and emotions that they mentioned contributed to their learning experiences and showed them that they have power to transform themselves and their societies and make them empowered.

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# **Accompanying Transformation and Being Untroubled by Trouble: How Educators Can Use the Kairos Practice to Elicit Decisive and Transformative Moments at the Edge of Human Experience**

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**Abstract:** This paper presentation aims to discuss how educators and adult learning practitioners facilitating transformation are challenged to be untroubled by trouble. In particular, when using the kairos practice of French Professor Pascal Galvani and studying decisive and transformative moments, educators are introduced to the unexpected—and potentially troubling—experiences of participants. As this practice relies on the phenomenological approach (phenomenon literally means: “what appears “), facilitators have to expect the unexpected, being comfortable with the uncomfortable with what the subject will bring to light from their experience to be discussed and reflected upon in a decentering dialogue. Our paper is based on our research and on our own practice of experiential workshops of Kairos as facilitators. We intend to discuss the unexpected role played by trouble in these transformative experiences (not only the decisive moments recalled but also the workshop or interview in itself) and how it is fostered to produce knowledge and how it is related to a global mindset for all of the participants involved in the experience.

**Key Words:** Kairos, Decisive Moments, Transformation, Experiential Knowledge

## **Introduction**

This paper presentation discusses how educators and adult learning practitioners facilitating transformation are challenged to be untroubled by trouble. In particular, when using the kairos practice of Galvani (2006; 2020) and studying decisive and transformative moments, educators are introduced to the unexpected—and potentially troubling—experiences of participants.

## **Rationale**

The kairos practice was initially developed by French Professor Pascal Galvani (2006) based on his research on processes supporting consciousness (conscientization) and emancipation. Galvani is with Gaston Pineau as one of the founders of the field of experiential self-learning (*autoformation existentielle* in French), in the context of lifelong self-learning research. Galvani (2006) developed the concept of kairos in reference to intense moments of self-development. While hearing people unfolding all the meanings they saw in those intense experiences, he had the intuition that those were key moments, that he called autoformation kairos (Galvani, 2006). He defined key moments as moments “of intuition and inspiration where the right act is at the right moment, a relevant interaction, a harmonic resonance between the subject and the environment “ (Galvani, 2016, p. 154). He decided to name these moments “kairos. “ Greek

methodology refers to Kairos as one of the three Gods of the conception of time. The first of these conceptions of time is Chronos, which refers to chronological or sequential time that applies to all beings, living and non-living. The second, Kairos, signifies “time when conditions are right for the accomplishment of a crucial action: the opportune and decisive moment “ (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The last conception of time is Aiôn, the time of eternity, usually associated with cycles (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Those meaningful moments, when the right act is done at the right moment, are “inspired by Metis, “ mother of Athena, and the Greek Goddess of wisdom and deep thought, who also embodies practical intelligence (Galvani, 2016, p. 148). Furthermore, Kairos was pictured as a young man with a lock of hair that one should grasp when passing, thus personifying the opportune moment to catch the decisive action to take.

In order to study those founding moments and help the participants unveil the hidden meaning embedded in their lived experience, Galvani invented the workshop of kairos (*atelier des kairos* in French). He has added the phenomenological perspective of Husserl (1989) to the process of raising awareness studied by Piaget (1974). With the help of a facilitator, a subject has the opportunity to capture “a phenomenological account “ of a current or past experience based on a certain topic (Galvani, 2016, p. 155) and benefits from a reflexive perspective (Schön, 1991).

### **Stages of the Kairos Process**

In practice, the kairos workshop has two main stages. The first one is a reflexive return which will “transform experience with the help of the awareness “ (Galvani, 2016, p. 150). The facilitator helps the participants enter into contemplation, recalls the aim of the workshop or the specific topic studied, and then opens “the doors of memory. “ Participants are invited to let memories of significant moments related to the theme of the workshop come up, to do an inventory of their own kairos, and eventually make a list of the memories. This is followed by a writing time to describe the lived experience from the sensorimotor evocation posture, focusing on the procedural action, the know-how, which is a phenomenological anchoring in the lived experience of reference (Vermersch, 1996). To help this process, Galvani suggests starting every sentence of the narration with “I remember... “

The second main step features a decentering dialogue: “When several moments have been described, one can go from clarifying to understanding with the analysis of the contents of the story. Understanding allows integrating the intuitions of the acting by turning them into explicated and transferable knowing “ (Galvani, 2016, p. 153). People share their text, or parts of it, and other participants are encouraged to react and express connections with their own experiences to allow “a reflexive dialogue [to] unfold. “ As Galvani (2016, p. 160) explains, this reflexive dialogue “is the beginning of an analysis of content, through recurring, divergent or striking items appearing in the shared memories “ and it gradually opens to an “understanding of the topic explored in the workshop. “

With these workshops, Galvani studies these significant and decisive moments of experience, helps professionals reflect on their practices, and conducts action research programs (2016, 2020). This practice of knowledge production is used to help participants reflect on their actions and serves as a methodology of research inquiry (Galvani, 2020; Balayn Lelong, 2021). We have further developed this work to help professionals and organizations in the face of transitions and transformations and to help explore and leverage tacit knowledge captured in experience. Our research (Balayn Lelong, 2021) has shown how kairos, through adult learning, can become an emancipatory process (Mezirow, 1978) whereby the subject uses the training for

their own project of transformation and emancipation (Pineau, 1983). We have also demonstrated that *kaïros* could be related to the different steps of the transformative learning process (Balayn Lelong, 2018, 2021). Furthermore, the *kaïros* process has been shown to be specifically connected to the idea of a disorienting dilemma in both ways. For one, the subject recalls this specific moment of destabilization that has led them to come back to reflect. Alternatively, the *kaïros* illuminates the moment when the subject, in a movement of reflective perspective and problematization as described by Dewey (1938) in the *Logic of Inquiry*, understands the dilemma in their journey and unveils the hidden experiential knowledge captured in this disorienting situation.

### **Phenomenology of Surprise**

Given that there is no preparatory work within the *kaïros* process, the moments that emerge for the participants are ontologically unexpected for the participants involved in the process. Even if participants know the topic of the session before it happens, the process developed by Galvani recalls intensive moments that are not immediately and usually accessible to the purposive memory, hence the phenomenological approach. Therefore, the moments that emerge as a result of the process happen to be a surprise for the participants, too.

The term “phenomenological “ is rooted in the ancient Greek word *φαινόμενον* (*phainomenon*), which means “what appears “ (Dastur, 2016, p.32). Thus, the phenomenological narration enables those “apparitions “ and “surprises. “ Beyond the unexpected essence of *kaïros* lays the question of the good or bad surprise. The practice leads the participants to relive those moments and unveil all of the experiential knowledge embedded. As a result, engaging with these significant moments can potentially be unpleasant, difficult, or disturbing. In our research (e.g., Balayn Lelong, 2021), four moments out of 17 collected were described and identified by participants as unpleasant. While unpleasant, these moments represented an important notion of bad trouble where the participants remained open to the unexpected. In fact, the role of the facilitator is to make a safe space where the unexpected is expected by the participants. Beyond the practical and technical dimensions of this role, the facilitators must also engage with an ethical dimension, which is primordial and entails creating, maintaining, and controlling a space where the following conditions can be met:

- 1) The participant feels authorized and supported in sharing moments related to good or bad trouble.
- 2) Discussions and sharing among participants as part of the decentering dialogues respect this destabilization of the narrator – the facilitator must be ready to kindly but firmly stop any comments that could be judgmental, harm the narrator, and add bad trouble but, in the meantime, enable open and constructive discussions.
- 3) The group may not be unseated or unhorsed, disturbed by what moments are shared – the facilitator must ensure the session does not become therapeutic.

Furthermore, the physical and social environment where the *kaïros* takes place must allow the subject to experiment with a new perspective—including an apparently troubling perspective—and allow transformation to occur (Maturana & Varela, 1991). In that respect, facilitating transformation, as rewarding and transformative as it is, can be



compared to guiding and accompanying another on a road that unveils step by step where troubles, bad or good, can arise.

It is important to recall that *kaïros* practice has never been intended to be therapeutic. Galvani has always stated that the aim is certainly not to address trauma but to benefit from all of the knowledge captured in significant moments of experience (thus, there is no correlation between “significant “ and “pleasant “). Pineau and Galvani firmly expressed that in the field of experiential self-learning (*autoformation existentielle* in French), practices aim at individual emancipation only: there are no psychological, therapeutic intentions (Tremblay, 2003).

*Kaïros* is when the right action is done at the right moment: this means there was an action to take, a decision to make. *Kaïros* moments are, in themselves, unexpected and surprising, and they witness a moment of trouble. The trouble, good or bad, by its existence or essence, is the source of knowledge produced thanks to the decentering dialogue, the reflexive point of view, and the transformation of the participant’s perspective. This is the process that the facilitator oversees; the process that they have to lead. This is the process that they have to take care of and foster, as well as the inherent trouble that is part of the success of the session.

Trouble and the unexpected nature of the practice of *kaïros* can be problematized and produce knowledge in a reflexive dialogue between the facilitator and the participants. This is enabled thanks to the phenomenological narration of experiences (Willis, 2012), as well as the discourse and constant back and forth with a rational and non-rational perspective (Cranton, 2006). The facilitator learns to expect the unexpected, be comfortable with the uncomfortable, and be untroubled by the trouble, thanks to their own experience as a participant.

### **Experiencing *Kaïros***

When one of the authors (Crocco) first participated in a *kaïros* workshop in February 2023, I (Crocco) was taken aback by the vulnerability that emerged. The facilitator (Balayn Lelong) asked the participants to imagine doors to memories that they would open one by one. Behind each door felt blank until the facilitator read the prompts and then potent moments from my life began rushing in. One of the *kaïros* moments that stood out to me and that I wrote about in my journal related to the prompt to remember a time when I felt most alive. A pleasant moment came to my consciousness that I had not pondered before. In the moment, I remembered myself on a grass field playing ultimate frisbee with many new and old friends. Viewing myself in the third person, I saw a huge, authentic smile across my sweaty face. To this day, this image sticks in my memory and has inspired me to learn more about this practice and its potential for transformative learning.

### **Applying *Kaïros***

This past February, Balayn Lelong and Crocco facilitated a *kaïros* workshop around the topic of global mindset at an international conference in the United States (Balayn Lelong & Crocco, 2024). The topic of global mindset was selected for its relevance to living and working effectively in a world of increasing talent mobility, international remote work, and globalization. This topic was also selected because it represented one of Crocco’s areas of expertise and both authors’ experience working in cross-cultural and international contexts. Global mindset was particularly well-suited for a topic for the *kaïros* process given the definition of global mindset as “openness to and awareness of diversity across cultures and markets with a propensity and ability to synthesize across this diversity “ (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2002, p. 117).

To facilitate the *kaïros*, sessions begin with guiding participants through moments when they experience otherness according to a series of prompts. Prompts are read, and participants reflect on each prompt. After the individual written portion, participants join in a dialogue portion of the session to share their moments of otherness with a partner, which often leads to further reflection. This sequence allows for the possibility of the emergence of a new frame of reference (Mezirow, 1991) around the moment that arose for them. In reference to a prompt about a memory of experiencing otherness, one of the facilitators (Balayn LeLong) shared a moment in an airport of seeing the TV screens with the times and gates of the various planes and feeling a sense of being in the midst of otherness simply because of the way the time was written.

### **Trouble as an Opportunity**

A *kaïros* moment is a decisive and opportune moment, which means they are, in essence, a form of trouble. In our experience, when facilitating a *kaïros* session, participants often share the way they handled a situation that was troubling (in either a pleasant or unpleasant way) and then their way of engaging with that trouble. What often emerges is a new frame of understanding the trouble that emerges in conjunction with new actions to take to address the trouble. It is worth typologizing trouble along the spectra of pleasant vs. unpleasant and good trouble vs. bad trouble. Reflecting on good trouble leads to a positive impact whether or not the moment is pleasant or not. Related to transformative learning, those *kaïros* moments which happen to be a transformative, pleasant or not, are always a form of good trouble.

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## **Reoccurring Life Crisis and Potential for Transformative Learning: Making Sense of Natural Disasters in Bahamas**

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**Abstract:** Nicolaidis and Eschenbacher (2022) argued that the global context is ripe for transformative learning due to global pandemic, climate crisis, and political polarisation; however, the promise of transformation is not clear yet. In this paper we share our study conducted in the Bahamas to understand the transformative dimensions of natural disasters. In our study we used Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1978, 1991) to better understand how teachers and administrators made sense of the disruptions caused by recurring natural disasters and how they navigated these disruptions. We found that natural disasters provide deeper learning experiences, and these experiences can be transformative. Since the participants had experienced natural disasters multiple times in their lives, they reported their sense making process was fluid and evolving throughout their lives. Overall, the experience was emotional and disorienting which led to deeper reflection. This reflective process led to perspective transformation and changes in their ways of being, relationships with their family and community, and in their practices related to their profession. In this presentation we will specifically focus on the transformative learning process and discuss how we can conceptualise transformation as fluid and evolving in reoccurring life crises such as seasonal hurricanes, floods, and typhoons.

**Key Words:** Climate Change, Natural Disasters, the Bahamas, Transformative Learning

### **Introduction**

Thomas (2017) argued that no matter a country's advancement in education or economy, natural disasters impact every sphere of life, including the education sector, and teaching and learning activities. Several studies have highlighted numerous challenges to teaching and learning in regions hit by natural disasters, such as limited access to bandwidth, physical conditions that are non-conducive for learning, and a lack of information technology infrastructure (Piryonesi & El-Diraby, 2021). However, Dahl and Millora (2016) argued that literature "on natural disasters has largely ignored individual learning" and its consequences for teaching and learning practice (p. 649). Therefore, our study aims to explore the impact of natural disasters on learning in disaster-prone regions from an adult learning perspective. We focused on teachers and administrators to better understand how they make sense of the disruptions caused by natural disasters and how they navigate these disruptions. This study

specifically focused on transformative dimensions of adult learning in a region impacted by recurring natural disasters. This study will contribute to the existing literature on transformative learning and help teachers and administrators be better prepared to deal with the impact of natural disasters on teaching and learning activities.

### **Conceptual Framework**

We used Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) by Mezirow (1978, 1991) as our basic framework and supplemented it with Hoggan (2016)'s typology of transformation. Hoggan's (2016) typology of transformation offers a structured framework to examine the experiences of adults in the Bahamas within the context of transformative learning. The categories of worldview shifts, capacity-building, values/beliefs, ontology, self-concepts, epistemology, and behaviour provide a systematic approach to analysing and understanding individuals' transformative processes when confronted with natural disasters and climate change. By employing Hoggan (2016)'s typology within the overarching framework of transformative learning, we can explore how teachers and administrators in the Bahamas undergo shifts in their perspectives, develop new capacities, redefine their values and beliefs, reconceptualize their sense of self and knowledge, and exhibit changes in their behaviours and actions.

### **Research Design**

We used a qualitative exploratory case study for data collection.

#### **Context**

We selected Bahamas as our research site and case because the country's geographic location and susceptibility to natural disasters make it an ideal case study for understanding the impact of these events on adult learning.

#### **Participants**

The study used purposeful snowball sampling to gather data, as suggested by Grosseohme (2014). The study focused on the experiences of 10 teachers from the Northern Bahamas who taught before, during, and after a natural disaster. The eligibility criteria required the teachers to have direct teaching experience during all three phases and have experienced more than one natural disaster in their lifetime. Out of the 15 invited teachers, ten chose to participate, forming the final sample for the study. The participants were two male and eight female teachers, and their age ranged from 30-49 years. All the teachers interviewed held a bachelor's degree or higher. They had teaching experience from 7-15 years at primary, secondary, or high school. The subjects they taught included English, Mathematics, Health Science, General Science, and Biology. The participants represented different regions of Bahamas such as New Province, Grand Bahama, and Long Island. All the participants were assigned pseudonyms for the study.

#### **Data Collection**

The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews for approximately one hour with each research participant. All the interviews were conducted via Zoom during May and June 2023. During the interviews, the team of interviewers took notes to document the details and responses provided by the teachers. These notes captured vital points, quotes, observations, and relevant interview information.

#### **Data Analysis**

After the interviews were conducted, the research team transferred the recorded details from the interview notes onto a designated data sheet or template. Data analysis process was three steps. First step involved data analysis using software tools and the second step involved

individual manual thematic data analysis. The third step involved all team members' collaborative meetings and data analysis for triangulation purposes as suggested by Yin (2013) to ensure validity.

### **Findings and Discussion**

In our study we found that our participants' sense making process was fluid and evolved with their life since each participant had experienced natural disasters such as hurricanes and floods several times in their lives. In this case natural disaster did not seem to be a one-time major disorienting event, rather it was a part of life as a resident of a natural disaster-prone region. This leads us to the question of the disorienting dilemma caused by recurrent life crises and how it is different or like previous crises? Often in transformative learning theory disorienting dilemma is discussed as an isolated one-time life crisis however, in our study we found reoccurring life crises can be disorienting and have potential for transformative learning. This also led us into discussion of human development and the sense making process as how they are interlinked and shape learning experiences.

In terms of the sense making process, we found our participants considered natural disasters as disorienting events which caused emotional stress and disorientation, and lead to deeper self- reflection. These findings support the transformative learning theory premises regarding sense making process. In terms of transformation, they reported a shift from self-centred to more altruistic approach to life, a shift from individual to communal perspectives about life, and as educators a shift from grade-focused teaching and learning approaches to more holistic and humanistic approaches to teaching and learning.

Overall, the study contributes to the existing literature by exploring administrators and teachers' experiences in the Bahamas, a region prone to natural disasters. The findings align with theoretical perspectives on transformative learning, as teachers demonstrated shifts in their worldviews, self-concepts, and capacity-building in response to the challenges faced. This study adds to the growing body of research on transformative learning and highlights the transformative potential and the fluid and evolving nature of the sense making process in case of recurrent life crisis. The findings also emphasise the importance of teacher support systems during and after natural disasters. Providing teachers with adequate resources, training, and mental health support can enhance their ability to cope with the emotional toll of such events and foster their overall well-being. Additionally, the identified adaptive strategies employed by teachers during natural disasters provide valuable insights for teacher training programs, highlighting the need for ongoing professional development that equips educators with the skills and knowledge to navigate challenging circumstances.

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## Quantum Leaps: Rethinking Transformative Learning Through Posthuman Theories

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**Abstract:** Quantum physics has fundamentally reshaped our understanding of the universe. This paper investigates how quantum-informed posthumanist theories can inspire new perspectives on the complex and entangled nature of personal and societal transformation. Situated in the posthumanist theories of Barad (2007) and Bennett (2009), this paper explores the question: what is transformation if we are constantly in a state of becoming? Approaching transformative learning as a multifaceted metatheory (Hoggan, 2016), I argue that transformative learning could be viewed as part of an entangled flow where under certain conditions a “quantum leap “ (Plauborg, 2018) occurs, transcending the boundaries of individualized subjects and impacting other beings. Examples will be provided from research on collaborative approaches to emergent systems design in a classroom setting. This conference paper will set the stage for an in-depth exploration of the interplay between quantum-informed posthumanist theory and transformative learning. By reconsidering the complex nature of transformation and the potential for quantum leaps, I aim to shed light on the emergent and entangled aspects of transformative learning.

**Key Words:** Posthumanism, Agential Realism, Transformative Learning, Becoming

### Quantum Leaps: Rethinking Transformative Learning through Posthuman Theories

Quantum physics, much like previous scientific revolutions, has fundamentally reshaped our understanding of the universe (Kuhn, 1962/2012). With its inherent mysteries and paradoxes, quantum physics challenges our perception of reality, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all things and the uncertainty that characterizes quantum systems. Thomas Kuhn, in his 1962 work on scientific revolutions, argued that scientific discoveries play a large role in paradigm shifts. For instance, Newton’s theories influenced a rules-based view of how the world functions whereas Darwin’s theory of evolution led to an emphasis on progress and competition. In both cases, one could argue that it was not a deep understanding of these scientific theories but rather the layman’s understanding that led to a paradigm shift (Kropotkin, 1902). Similarly, quantum physics and its inherent uncertainty seems to have had an impact on our understanding of the world. For the past few years as I worked on my PhD, I dove into the work of Karen Barad, a theoretical-physicist-turned-cultural-theorist. Their work *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* has been my gateway into the lexicon of quantum physics and how it relates to core questions of ontology. In this paper, I will apply some of Barad’s concepts to the realm of education and transformative learning, arguing that it is crucial we consider how these quantum principles can inspire a new perspective on the complex and entangled nature of personal and societal transformation.

Mezirow’s perspective transformation (1991) has been critiqued for its focus on cognitive meaning making, and many scholars have worked to integrate the body and the spirit into discussions of transformation (Hoggan, 2016). These approaches, however, still reinforce the idea of the human as a separate, cognitive-rational subject. Posthumanism represents a diverse



body of theorists who seek to dethrone the Cartesian “I think, therefore I am “ conception of humans that is thoroughly embedded in our discussions of what we, as humans, are and what we can be. Posthumanism for theorists like Barad (2007), Bennett (2009), and Braidotti (2013) seeks to illuminate the blurred edges around what it is to be human. For instance, Bennett (2009) questioned at what point the nutrients we consume become a part of us, and Barad (2007) discussed the literal blurry edges where light “bends “ around an object and intermingles with shadow. Reading their works, I often felt unnerved as my conception of the world was challenged time and again—a process one could analyze using Mezirow’s stages of perspective transformation (1991) or Mälkki’s (2010) edge emotions. Posthumanism offered a different perspective than the humanists and the postmodernists I had previously studied. While previous traditions like postmodernism critiqued humanism, the posthumanists argued that by taking an oppositional, binary stance the postmodernists merely reinforced humanism. Instead, the posthumanists take an affirmative approach: they seek a different path of understanding our world to open up new possibilities.

One of the underlying tenants of posthumanism is the idea that we, as humans, are not stable subjects. We are in a constant state of becoming, amid a stream of what Barad (2007) termed “intra-actions “ to emphasize that we are not separate from the world around us. Intra-actions are complex, and causality is no longer a useful concept. Barad also posited that “we “ do not preexist intra-actions, stating that we only exist in relation to other beings which make up a given phenomenon. Phenomenon, in turn, are somewhat-bounded collections of intra-actions that are always in flux. Barad’s emphasis on becoming, this rejection of the idea that we are ever not in movement, fundamentally troubles the idea of transformative learning. To transform, something must first be formed. This is, of course, why transformative learning is studied in adult education: it definitionally must follow the formative years of youth. So how can one make sense of transformation when we are constantly becoming? In the following section, I will offer an example of how transformative learning could be discussed when integrating posthumanist theories.

### **Transforming Together**

Our team at the University of Georgia, led by Dr. Aliko Nicolaidis, has been experimenting with methods for opening pathways of possibility within formal classroom settings. These experiments are the subject of a book we published earlier this year and the subject of my dissertation. We do this through inviting students to engage in world building: a method borrowed from fiction where students ask “what if? “ the world was a certain way and then collaboratively design systems “as if “ to bridge the gap between our reality and their imagined world. Through the world building course, we worked to bring in affective (Perry, 2021), storied (Nicolaidis, 2022), and generative ways of knowing, and we consider the students multifaced, constantly becoming, and as parts of the class and parts of many other phenomenon simultaneously. This reorientation meant moving beyond just the individual and social to recognize the non-human and more-than-human effects of the class as a collective. It also meant moving beyond the cognitive: from an epistemological to an ontological approach.

In my dissertation (Barefield, forthcoming), I detailed how the world building class came together over ten class sessions. I treated each meeting as an instance of the phenomenon of the class and used narrative to tell our story. My account highlights the uncertainty that both students and facilitators experienced as we co-created our learning environment. The experience was rife with edge emotions (Mälkki, 2010). Aliko and I were transparent with students about our having a plan, but that plan involved following our intuition on when the class needed to go into an

unplanned direction. We experienced moments of tension and conflict, but also moments of epiphany and joy. The first three weeks brought tensions as the group's form shifted. There were moments where students directly challenged the choices Aliko and I made as facilitators. While we encouraged them to challenge us, our willingness to engage did not make these moments of challenge comfortable. We, as a class, weathered these weeks together.

As the weeks passed, familiar patterns emerged. Students became more comfortable with our facilitation style, with their peers, and with the roles they were being asked to inhabit in this class. They integrated their experiences into their way of being in the class, and stories began to trickle in about how their work in the class was impacting their lives outside of class: one student reported their teaching style changing as they tried out elements of their world building project while another group found a common passion and founded a nonprofit to continue their world building project after the class concluded. One student discussed their reaction to a partner's behavior changing while another changed their dissertation topic. Many impactful transformations took place at the individual and group levels, and those effects rippled out and impacted their communities.

But these transformations were emergent, unpredictable, and took their shape through the entangled phenomenon of the class. Going back through my observation notes, I found time and again that my mood going into the class matched the general mood of the others. Weather impacted the tone and shape of our sessions. Twice we ended class early on days where it was cold or rainy because no one wanted to engage. The thermostat in the room also impacted our sessions as it seemed to only work in extremes. The affective flow in the room and the flow of ideas that emerged from our conversations shaped the course, and it was our role as facilitators to gently guide it. During our last class, students offered suggestions for the next world building class. They offered to serve as guides for the group, wanting to continue to be involved in what they deemed a community of practice. What was not there before the class began had taken root.

### **Discussion**

When does a class form so it can be transformed? Does it form as an instructor is selected and students register? Is it when the instructor is thinking through a term and putting together its schedule? Does the class need to meet, in-person or online, for a class to form? Is there a catalyzing moment—a first spark of life—where the class comes into being? I do not have answers to these questions, but interrogating the phenomenon of a class is at the core of my current inquiries. Formal education is often discussed as a static thing, and it can often feel that way, but that could not be further from the truth.

A class is a collection of beings with whole histories, lineages, and lives. They are brought together to learn something about a topic, and while together their experiences and engagement make the tapestry of a given class. Philosophers throughout history have grappled with the unknowability of another being's internal life, and classrooms are, to me, a fascinating site where there is content that is shared but each person's response to that content differs based on many factors. Previous experience is, of course, important, but so is their mood that day, the recent interactions they have had with other beings and environments, and their health and wellbeing. I am here advocating for the introduction of quantum concepts into transformative learning because it gives language that helps us engage with the vast network of unknowability that impacts learning.

Let us return to the blurry edges of shadows and Barad's (2007) work on diffraction. Diffraction is the term for the patterns that are created when waves overlap. This happens on a seashore as some waves combine to make larger waves that reach further into the sand, but it

also happens to light as waves intersect, creating patterns where light and dark meet around the edges of shadows. While one can know what two waves will do when they intersect, the interaction effects of multiple waves is difficult to predict: sometimes waves amplify each other's effects, and sometimes they cancel each other out. Haraway (1997) used diffraction to challenge the idea that one can reflect on their thoughts. Haraway argued that there was no such thing as a 1:1 reflection on our mental processes or our previous experiences. Instead, our "reflections" were diffracted through our other experiences, current circumstances, and so on. Barad (2007) added a scientific discussion of diffraction as a component of their discussion of intra-acting phenomena. I am drawn to the use of concepts like diffraction when looking at learning because, perhaps because the concept itself is complex, I agree with Haraway that it offers a better metaphor for how we learn and how ideas and experiences impact us at all levels.

Plauborg (2018) introduced the concept of a "quantum leap" in the context of instrumental classroom learning. They argued that past, present, and future, as well as time and space, all play significant roles in the learning process. For instance, previous knowledge and experiences impact how a lesson is received, and the potential for future applications can also influence the learning experience. Similarly, posthumanist transformative learning can be understood as quantum leaps that emerge from entangled phenomena.

Utilizing a quantum physics-informed posthumanist ontology, I argue that transformative learning could be thought of as quantum leaps within an entangled flow. Perhaps the language of diffraction and phenomena can allow us to integrate the domains of Hoggan's (2016) discussion transformative learning metatheory while also thinking about transformation as a flow that impacts more than just an individual. While the literature may have distinct traditions where transformation is discussed as psychological (Dirkx, 2012a; 2012b), spiritual (Tisdell, 2020), and cognitive (Mezirow, 1991), transformation is too big to be kept to individualized domains and bodies. Transformation is a movement, and it is catching. The "form that transforms" (Kegan, 2018) is more than the sum of its parts.

With this conference paper, I hoped to follow the theme by getting transformation into good trouble, and I hoped to set the stage for an in-depth exploration of the interplay between quantum-inspired posthumanist theory and transformative learning. By reconsidering the complex nature of transformation and the potential for quantum leaps, I aimed to shed light on the emergent and entangled aspects of transformative learning. As I, alongside many co-inquirers, continue to challenge traditional paradigms in education, we invite fellow scholars to join us in this journey of transformation where the past, present, and future converge in a quantum dance of knowledge and potential. In doing so, we aspire to uncover novel insights that can pave the way for transformative learning experiences that transcend the boundaries of traditional pedagogy.

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# The Disorienting Dilemma of Unemployment: Transformative Learning, Life Design, and Community Strategies for Navigating Work Transitions

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**Abstract:** The paper explores the impact of key significant experiences, focusing on the transformative potential of critical events such as job loss. Through Transformative Learning, individuals can undergo cognitive and emotional revisions of meaning perspectives, influencing self-perception and interactions with others and the world. Using the lifelong perspective of Life Design paradigm, professional career and personal aspirations can be reshaped in new paths. These two approaches are integrated in a Participatory Action Research involving a group of unemployed adults. The article analyses the impact of the disorienting dilemma on individuals' well-being, emphasising the importance of community guidance strategies for perspectives transformation and the role of narratives in the process of critical reflection.

**Key Words:** Disorienting Dilemma, Life Design, Life Stories, Transformative Learning, Unemployment

## Introduction

In the post-global society characterised by insecurity and volatility, precarity is no longer not an absent dimension of the labour market but has become an integral aspect of human existence (Beck, 2000). Throughout their life course, individuals must face changes and interruptions, whether planned or unintentional, that disrupt the linearity of their biographical trajectories (Savickas, 2005).

Differently from the past, where adulthood was associated with a sense of stability and security, marked by specific stages and rites of passage in individuals' developmental pathways, now this period of time is characterised by a constant state of transition, flexibility, fragility. Individuals must navigate in unfamiliar and novel professional landscapes, where linear career trajectories are being replaced by fragmented and ever-changing work experiences. As a result, adults are required to deal with a continuous revision of personal, emotional and cognitive processes of identity and of roles re-design that influence how they perceive themselves and interact within their social environment. (Mezirow, 1991). The imperative of the society of insecurity (Bauman, 2000) is to take on this challenge, and engage proactively in the process of personal, social, and professional re-design embracing it as an opportunity for potential growth and development. The idea of patchwork biographies (Klammer, 2000) interprets and influences the narratives of individuals who must adapt, revise or reconstruct their position in life, work, relations (Alhadeff-Jones, Kokkos, 2011).

The paper aims to contextualise the link between the Transformative Learning (TL) model and Life Design (LD) paradigm in promoting adult learning and empowerment by narrative and collective guidance practices. It presents a Participatory Action Research (PAR) that has given voice to unemployed adults in order to help them in re-designing individual, professional.

## **Unemployment as a Disorienting Dilemma: A Transformative Break Event**

Precariousness and flexibility in professional pathways led to career interruption and forced exits from the workforce more frequently than in the past.

The experience of unemployment often represents a traumatic and shocking moment (Akkermans et al., 2018), that has significant impacts on personal identity and overall well-being, especially when the disruption of one's professional life had not been foreseen in the individual's life plan, leading to feelings of disorientation and dislocation (Solove et al., 2015). In addition to the duration of the period of unemployment (that is closely connected to the new access to the profession), adults usually have troubles and personal difficulties in finding a new job. Although it may seem counterintuitive, because of their mature work experience, mature adults encounter difficulties re-entering the workforce when becoming unemployed (Marmora, Ritter, 2015).

Studies show that job loss due to involuntary circumstances can paralyze individuals, leaving them with a lack of time projection or future perspective for their existential life. This has a debilitating effect on mental and physical health, with significant effects on physical (heart and gastrointestinal diseases), psychological (prolonged anxiety, depression, stress, self-sabotage), social (isolation, social exclusion) dimensions, and identity (personal distrust, loss of direction, disorientation).

The transition from worker to unemployed status can be a source of vulnerability that lead to an increased risk of developing cardiovascular diseases, depression, anxiety, alcohol abuse, higher mortality rates, and even suicide in extreme cases (Van Eersell et al. 2022). Despite the listed negative impacts, unemployed can also be regarded as a transformative phenomenon with the potential for growth. It can encourage individuals to become more active in shaping their own lives and communities (Thomsen, 2012).

As a disorienting dilemma (Hoggan, 2023), unemployment can be an opportunity for growth and critical reflection on one's personal life path. This involves evaluating the choices made, obstacles encountered, self-efficacy and agency seized in the achieved life goals. This process can be facilitated through storytelling, that allows individual to attribute meaning to their life story, sharing and co-constructing of experiences with others (Bruner, 1997).

Unemployment can stimulate the activation process, where the desire for redemption becomes the driving force to reintegrate into professional dynamics, and to respond to life responsibilities such as caring for loved ones and reclaiming one's social role (Solove et al., 2015). Conversely, when confronted with isolation, solitude and lack of assistance and support, it can give rise to pessimistic and disillusioning visions of the future, that, if maintained for a long time, can have adverse consequences on the individual's overall well-being, increasing the risk of social exclusion (Latack et al., 1995).

In an uncertain economy, the labour market demands to rethink one's career not as a lifelong commitment with a single employer, but as a professional task that can have multiple, diverse, and not always predictable scenarios (Savickas, 2005). The paradigm of LD has been developed as one of the most appropriate approaches in the field of guidance to address modern uncertainty (Savisacks et al, 2009). This approach considers people in their life, supporting them in reconstructing the meaning of their lived experience, where job still plays a significant role in shaping humanity and constructing identity. According to Savickas (2005), the adult (as homo faber) builds a narrative identity. The act of narration allows the construction of an active representation of context and self. It enables self-observation and self-analysis in time continuum and at a distance (Guichard, 2016). LD is aimed at designing individual, professional, and social

life to make the future less hard and daunting, increasing the use of personal resources for recognizing aspirations, values, and opportunities that can be seized.

Individuals are required to actively participate in narrative-formative interventions, engaging in critical reflection, questioning events that have shaped their past experiences and helped focus desires and talents. This type of design is dynamic and preventive in nature, and its effects persist over the lifespan (Hartung, Santilli, 2018). The ability to organise and convey one's narrative in the process of reconstructing personal biography and to receive support in the transformative journey of re-designing, provides direction and continuity in existential and professional paths, thereby fostering confidence and hope for the future.

According to LD, narration can be used as a tool to facilitate critical reflection on disorientating dilemmas (Mezirow, 1997), such as the experience of job loss (LaPointe, 2010). This process involves questioning and re-composition identity and roles. Narrative can be used to counteract the inability to act, promoting engagement and empowerment, that are fundamental for developing critical consciousness. The act of narrating one's life story is an effective way to regain a sense of mastery over oneself and to engage in actions that promote awakening and animate the will to achieve personal and professional redemption. It also provides an opportunity to give voice to those who frequently do not have the chance to be heard (Freire, 1993).

In TL and LD, narrative and transformative approaches provide opportunities for the individual to gain awareness of the life's paths undertaken and open to the creation of new perspectives of meaning, as alternative ways of thinking, acting self-perception and in reality (Hoggan, Finnegan, 2023).

### **A Participatory Action Research: Method and Participants**

Based on these theoretical premises, the paper presents a PAR where participants have experienced the disorienting dilemma of (unexpected) job loss, some of them for extended periods of one or more years.

The PAR was carried out in the Italian city of Padua and involved a group of 10 adults who share the experience of unemployment and, in some cases, positive processes of re-employment, thanks to the support received from their personal and informal networks. The majority of the sample is represented by women, with only three men included in this study. The participants are aged between 54 and 66 years old, except for a 35-year-old woman. 80% of them has achieved a high school diploma (which includes both academic and technical studies), 20% has obtained Bachelor's or Master's degrees.

Half of the sample sought also assistance from the job placement service in the territory. Eight participants report relatively stable employment experiences, while one has no job yet and another one has recently secured employment. Participants, that in the PAR are also co-researchers, have actually joined a group called *Passaparola Lavoro* (Word-of-mouth Job). The group has chosen to share life experiences, listen and support unemployed adults living in the territory. Their activities include the dissemination of job offers known through the social network and collaborating in training and orientation moments organised by external experts working in the regional job services sector. The actions are co-constructed, and everyone has received benefits from them; the main idea is that the disruptive experience of unemployment is a collective moment and not a solitary or individual event. The lack of work opportunities requires a collective response. Group meetings can facilitate a change in the social context and encourage the development of new strategies to overcome obstacles collectively (Thomsen, 2012). The group has been active since 2016 and is open to those experiencing exclusion from

the job market, long-term unemployment, and difficulties in the process of re-employment. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, weekly activities have been temporarily suspended during the emergency.

The goal of the PAR has been to help *Passaparola Lavoro* group in re-configuring its identity and identify future perspectives, experimenting a community guidance model that could foster formal processes of job search and professional transformation.

The distinctive characteristic of this group (that has also been the element that prompted the PAR) is that all the participants have used the informal job search channel as the preferred method for the reintegration process. Using this type of job search mode has obvious limitations such as the spread of illegal work and exploitation, the inability to monitor labour dynamics and wage agreements). However, these informal communities can be effective local networks that bring together jobless adults joined by the common situation of struggling with social exclusion. Informal groups can give voice to unemployed people and help them cope with the event of job loss by supporting the transformation of meaning perspectives.

### **Investigating the Meanings Through the Narration**

Job loss experience as a disorienting dilemma that interrupts the linearity of one's life pathways has been investigated through the life stories of the co-researchers. Narrative interview (Atkinson, 2002) integrated with photo-elicitation (Harper, 2010) was used as method.

In this process, each participant or narrator was able to present a clear picture of their personal and professional background, examining the underlying meanings and identifying the conscious and deliberate actions taken to address the disorientating dilemma: *"It was very useful, I realized that I have many skills. I am no longer afraid of anything, I could do anything"; "Absolutely! I had never thought about all the 'journey' made so far and how certain events have influenced my choices in professional and private life. "; "Yes, even just the fact that listening to (hearing) one's own words opens up to further reflections on them and on other things. "*

This cyclical and critical reflection was facilitated by the narrative process that provides a space for dialogue and trust, where the storyteller was supported to construct and reconstruct dimensions of identity in an active and participatory way. Photo-elicitation encouraged reflection and awareness using a symbolic and iconic language. Due to the emotive and personal nature of the disorienting dilemma, visual prompts served to mitigate the potential distress associated with verbal communication, with the emphasis on the selection of the most appropriate image (Kyololo et al., 2023). These voices of narrators reveal the positive impact of narratives in self-awareness process: *"Even just the fact that listening to (hearing) one's own words opens up to further reflections on them and on other things. "; "Useful, because I dedicated time to myself. Useful because it allowed me to focus, stop for moments, clarify, settle, my long period of life. I had never done it before! "; "A great starting point for a reflection on my life that I will have to do more often to remind myself who I was, see who I am now, and think about who I will become in the future. "; "I am quite aware of myself, but everything helps. "*

The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of the narratives collected confirmed a range of negative consequences associated with job loss, including physical (e.g., heart attack, weight gain, gastritis), psychological (e.g., stress, anxiety, depression, burnout, disorientation), social (e.g., loneliness), and relational effects (e.g., divorce, family disputes) experienced by the participants.



Additionally, the need for immediate resolution of economic and financial issues, as well as structural management problems, was frequently reported. This led to the choice of undignified jobs, including exploitation, mobbing, and demotion due to maternity, apathy.

Nevertheless, the stories demonstrated how various transformative experiences (garage renovation, relocation to a new country, self-care, personal reconciliation with desires, encouragement from a spouse, meeting a new partner, therapeutic counselling) led to a process of re-activation, resulting in re-employment through the informal word-of-mouth mode. Attempts to integrate the dilemma in the life course, and reinterpreting its impact had positive effects: to the present date, nine people have been reinstated into a new job.

### **Sharing, Reflecting, and Acting**

Although the transformation process of meaning perspectives is long and cannot be expected to conclude within a set timeframe, the implemented PAR process has shown positive results in terms of participation, aggregation of the informal group, and in the ways in which limits encountered and possible found solutions could be addressed.

*Passaparola Lavoro* group has been supported in the process of planning future goals starting from a community orientation perspective (Gone, 2021), including the informal network benefits. During the PAR, group meetings involved participants in transformative dialogues and in telling and sharing stories of unemployment in order to gain a collective and individual awareness from the negative situation. Personal and other people's stories with photo-elicitation helped as main tools opening to new perspectives and understandings.

The role of facilitator (initially held by the researchers) was gradually assumed by some participants as co-researchers, demonstrating efforts and dedication to the group; this served as a motivational hint in persuading those who were reluctant in participation or in the telling their story.

The participants gradually assumed responsibility for managing the process independently, organising and sharing objectives and tasks. While these efforts did not have a macro impact, they had some effects on personal lives, on the community and local territory. Some experts in vocational guidance provided relevant operational insights, accompanying participants with specific training sessions. A Facebook group created by *Passaparola Lavoro*, with documents, legislative notions, informative self-produced videos is one of the outputs that show how professional and personal life design was undertaken by members; meetings and seminars have been held to identify new perspectives and competences for the job market. The group is now pursuing the objective of increasing participation, extending support to those who need it in the territory, offering its voices, resources and counselling for the transformation.

### **Conclusion**

The experience of sharing personal meanings within the group fosters the process of re-elaboration, transformation, and restructuring of these meanings. This occurs especially when alternative viewpoints offered by others are embraced through open and critical dialogue. (Mezirow, 1991) The loss of employment and transition to a new job are not solitary experiences; within the narrative approach and critical reflection, shocking events can engage individuals and the groups in support and reactivation (Bergold, Thomas, 2012). Sharing and narrating disorienting dilemmas in informal practices is a form of pedagogical care, a key point of the community guidance.

The integration of TL and LD approaches in the PAR with unemployed adults shows interesting elements that could be further investigated. Using narration to facilitate a critical reflection on personal experiences and assumptions, the transformative potential of networks is highlighted in facilitating mutual care and sharing (Burns et al., 2021).

The synergy between personal transformation and community support encourages the active participation and collaborative meaning-making process within informal guidance actions. This approach aims to facilitate personal as well as social change, with a focus on lifelong learning and development (Guichard, 2016). It provides some elements for researching innovative models of adult learning and narrative-based guidance practices with inclusive, democratic, and participatory perspectives.

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## **Exploring Transformative Learning Through Teacher Education Programs: Insights from a Case Study**

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**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Educator-Student-Centered Approach, Programme Accreditation, General Teaching Council for Scotland

### **Extended Abstract**

The transformative learning (TL) theory was originally developed in the 1980s by the American sociologist Jack Mezirow to describe meaningful learning processes that occur when learners connect theory with practice. Precisely, Mezirow (1996) defines transformational 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 “ (p. 162). While a comprehensive definition of transformative education remains elusive among experts, there is consensus that the interaction between students and educators is pivotal in facilitating transformative learning. This argument is deeply rooted in the constructivist approach to education, as articulated by scholars such as Dewey (1938).

In alignment with the constructivist paradigm, transformative education states that knowledge needs to be developed autonomously by learners (self-directed learning, Mezirow, 1997) through TL classroom practices, starting from a sort of “personal crisis, “ initially conceptualized by Mezirow (1991) as a single “disorienting dilemma “ (p. 168) and later as a long cumulative process (Taylor, 2008). Moreover, thinking autonomously allows learners to develop their own sense of meaning in the world, free from the educators’ purposes, beliefs, judgments, values, and feelings. In fact, as argued by Baumgartner (2001), “transformation is an extrarational process that involves the integration of various aspects of the Self “ (p. 18). Learners do play an active role in the knowledge-creation process. TL is based on the premise that education has to equip individuals and our society with knowledge, experience, skills, or values necessary to authentically improve the connection among human beings and link society with nature (UNESCO, 2021).

Although transformative education clearly recognizes that the teacher-learner relationship is crucial to creating the right conditions for a TL experience, some scholars (e.g., Courtenay, Merriam, Reeves, and Baumgartner) argue that “questions remain concerning the educator’s role in planning a transformational learning experience and the educator’s responsibility for its impact “ (Baumgartner, 2001, p. 21). Robertson (1996) suggested talking about educator-student-centered approaches instead of student-centered approaches. Robertson’s (1996) idea was the focus of this paper. Specifically, this research examined the role that accreditation of education programs plays in the development of TL. A case study has been designed to understand the impact that the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTC) may have on the development of innovative transformative education programs for teachers. Giving the relevance of accreditation for institutions, investigating how a teaching profession regulatory body like GTS has understood the importance of transformative education and has designed and implemented

accreditation criteria compatible with TL is crucial. Since 2012, GTC Scotland introduced the Professional Recognition Award for professional learning and development programmes that meet certain high-quality requirements of teachers and teaching and ensure that those requirements are maintained and enhanced (GTC, 2020).

The accreditation criteria developed and adopted by GTS were evaluated against three of the four key areas defined by UNESCO (2022) for transforming education: (1) ensuring a learning environment that supports the development of all learners; (2) enabling teachers to transform themselves and become agents of change; and (3) harnessing the digital revolution for the benefit of public education. The fourth area, investing more, more equitably, and more efficiently in education, was excluded from the analysis as it pertains to government investments in education.

The analysis of the accreditation document developed by GTS highlighted that all three key UNESCO areas are directly or indirectly covered, with a particular emphasis on the second key area. The criteria stress that learning should be personally and professionally transformative, demonstrating the significant impact of professional development on teachers. They articulate a clear rationale for the program as a professional learning opportunity, enabling teachers to critically reflect on their growth and transformation. To be accredited, programs must provide evidence of how the learning experience has changed teachers both professionally and personally. The criteria also call for teachers to demonstrate creativity and originality in applying knowledge and practices, which is essential for becoming effective agents of change in education. The third key area is partially addressed by GTS's criteria, emphasizing the importance of teachers engaging with the complexities of teaching and learning in an ever-evolving world. This engagement is crucial in the digital revolution, where technological advancements are transforming educational landscapes. Teachers need to develop digital literacy and integrate technology into their teaching practices to create more interactive and engaging classrooms. By staying updated with the latest technological trends, teachers can adapt their strategies to improve educational outcomes. Embracing the digital revolution also means recognizing technology's potential to bridge educational gaps, providing equal learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their background or location. The first key area is effectively addressed by the criteria. These criteria emphasize the importance of teacher education programs that equip teachers with the skills to communicate effectively using appropriate methods tailored to a diverse range of audiences with varying levels of knowledge and expertise. By fostering such communication abilities, teachers can create inclusive and supportive learning environments that cater to the unique needs of each learner, thereby promoting equitable educational outcomes.

In summary, the GTS criteria empower teachers to transform their practices and become catalysts for positive change in education. However, a more comprehensive focus on digital competencies is necessary. Integrating digital skills into the standards would better support teachers in leveraging the digital revolution to enhance public education. This qualitative research highlights the role of teachers in transformative learning (TL), the importance of school autonomy in curriculum design, and the impact of accreditation on TL. Several recommendations for educational practice emerge from the research. Teacher education programs should foster both personal and professional transformation through critical reflection and encourage innovative knowledge application. There should be a stronger emphasis on developing digital literacy skills and ongoing professional development. Additionally, teacher education programs should equip teachers with effective communication skills for diverse audiences, promoting

inclusive learning environments. Accreditation criteria should be regularly updated to align with global standards, including digital technology integration, and require clear evidence of their impact on teachers' professional growth and transformation.

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# The Transformative Learning Experience in National Team-based Competitions: A Study of Chinese College Students in Computer Science and Engineering

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**Key Words:** Team-Based Learning, Informal Education, Reflective Practice, Innovation and Collaboration

## Extended Abstract

Competition plays a vital role in computer science and engineering education. Team-based competitions are particularly prevalent in engineering (Crawley et al., 2007). In teaming, students learn to articulate their ideas, listen to others, and even take on leadership roles (Hirsch & McKenna, 2008). When students engage in discussions or collaborative activities and receive feedback from others, they are likely to critically reflect on their interpretations, beliefs, and points of view; those engagements create the conditions for transformation (Taylor & Snyder, 2012). Observing how peers work (e.g., how they deal with complex tasks and interact in society), students can expose themselves to various perspectives and viewpoints to learn about professional values and collaborative strategies for working with others (Lingard, 2012). Such an experience is unmatched to students' gains from traditional classrooms, especially in the lecture-exam mood of learning (Gadola & Chindamo, 2019). Although research in team learning and teamwork is abundant, studies on team learning in terms of students' learning experiences on group assignments in an informal context (i.e., team-based competitions) have not been thoroughly investigated. Some scholars suggest that more studies should explore factors that affect computer science and engineering students learning (Zahedi et al., 2021). This study applies transformative learning and its relevant concepts to investigate college students' learning experiences in national team-based competitions. The study offers insights into how informal learning experience promotes students' transformative understanding of collaboration.

Several reasons support the assumption that competition can offer opportunities for students to engage in a transformative learning experience. First, transformative learning is about reflecting on one's pre-existing beliefs. In team-based competition, students learn to make uncertain decisions based on speculation of available options and perceived assumptions (Gadola & Chindamo, 2019). The introspective process enables students to reflect. When something does not work, they need to re-evaluate their thinking methods to drive for innovative ideas and new solutions (Margalef García & Pareja Roblin, 2008). Second, transformative learning broadens perspectives. Besides strengthening personal attributes, team-based competition offers opportunities for students to work in teams. During the process, team members must learn to

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closely monitor each other's progress and be mindful of team member's strengths and weaknesses in performance (Carron et al., 2002). To achieve team-based success, members must ensure that everyone is supported to accomplish assigned tasks (Demir et al., 2015). Interacting with team members becomes a source of exposure to diverse perspectives, stimulating creative thinking and considering alternative solutions (West & Hirst, 2005). Third, transformative learning requires intrinsic motivation to change. Participating in competition demands students to take the initiative and invest extra effort outside the classroom (de-Juan et al., 2016). Students can decide what they need to learn and how to learn it.

This study used narrative inquiry to inquire about computer science and engineering students' learning experiences in competitions (Wengraf, 2001). The researcher conducted an in-depth qualitative study by interviewing nine computer science and engineering students from one Chinese university. All student participants won a prize in team-based national competitions. The interview questions prompted students to reflect on their learning experiences in competitions. After collecting data, the researchers used Braun and Clarke's six-step approach to thematically analyze students' learning experiences (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

The findings showed that students exhibited an evolutionary learning process in their perspective change. There was a progression from single-loop learning to double- and triple-loop learning throughout the team-based competition. Students' single-loop learning focused on tactical problem-solving; their double-loop learning involved strategic adaptation and questioning assumptions; ultimately, the triple-loop learning characterized their transformative meta-learning and deeper understanding of the value of collaboration in competition. The single-loop learning dominated students' initial thinking. They began with conventional learning techniques and aimed to achieve specific performance-based goals, such as winning the contest. Success, at this point, was measured by applying learned theories directly to solve problems. However, during the competition engagement, students began questioning and reshaping their learning aims. Some students altered learning strategies, goals, or metrics they used to measure success. Some students reflected on how they learn. Evidently, those students shifted from the previous single-loop to double-loop learning or triple-loop learning. Such a meta-learning led to a deeper understanding of one's cognition and learning processes. This transformative learning progression highlighted students' perspective change in learning. Such a shift enabled those students to discover new approaches to problem-solving and appreciation for collaboration.

Findings also revealed that a harmonious informal team environment contributed to the team's performance and success. When team members work, study, eat, and socialize closely and extensively outside of the classroom, those informal interactions provide opportunities for students to build mutual trust. As team members worked towards the same goal in the competition, their good rapport enabled them to understand each other even without the necessity for verbal communication. Teammates were able to support each other during intense competition when time was scarce for explorative discourse, discussion, and debate. Students' informal activities (e.g., informal peer feedback and contextual dialogue with peers) set the foundation for transformative learning because team members felt safe to concede errors and consider alternative perspectives, ultimately leading to more refined and robust solutions. Based on the team-based competition experience, students transformed their views on collaboration and recognized that the purpose of collaboration was not solely to complete a task but to collectively grow and improve. With such a perspective, team members became aware of the competition process. As a result, they were able to more holistically appreciate each person's values and their contributions to the competition without merely applying the narrow-focused measurement of



performance outcomes. Working with team members was a shared journey of learning and development. An open and supportive learning environment encouraged students to critically question their assumptions, engage in dialogue, and apply their knowledge in new and meaningful ways. This study examines computer science and engineering students' learning experiences in competitions to illustrate the transformative effects of such an experience on students and their understanding of collaboration. Also, the study captures factors that lead to those effects. Findings show the impact of metacognitive learning (i.e., double and triple-loop learning, critical reflection) on students. The study argues that reflective skill development in computer science and engineering education is essential for self- and team-based learning. The research draws on the transformative learning lens to improve the traditional curriculum and teaching to computer science and engineering students in higher education. This research data reveals that a harmonious team environment can facilitate cognitive development and shift understanding of the learning process. Insights gained from this research offer practical guidance to applications of transformative learning in team-based engineering curriculum design.

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## **Nursing Students Among Transformative Learning, Professional Well-being, and Resilience. An Observational Study**

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**Abstract:** This two-year observational study explores the perceived level of well-being and personal strength among nursing students during their professional and academic training amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The research aims to assess the students' capacity for transformative and critical lifelong learning, particularly in the context of challenging and uncertain circumstances. The study involved administering standardized surveys to second-year nursing students at multiple universities, with data collected at two time points: at the end of the 2020/2021 academic year (T0) and one year later during the 2021/2022 academic year (T1). A total of 392 students participated in the quantitative survey, providing valuable insights into their experiences and preparedness for future professional practice.

**Key Words:** Nursing Students, Well-Being, Personal Strength, COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 disrupted the perceived certainties that humanity had achieved up to that point. Over almost four centuries of medical research and clinical trials, accumulated knowledge has yielded unprecedented results in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of numerous diseases that once plagued entire civilizations. This progress has significantly extended life expectancy and fundamentally altered the demographic makeup of societies (Tulchinsky et al., 2014; Adedeji, 2016). The discovery of antibiotics and the development of vaccines have fostered a sense of security against pandemic threats, instilling the belief that medicine represents an all-powerful means of earthly salvation (Illich, 1976; Thomasma et al., 2013).

The education and training of new generations of doctors and nurses over the past two centuries have emphasized the acquisition of knowledge, incorporating the latest advancements in diagnostic technology, surgical techniques, and pharmacological protocols. This emphasis has instilled in healthcare professionals a sense of confidence in their ability to treat patients suffering from various ailments. Additionally, the perceived economic security and social prestige associated with these professions have attracted many young individuals to pursue careers in medicine and nursing.

The global spread of a pandemic has not only disrupted the perceived efficacy of established practical, procedural, and medicinal protocols, but has also cast doubt upon the longstanding social recognition afforded to doctors and nurses. The exhaustion experienced by these professionals during the peak of infection spread has profoundly altered the landscape of nursing work, both for seasoned hospital staff and potentially for students entering the field.

Transformative learning is conceptualized as a theoretical framework for understanding the process of learning, wherein a student, throughout the course of professional training and socialization, assimilates a set of arbitrary definitions and behavioral scripts from authoritative and trusted sources such as teachers and educational mentors. These definitions and scripts

encompass various fundamental aspects of the profession, including technical routines, emotional expression norms, threat identification strategies, interactions with authority figures, responses to rejection and failure, competitiveness, and role management, among others. They form the foundational backdrop of the student's emerging professional identity.

While this acquired knowledge is presented within historical, scientific, and disciplinary contexts, it is not considered immutable. Each student possesses the capacity to engage in meta-reflection on their learning journey, thereby retaining agency over their knowledge acquisition process. The dynamic nature of today's organizations and healthcare environments necessitates that students continually expand their understanding of contextual nuances and the diverse individuals they encounter. This entails ongoing critical examination of their assumptions to maintain control over their learning trajectory and eventual professional practice, particularly during internships.

Encounters with novel experiences devoid of established protocols or techniques may evoke feelings of shame, prompting students to question not only their knowledge but also their self-concept. Consequently, the act of challenging and relinquishing long-held perspectives fosters heightened critical reflection on one's consciousness. This process often leads to the emergence of a more critical, relativistic, and creatively open worldview, along with a revised self-image (Mezirov, 1991).

The literature suggests that not all students possess the capacity to effectively navigate challenges to their established beliefs and perceptions. To facilitate a student's ability to confront such challenges, several conducive conditions must be ensured. These conditions include the following:

- **High Levels of Compassion Satisfaction:** Students should experience a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction derived from their ability to contribute meaningfully to others' well-being (Stamm, 2013).
- **Satisfaction of Basic Life Needs:** It is essential for students to have their fundamental life needs met, as outlined in Deci and Ryan's theory of self-determination (2012). This encompasses the fulfilment of psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness.
- **Presence of Resilience-Facilitating Factors:** Students should possess factors that promote resilience in the face of life's challenges, as proposed by Connor and Davidson's resilience model (2003). These factors may include social support networks, coping strategies, and self-care practices.

Based on this evidence and guided by a critical emancipatory approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2023), a two-year observational study was conducted with nursing students enrolled at the Universities of Padua and Ferrara. These universities represent two significant educational sites, with a combined annual enrollment of approximately seven hundred students each year.

The primary objective of the study was to investigate and comprehend the perceived levels of well-being and personal resilience among students throughout their professional and academic training, particularly during the pandemic. It is recognized that students, more so than established professionals, may struggle with issues of social trust in their work and experience excessive workloads. Consequently, they may tend to adhere rigidly to established protocols and routines, seeking security but potentially hindering their professional development.

The study sought to assess the extent to which students met these challenges and aimed to provide tutors and teachers with insights to help identify areas where students could enhance

their approaches to their work, both within their courses and following graduation. Emphasis was placed on fostering divergent, transformative, and critically oriented lifelong learning practices among nursing students.

The study was designed to administer a T0 survey, tentatively scheduled at the conclusion of the clinical placement, to all second-year nursing students enrolled at participating universities during the 2020/2021 academic year. This survey utilized a standardized interview procedure conducted through digital platforms. The decision was made to focus on second-year students who were approximately halfway through their training and had already gained exposure to COVID-19 units and patients during their clinical experiences.

Subsequently, one year after the initial survey, a follow-up administration (using the same tests) was conducted during the 2021/2022 academic year (referred to as T1), involving the same cohort of participants. A total of 392 students participated in the quantitative survey.

The project was approved by the Teaching Commission of the Bachelor of Science in Nursing at the University of Padua and by the Departmental Research Ethics Committee (Prot. no. 0000802 of 24.02.2023).

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# The Posthuman Epistemology of Transformative Theories. The contribution of Posthuman Feminism

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**Abstract:** This conceptual paper explores the contribution that Posthuman Feminism—as conceptualized by Braidotti (2022, 2019, 2013)—offers to Transformative Learning Theories. We propose a reflection around the possibility of developing *non-constructivist* and *non-humanist* assumptions underpinning Transformative Learning Theories. In this endeavor, the argumentation unfolds in three steps: (1) first, a critique to discursive pattern of social constructivist paradigm that upholds binary distinctions, such as between nature/culture, nature/technology, human/nonhuman, subject/object, mind/body, masculinity/femininity, and so on, is presented; (2) secondly, the internal contradictions and external exclusions that have always composed the humanistic view of the human subject are reconstructed; and, (3) finally, it is argued in favor of a Posthuman Feminist reading of Transformative Learning conceptual device and it is shown in what sense and to what extent the Posthuman Feminism can be appropriated to transformative epistemologies.

**Key Words:** Posthuman Feminism; Transformative Theories; European Humanism; Affirmative Ethics

## Introduction

This conceptual paper explores the contribution that Posthuman Feminism—as conceptualized by Braidotti (2022, 2019, 2013)—offers to Transformative Learning Theories. Our purpose is to examine how Posthuman Feminism enriches, through critical and creative cartographies, the philosophical assumptions on which Transformative Learning Theories are based. We propose a reflection around the possibility of developing *non-constructivist* and *non-humanist* assumptions underpinning Transformative Learning Theories.

In this endeavor, after a brief overview of different theoretical perspectives on transformative learning, the argumentation unfolds in three steps: (1) first, a critique to discursive pattern of social constructivist paradigm that upholds binary distinctions, such as between nature/culture, nature/technology, human/nonhuman, subject/object, mind/body, masculinity/femininity, and so on, is presented; (2) secondly, the internal contradictions and external exclusions that have always composed the humanistic view of the human subject are reconstructed; and, (3) finally, it is argued in favor of a Posthuman Feminist reading of Transformative Learning conceptual device and it is shown in what sense and to what extent Posthuman Feminism can be appropriated to transformative epistemologies.

The *social-emancipatory*, rooted primarily in the work of Freire (1984), *cultural-spiritual* (Brooks, 2000; Tisdell, 2003; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006), *race-centric* (Sheared, 1994; Johnson-Bailey, 2001; Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006), and *planetary* (O’Sullivan, 1999, 2002) views of transformative learning, despite their diversity, have contributed to formulating a culturally

bounded, situated, oppositional, and nonindividualistic conception of it, interested in processes of both social and individual change (Taylor, 2005, 2008). On the other hand, perspectives whose locus of learning concerns the individual—that is, the *psychocritical* one elaborated by Mezirow (2000, 2003, 2009)<sup>1</sup>, which continues to represent the dominant transformative paradigm, as well as *psychoanalytic* (Kegan, 2000; Daloz, 1988), *psychodevelopmental* (Boyd, 1989; Cranton, 2006; Dirkx, 2001), and *neurobiological* (Janik, 2005)—tend to reflect a universal view of transformative learning and risk recognizing difference through the lens of personal ones (such as, for example, cognitive or learning styles, forms of rationality, selective attentions, characterological dispositions, and so on). At the same time, views whose locus is sociocultural have placed much greater emphasis on the notions of *difference* and *positionality*—where one’s *position* is relative to class, race, gender and sexual orientation, age and able-bodiedness—and their relationship to both the process and the practice of transformative learning. These theoretical conceptions converge in arguing that *speaking truth to power* represents a promising method to reach an adequate understanding of the conditions that can promote a radical and transformative education.

The evolution of transformative learning theory, over the last three decades, especially in the United States, is more understandable when viewed as parallel to and strongly influenced by the development of adult learning theories—that began to draw on situated cognition theory, practice-based studies, feminist theories and methodologies, critical social theory, and postmodern theory (Taylor & Cranton, 2013; Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Merriam, 2008). Learning in adulthood is now described in relation to embodied learning, the emotions, spirituality, relational learning, arts-based learning, and storytelling. Similarly, as Gunnlaugson (2008) suggests, the *second wave* of theory development in the field of transformative learning has moved—and keeps doing it—toward the integration of the various factions of the theory and into a more inclusive and holistic perspective.

### **Epistemological Doubts, Philosophical Orientations, and Posthuman Subjects**

Our research interests are rooted in the field of transformative learning and in the practice of fostering the development of it in a variety of settings, such as school, professional development, and gender education. Also, transformative learning—seen as teaching for change—represents one of the adult education teaching constructs that has most affected our educational practices.

The educational and teaching experiences we conducted during the past ten years involved undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral students at University of Florence, Siena, and other Italian Universities. Our students are enrolled in *Adult Learning, Curriculum & Teaching*, or *Inclusive Education* Programs. The courses we teach are, mostly, *Facilitating adult learning*; *Adult learning and education: Theory and practice*; *Research on organizational learning*; *Gender, difference, and curriculum*; *Methods of teaching in elementary school*. Our classes are, by and large, linguistically and culturally homogeneous and composed, for the most part, of

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor (2003, 2005), Taylor & Cranton (2013), and Hoggan (2023) have highlighted how in the United States the preponderance of both theoretical and empirical literature on transformative learning refers to the original formulation given by Mezirow (2000; 2009). The same analysis can also be extended to our national context, within which, in the extensive literature on the topic, attention to Mezirow’s theory is almost ubiquitous, running the risk of assuming it as the only conception, using some of its assumptions uncontestedly, and neglecting the contributions that the growing presence of other views can offer to its development in terms of both analytic and synthetic metatheory.

Caucasian Italian women ranging in age from 20 to 30 years. The number of attending students per class is between about 20 to 150.

In the early years of our academic journey we predominantly focused on the views of transformative learning whose locus of learning is *individual* and, only more recently, we approached those whose locus is *sociocultural*. However, the sharing by all these conceptions of Transformative Learning of philosophical underpinnings related to *social constructivist* and *humanist* assumptions (Taylor & Cranton, 2013) began to arouse in us a sort of epistemological unease linked to three considerations.

The first consists in recognizing that social constructivist paradigm is based on a discursive pattern that upholds binary distinctions, such as between nature/culture, nature/technology, human/nonhuman, subject/object, mind/body, masculinity/femininity, black/white, local/global, present/past, and so on (Roth, 2011; Braidotti, 2019; Cozza & Gherardi, 2023). This logic of dualistic oppositions—based on a hierarchical organization of dominant dichotomies composed of superordinate and subordinate meanings that relate to each other in implicative terms—risks reducing *difference* to being different from, or in being worth less than (Roth, 2011; Braidotti, 2022). That is, there are axes of reference and dimensions of sense, whose specific, historically variable, contents are worth less than others. A radical gesture of *defamiliarization* from social constructivist assumptions implies, among other things, to explore the idea of subject formation as an event that takes place transversally, in between nature/technology, male/female, black/white, local/global, present/past—in assemblages that flow across and displace binary oppositions (Braidotti, 2019). This produces educational practices based on *becoming-other*, both in relation to involving the non-human elements of education, be it animals, natural entities or technological apparatus.

Hence, the second consideration takes up the invitation—made by Braidotti (2013, 2022)—to practice productive forms of *conceptual disobedience* toward the humanistic vision of Man. The scholar (2019) suggests to take distance from the abstract universalism that composes the human in the humanistic scheme, proposing to assume subjects as neither unitary, nor autonomous, nor self-determined, but embodied and embedded, relational, and affective collaborative entities, activated by relational ethics. Suspending belief in a unitary and self-evident category of “we humans”, however, is by no means the premise to relativism. On the contrary, the author provocatively emphasizes the statement “we humans” was never neutral, but in fact indexed on sexualized and racialized hierarchies that controlled access to power<sup>1</sup>. Fundamental social categories such as class, race, gender and sexual orientation, age and able-bodiedness have functioned as markers of human “normality”. They still are key factors in framing the notion of and policing access to something we may call “humanity”. “Who qualifies as a human in that view is the kind of being that skillfully combines high Humanist standards of individual physical and mental perfection with collective intellectual and moral values. This is the generic sweep that turned Humanism into a civilizational standard, positioning Europe as the centre of world progress. Incidentally, that is what makes Eurocentrism into a structural and not just a contingent attitude” (Braidotti, 2019, p. 171).

Given these premises, the loss of humanist unity is the starting point for constructing alternative ways of *becoming-subjects-together*. It is a practice to lead the new subjects that we

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<sup>1</sup> Braidotti (2013, 2022) describes Leonardo’s famous sketch of the Vitruvian Man as an emblematic image of humanism. That perfectly proportioned, healthy, male, and white body still constitutes the model which became the golden mean for classical aesthetics and architecture. The human thus defined is not so much a species as a marker of European culture and society and for the scientific and technological activities it privileges.



are capable of becoming away from the violent aspects of European Humanism, most notably the violence of sexualized, racialized and naturalized exclusions and of colonial domination. It is about redefining the human after Humanism and anthropocentrism, as a *zoe/geo/techno-mediated being* (Clarke & Haraway, 2018; Braidotti, 2013, 2019), immanently related to and hence inseparable from the material, terrestrial and planetary locations that we happen to inhabit.

Braidotti (2022) describes posthuman feminism as the transformative, radical, and decolonial struggle to affirm positively the differences among marginalized people(s). Its radical spark lies in the subversive politics manifested in creating alternative visions of the human generated by people who were historically excluded from, or only partially included into, that category. It means creating other possible worlds. This transformative edge assumes that no emancipatory process, however partial, is ever completely subsumed or incorporated into the dominant socio-economic conditions, to which it is attached by critical opposition. Discrete margins of intervention remain available.

### **How to Activate Them?**

The third consideration regards the sense of epistemological discomfort generated by the attempt to answer this question and linked to the need to: (A) unlearn our privileges, including humanist and anthropocentric Eurocentric habits of mind, through the methodological practice of *defamiliarization* (Braidotti, 2019); (B) increase awareness of the forms of racism and sexism that we have inevitably internalized—by drawing on the construct of *revolutionary feminist self-consciousness* (hooks, 2000, 2010) that *academicized* feminist pedagogies have risked depriving of its radicality; and (C) understanding how to cultivate their emancipatory dimensions in educational settings and construct *our white professional identities* in an *antiracist* and *feminist* sense—abandoning the myth of *white or Euro-American epistemology* (Brookfield, 2014, 2021; Teo, 2022) of neutral and non-impositional facilitation.

It is not merely a matter of taking the position—now well-established in the transformative learning literature—that without developing awareness of our own frames of reference and how they shape our teaching and educational practices, there is little chance of fostering deep, epistemological changes in others (Taylor, 2009). What is at stake is to build transformative models from which new, different and even contradictory definitions of what it means to be human can be invented. This is because I believe that education is tasked with revealing the diversity of the world and dissolving the white, Eurocentric blanket that has suffused past years and culture by resisting radically the forms by which domination manifests itself and exploring how to transform individual uncertainties into collective solutions that work and help make the world more inclusive and socially cohesive.

*Disidentifications* from dominant models of subject formation is a way of decolonizing our imaginary through a radical disengagement from the axes and institutions of power in our society. These include the gender system with its binary representations of femininity and masculinity (Braidotti 1991); white privilege and racialized hierarchies, which are critiqued by postcolonial (Gilroy 2000) and race discourses (Hill Collins 1991; Wynter 2015). Disidentifications in these cases occur along the axes of *becoming-woman* (sexualization) and *becoming-other* (racialization), and hence remain within the confines of anthropomorphism. A further shift is needed to develop post-anthropocentric forms of identification.

The construct of revolutionary feminist self-consciousness offers a twofold solicitation. The first relates to the legitimacy in arguing that the personal is political (hooks, 2010), that is, the belief that lived experience is as important as factual information and that in the learning process, there should really be room for telling one's personal story by all/all participants. The

second, finally, is to take up the contribution of visionary feminism, which encourages analyzing our lives from the perspectives of gender, race, and class to be able to accurately understand our position within the white supremacist imperialist capitalist patriarchy systems of which we are a part (hooks, 2015). This is especially relevant for those who, like us, are part of privileged segments of highly educated women who have risked underestimating the consequences of the feminist focus on careerism and their own academization.

### **Conclusive Reflections**

Posthuman Feminism represents both critical and creative framework for performative and generative practices of fostering transformative learning across disciplines and settings. It unfolds into a series of rhizomic folds that can enrich the philosophical assumptions underpinning transformative learning theories.

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## **ADHD and Families: Transformative Learning and Parenting Support Extended abstract**

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**Abstract:** Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by persistent patterns of inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity that interfere with daily functioning and development (APA, 2022). Educating a hyperactive child disrupts the balance of family relationships. Indeed, ADHD can profoundly alter family structures by triggering intense emotions that are challenging to manage and by making interactions complex and problematic (Anastopoulos et al., 2009; Bullegas et al., 2023; Theule et al., 2011).

Through participatory action research, this study explores the transformative potential of Parental Reflective Groups (PRG) as an innovative approach to provide parenting support for families dealing with ADHD (Bullegas & Mura, 2023; Mura & Bullegas, 2021). PRGs represent a methodological approach, aimed at facilitating critical reflection on parenting practices. Twenty parents of children with ADHD participated in a six-month PRG program that included pre-training and post-training semi-structured interviews to detect changes in frame of references (e.g. premises and meanings about parental identity, ADHD, parent-child relationship, etc.) and educational practices. The findings underscore the potential of PRGs in assisting participants in critically analyzing their perspectives and supporting them in a process of personal growth and empowerment.

**Key Words:** Meaning Transformation, Educational Practices, ADHD, Reflective Practice, Parenting Support

### **Introduction**

Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by persistent patterns of inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. (APA, 2022). These traits determine an impairment in the daily activities, interfering with the functioning of a person (Banaschewski et al., 2017).

ADHD changes families: educating a hyperactive child transforms the balance of relationships, activates intense emotions, and makes interactions more complex and problematic. Parents of children with ADHD perceive themselves as less competent and effective to regulate their children and have low expectations of their educational skills and competences. At the same time, the parent-child relationship is often characterized by negative disciplinary behaviors, ineffective strategies such as punishments; these strategies can consolidate a “reactive-negative” style distinguished by high levels of control, authoritarianism and emotional reactions of anger and frustration (Johnston & Ohan, 2005).

Faced with the educational challenges imposed by the presence of a child with ADHD, the family must “re-define “ itself in emotional, relational, and educational terms, even through parental support interventions.

### ADHD and Parenting: Towards a Transformative Paradigm

Intervention on ADHD cannot be limited to pharmacological and rehabilitative programs aimed at the person. Family and school intervention are also important in a multimodal approach to ADHD (Barkley, 2015). In this framework Parent Training (PT) becomes relevant (Coates et al., 2015). Parent Training is the main intervention with families. It provides information on ADHD characteristics, enabling the development of problem-solving skills and the acquisition of psychoeducational strategies for managing children’s behavioral issues (Anastopoulos et al., 1993).

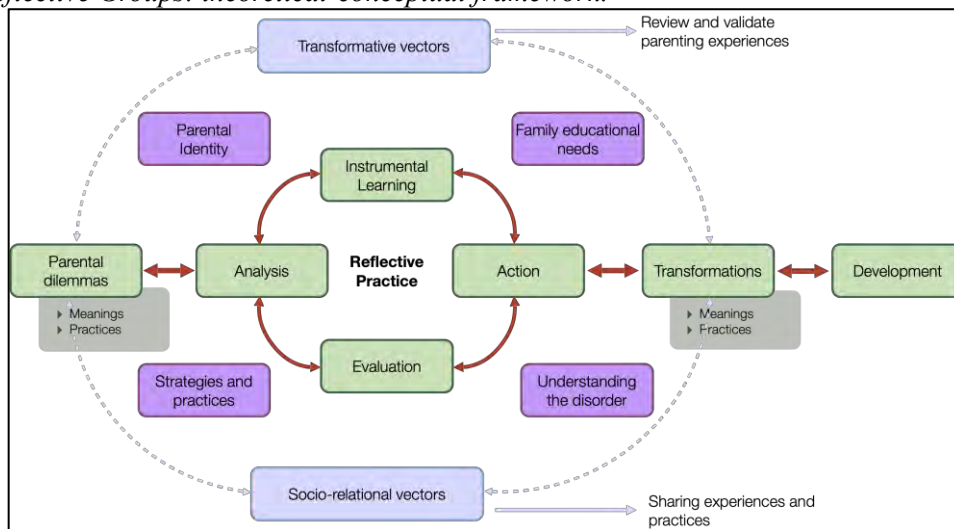
It is also possible to highlight other types of interventions, aimed at modifying and enhancing the meanings and experiences of parents, through a parent education based on transformative learning theory (First & Way, 1995; Mezirow, 1991, 2000; Taylor & Hill, 2016; To et al., 2013). Such interventions are shaped through the principles of adult learning: in this framework, knowledge and practices are co-constructed through dialogue, discussion, and critical reflection.

From this perspective, the family issues related to children with ADHD do not present themselves as well-formulated structures, solvable through certain solutions, but rather represent a complex interplay of factors, often tacit, influencing participants’ horizon of expectations.

### Parental Reflective Groups: Methodological and Operational Dimension

The enhancement of parents’ experiences and needs through a transformative approach to family education constitutes the theoretical-methodological basis for the definition of Parental Reflective Groups (Figure 1) (PRGs) (Bullegas & Mura, 2023; Mura & Bullegas, 2021). Within a participatory action-research framework, the PRGs are aimed at promoting critical reflection on the frames of reference and parenting practices.

**Figure 1**  
*Parental Reflective Groups: theoretical-conceptual framework.*



Based on these considerations, the research is aimed at investigating the transformative impact of PRGs which involved twenty parents of children with ADHD. In this context, the families participated in an educational program consisting of twelve sessions, each lasting approximately two hours, spanning a total of six months.

The program was focused on significant topics and issues for the participants, including parental identity, parenting skills, understanding of the disorder, parent-child relationship, discipline, self-regulated strategies and more. Through group discussions and experiential activities, parents were encouraged to share their daily experiences and explore solutions to the challenges they encountered.

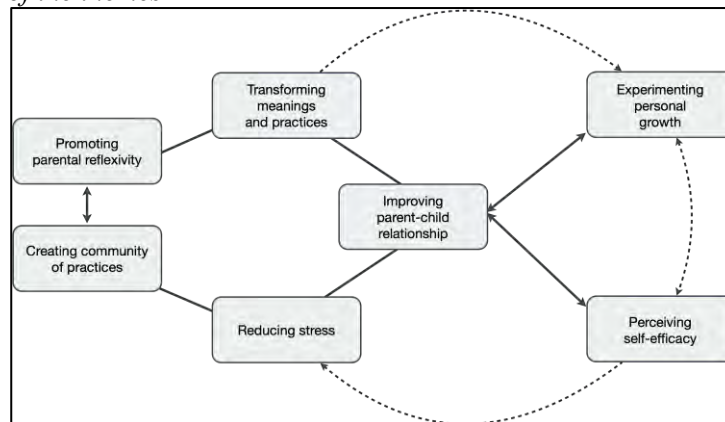
Data collection for this study involved: 1) before-training interviews to collect needs, perceptions, and parenting experiences about ADHD; 2) after-training interviews to investigate the transformative impact on the frames of reference and educational practices used by the parents. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed *ad verbatim*, with codes used instead of sensitive data. A Thematic Analysis was conducted on the transcripts, enabling a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the parent’s point of view on the training intervention (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

### Learning and Changing through Parental Reflective Groups

The thematic analysis of the interviews allowed the elaboration of some themes, which describe a transformative dynamic in the parents who participated in the PRG: 1) *promoting parental reflexivity*; 2) *transforming meanings and practices*; 3) *creating community of practice*; 4) *reducing stress*; 5) *improving parent-child relationship*; 6) *perceiving self-efficacy*; 7) *experimenting personal growth* (fig. 2).

**Figure 2**

*Visual representation of the themes*



Findings highlight the transformative impact of Parenting Reflection Groups. Participants reported a profound transformation in their frame of references (e.g. about ADHD, discipline, challenging behavior, parental belief, etc.) and educational practices. This has contributed to enhancing their sense of efficacy and competence, fostering a positive dynamic of personal and familial well-being. Furthermore, parents observed a reduction in stressful situations, which positively affected their relationships with their children, allowing them to experience a path of personal growth.

## Conclusion

This paper sought to determine whether the use of transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000), in a parent education class could change the meaning perspective and educational practices of the participants.

Parental Reflective Groups appear to be a mode of intervention to support participants in a transformative process of personal and family empowerment. Through the PRGs, parents reported not only an enhancement in their understanding of ADHD and an improvement in parent-child relationships but also a profound personal growth and increased sense of self-efficacy. These outcomes underscore the potential of reflective practices in parent education not only to address the educative challenges of managing ADHD but also to foster a supportive community that enhances the overall resilience and functionality of families.

This study also contributes to extend the research on transformative learning as a useful framework for parental education. This is an evolving area of research that requires additional empirical exploration to further validate the range of educational interventions aimed at supporting families dealing with ADHD.

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# **Influences of Transformative Multiple Language Learning and Use on Changing the Ways of Seeing and Being in the World**

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**Abstract:** How do plurilingual people see themselves as plurilingual speakers and in what ways might their relationships with other people change due to their knowledge of multiple languages and exposure to other cultures? Can practicing plurilingualism lead to transformative experiences and expanded worldviews? In this paper, I explore the application of Mezirow's transformative learning theory (TLT) in relation to Illeris's conceptualization of identity and the role of emotions, brought into play by Dirkx, Mälkki and other TL- focused scholars, to plurilingual participants' experiences of learning and using their languages immersed in other cultures. I draw on TLT and the plurilingual approach as it was conceptualized in 1996 by the Council of Europe. My research of plurilingual TL experiences is rooted in social constructionism. Methodologically, I conducted a narrative inquiry following Clandinin and Connelly. My analysis of focus groups/interviews and memoirs co-generated by my participants and me consisted of Fraser's narrative analysis and Braun & Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis, tools for uncovering common and unique themes. I outline how plurilingualism transformed adult plurilinguals' relationships with others, increased their agency and enlarged their sense of openness towards other cultures. My findings may offer language teachers and learners insights in relation to working with plurilinguals and the transformative potential of plurilingualism.

**Key Words:** Plurilingualism, Transformative learning, Agency, Openness, Relationships

## **Theoretical Background**

My research explored the relationship between plurilingualism and transformative learning by exploring the experiences of those who have learned, know and use multiple languages. The research I undertook is epistemologically rooted in social constructionism. Social constructionists (Burr, 1995; Schwandt, 2003; William & Schwartz, 2020) claim that what we know and how we came to know it is socially constructed. Theoretically, my research of plurilinguals' TL experiences is grounded in Mezirow's (1978, 1991, 1994, 2000) TLT, enriched by the voices of scholars who recognized the importance of emotions in the transformations including Dirkx (2008), Mälkki and Green (2018), Mälkki (2019), Mälkki and Raami (2022), Butterwick and Lawrence (2023) and their connection to identity (Illeris, 2014). In addition, in this research I draw on the concept of plurilingualism (Council of Europe, 1996, 2001, 2018) which, in contrast to multilingualism, accentuates the idea of "a person, viewed as a social agent, [who] has proficiency of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures" (Council of Europe, 2001, p.168). TLT is nevertheless the most crucial concept in my work due to its emphasis on critical reflection's transformative potential, helping the learner reassess their seeing, knowing, feeling, and acting in the world.

## **Different Views of Transformations**

Although Mezirow focused on the cognitive, rational dimension, other scholars including Dirkx (2008), Taylor (2009), Mälkki (2019) and Illeris (2014), recommended increasing attention to the emotional dimension and identity transformation. Jack Mezirow (1978) claimed that perspective transformation, which changes an individual's system of values and results in a change of behavior leading to different actions, is only possible in adulthood. Conversely, Robert Kegan (1979) in his theory of constructive-developmental psychology, viewed transformation as an epistemological shift towards more complex meaning-making which enables critical reflection and autonomous thinking that can span across an individual's life.

Illeris (2014) in his study of identity confirmed that a person starts to be capable of engaging in a critical reflection since youth. In further development of TLT, Mezirow (1995) stressed an important role of the relationships in TL. Taylor (2000) added that it is through relationships that learners increase their level of openness and boost their confidence to use their emotions appropriately and thus catalyze their transformation. Moreover, the catalyst can exist in the form of a transformative moment or a period of time. This more holistic view of TL, as cognitive, affective, social, and related to identity change, is the one I draw on in my work.

## **Defining Plurilingualism and Connecting it to Transformative Learning Theory**

According to Piccardo (2017), the widely used term multilingualism does not fully encompass the complexity of increasing linguistic and cultural diversity. Therefore, the construct of plurilingualism that addresses the intricacy of language learning/teaching and use (Council of Europe, 1996, 2001; Coste et al., 1997/2009) has been introduced. Considering numerous definitions of plurilingualism, I selected the one that clearly outlines the difference between plurilingualism and multilingualism:

Plurilingualism differs from multilingualism (the simple addition of languages in societies and/or individuals) in that it focuses on the relationships between the languages an individual speaks, the underlying linguistic mechanisms and cultural connotations, the personal linguistic and cultural trajectory as well as the persons' attitude toward language diversity, stressing openness, curiosity, and flexibility. (Piccardo, 2017, p.2)

Focusing on teachers rather than language learners, Galante & Dela Cruz (2024) defined plurilingualism as “an inclusive language teaching approach to sustain multilingual societies “ (p.2). While transformative journeys of language learners have been captured in the literature to some extent (Pavlenko, 2006; Obojska, 2019, Galante, 2019, 2020; dela Cruz & Galante, 2021), these studies focused on identities of plurilinguals, depicted either in study abroad trips or service-learning environments, and did not fully capture the transformative complexities taking place in minds of adult plurilinguals, reflected in the changes of their relationships with other people.

My study of adult plurilinguals' transformative experiences links TLT with plurilingualism and helps to fill a gap in TL literature related to how language learning and use may lead to identity changes, transformations of relationships with others and changes in worldviews. Equally, the study represents enrichment of the field of plurilingualism by connecting it to TLT and outlining how plurilingual experiences can be transformative.

## Methodology

Methodologically, I examined nine adult plurilingual participants' accounts of transformative learning (TL) experiences through an overarching methodology of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2019). For my analysis, I used Fraser's (2004) narrative approach to narrative inquiry (*the how and why*) of the participants' experience and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) (*the what*) of the plurilinguals' experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe narrative inquiry as a way of understanding experience:

It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that made up people's lives, both individual and social (p. 20).

First, I sent the participants two transformative language learning memoirs authored by me as prompts for a) a preparation for the focus groups/interviews and b) to initiate the process of thinking about their own memoirs. After the focus groups/interviews, I asked the participants to write their own memoirs with the focus being on their transformative moments or periods of time that provoked in them changes in relation to themselves, their relationships with others or their worldviews. I conducted the focus groups/interviews over a period of two months in 2022. I generated the participants' stories using several data sources; however, for the purpose of this paper, I used predominantly excerpts from the plurilinguals' memoirs. By giving the participants the opportunity to express themselves in a language of their choice (in the case that these languages were in my language repertoire, i.e., English, Slovak, Russian and Spanish), I researched multilingually (Holmes et al, 2013). This means that the plurilingual participants had an opportunity to express themselves reflexively in a language of their choice through both writing memoirs and discussing their experiences in focus groups/interviews which I later translated myself in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of the participants' plurilingual journeys.

## Findings

Through my study findings, I was able to reconcile the differences among the views of Kegan (1979), Illeris (2014) and Mezirow (1978) regarding the time of occurrence of transformations since the research participants presented transformative experiences that happened both in childhood (early youth) and adulthood, confirming that they can indeed occur in both childhood and adulthood. In the next few excerpts, I exemplify how participants transformed their relationships with others and expanded their worldviews.

First, I provide an example of transformation in youth that Marie Rose<sup>1</sup>, one of the participants, experienced as a result of being shamed by Slovak children in Slovakia for speaking her first language, Hungarian:

“All of these negative childhood memories that were directly connected to the language I spoke and identified myself with have left a very strong trail in me, as I realized that the reaction of the outside world was directed at nothing less than my mother tongue, which happened to be different from the majority of the population. Thus, at an early childhood stage, I was forced to realize how speaking more languages could also bring about negativity in the people for whatever reasons. This perception has later formed my way of thinking and it has literally

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<sup>1</sup> All the participants chose their own pseudonyms which I respected and used for their respective excerpts.

transformed my being towards becoming an open-minded, tolerant and hungry-to-learn-languages person.” (Marie Rose, memoir).

This excerpt shows that despite her negative transformative moment, Marie Rose activated in herself a desire to better understand others, have an open mind and learn more languages. Through Marie Rose’s *agency*, she opened herself toward more *acceptance* of others.

In the next example of Fabyan, the transformation took place in adulthood. Fabyan described her transformation after an internship where she, as a speaker of Slovak as a second language (Hungarian was her first language), was treated by a Slovak colleague with kindness and patience which left a long-lasting impression on her that resulted in her own change as a human being:

Beriem väčší ohľad na to, že každý má svoje tempo, som trpezlivejšia a neposudzujem nikoho podľa seba. Neočakávam výkon za taký čas, za aký to viem urobiť ja, ale dávam každému priestor na realizáciu. Ak by som nepotrebovala čas a priestor pri učení sa cudzieho jazyka, určite by som mala menej porozumenia k tomu, že na učenie sa je potrebný jednak čas, ale aj pomoc mentora/učiteľa. Som pyšná na seba, nie preto, že som sa naučila cudzí jazyk, ale preto, že som sa naučila vážiť ochotu učiť sa a nevzdávať sa pri prvých ťažkostiach a akceptovať nedokonalosť tak u iných ako u seba.

(Fabyan, memoir, Slovak original)

*I’m more aware that everyone has a certain pace; I’m more patient and I don’t compare anyone to myself. I don’t expect others to do things as fast as me; I give everyone their time for self-realization. If I didn’t need time and space when learning another language, I’d definitely have less understanding for other people needing time as well as help from a mentor/teacher when they’re learning. I’m proud of myself, not because I learned another language, but because I learned to appreciate willingness to learn and not give up when difficulties arrive and accept the imperfection of others and of my own.*

(Fabyan, memoir, my translation.)

This excerpt demonstrates a transformation of Fabyan toward *openness*, into a more patient person who appreciated everyone’s individual requirements, needs, and pace, which makes her a more accepting human being.

As a result of her moving to Mexico due to marrying her Mexican husband, Lucia experienced a turbulent period of time of inability to find a job due to her limited command of Spanish. She had gone through hundreds of interviews hoping to find an opportunity with an international firm, however, without success, which resulted in a transformative period marked by anger, disappointment and disillusion. After mastering Spanish Lucia realized that the new language provided her with an opportunity to better connect with others. She even provided two versions of her memoirs, English and Spanish, in the order that they are presented here:

This experience has enriched me with knowledge of how important the ability to speak the language of the country where you live is. Knowledge of the language allows me a better understanding of the culture, local mentality, humor, way of thinking and connecting with people on another, mental level. If you want to live in another country, learn their language - although not perfectly. (Lucia, memoir, English original, p.2)

Esta experiencia me enriqueció con conocimiento de la importancia de la capacidad de hablar la lengua del país donde vives. El conocimiento de la lengua me ofrece una

apreciación de la cultura, mentalidad y el humor, el modo de pensar y conectarse con la gente en el otro, el nivel mental. Si quieres vivir en otro país, aprenda la lengua - aunque no perfectamente. (Lucia, memoir, Spanish original, p.2)

These two excerpts demonstrate a transformation toward *acceptance of others, better connection with them* and *lifelong learning* that resulted from overcoming an extremely difficult period of time in Lucia's life: moving to another country, the language of which she understood only at an elementary level and her inability to find a job or communicate. Lucia exited from this experience as a person enriched not only by her improved knowledge of Spanish but also of Mexican culture, which enabled her to connect with people on another, more meaningful, empathetic level.

Another participant Baruch, a former Russian citizen who had been living in Canada for almost ten years, experienced a transformative moment during his chaotic trip to Russia. Due to his insufficient planning, he ended up having an unplanned stopover in Finland. Upon his return to Canada, he reflected on how much he had changed since he left Russia:

Вернувшись в Канаду, я попробовал осмыслить, что произошло в течении моего путешествия. Я понял некоторые вещи. Я понял, что с моим английским, умением общаться и новыми личными качествами, я стал канадцем более чем я думал. Язык стал первопричиной моей трансформации. Именно поэтому, после моего путешествия я решил учить испанский, а в последствии и японский языки. С помощью общения я могу продолжать общаться с людьми и изменять самого себя. (Baruch, memoir, Russian original p. 2).

After returning to Canada, I reflected on my trip and realized that I became more Canadian with soft skills, communication style, and English than I thought. The language was the cornerstone of my transformation. That is why after my travels, I decided to learn Spanish and now Japanese. With the ability to communicate, I can continue my transformation and connect with people and change myself. (Baruch, memoir, English original p. 2)

Both these excerpts are originally written by Baruch: one in Russian and another one in English, based on his own desire to express himself in both languages. He stated that by moving to Canada, he embodied certain ways of living and communicating, and he attributed the impetus of this transformation to language. Language *widened his perspectives* and enabled him to communicate better with others and embark on *lifelong learning*.

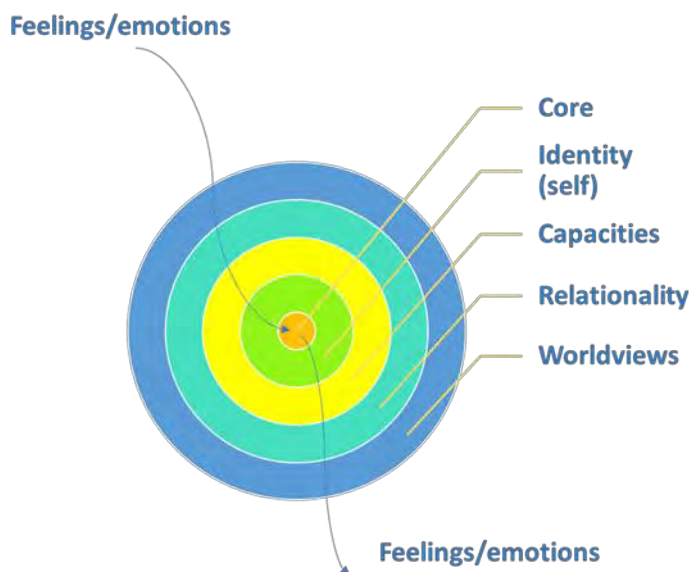
The main theme co-generated by the participants of the research and me in regards to relationships was *changes in the relationships of those who know and use multiple languages*. The subthemes within this theme were: improved understanding of others, forming friends easier and decreased judgment. The largest subtheme of them all was improved relationships with others which is represented in the four selected extracts out of which Marie Rose demonstrates most evidently agency, Fabyan openness, Lucia acceptance, and Baruch widened perspectives.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The most valuable contribution of this research is that all the plurilingual participants orally confirmed, and through their written stories demonstrated experiencing, transformation through knowledge and use of their languages and exposure to multiple cultures which resulted

in their expanded worldviews and different perspectives that opened their minds, increased their level of curiosity, understanding and empathy for other people (see Figure 1).

In Figure 1, identity represents state of being which is fluid and always changing depending on influences – i.e., reflecting their agency. Capacities are, for example, lifelong learning, analytical skills, and creativity. Relationality is represented by connectedness, belonging, pride, and empathy. Among worldviews, the participants displayed widened perspectives, acceptance, being less judgmental, and openness.



**Figure 1**

*Transformative Language Learning Experiences Impacts on Identity*

Most participants declared that in their relationships with other people they became more cognizant of other people’s emotions and feelings, and more interested in their worldviews and opinions. They also developed further desire for authenticity, empathy, and true human connection. Some participants wished to communicate more clearly, taking into consideration the needs of their communication partners. Several participants developed a strong sense of agency, felt compelled to better understand the history of other countries; some discovered the necessity of helping others or developed interest in mentoring others. Through the research I conducted, I confirmed that people can experience transformations in the process of learning and use of multiple languages and exposure to various cultures which was demonstrated in the participants’ increased pride, self-confidence, decreased judgment, and widened world perspectives.

Novel findings may offer useful tools for parents, language learners, teachers, and future researchers. The findings from my study might offer parents, language learners, teachers, policy makers, and future scholars, tools to navigate differently plurilingual learners’ journeys at home, at schools and other educational institutions, and in academia. This may also enable plurilingual people to freely select the language most accessible at the situation and use it comfortably in that particular moment, in order to develop relationships with themselves, other people and the world they live in.

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# **How White is Our Research? Whiteness as a Distorted Implicit in Educational Researchers' Knowledge Construction Processes**

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**Key Words:** Whiteness, Transformative Learning, Educational Research, Distortions

## **Introduction**

Internationally, the field of adult education has been informed by numerous empirical studies that use Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) to promote intervention models that foster students and adult educators' cognitive shifts around the meaning of whiteness and white privileges (e.g., Grayman-Simpson, Doucet & Burgos-López, 2019). In general, these studies show how critical reflection processes help people “to become aware of what it means to be white and examine how the white identity operates in everyday situations and practices “ (Brookfield, 2020, p.120). Less attention seems to be paid to empirical works that explore how elements of whiteness influence the assumptions that guide thoughts and actions of “official “ producers of knowledge: adult education scholars. Accordingly, it seemed interesting to analyze whether, how, and to what extent the whiteness perspective is embedded in the worldviews that guide adult education scholars' research practices. Building on that family of studies that apply the constructs of TLT to understand how the white perspective is constructed and deconstructed, the paper aims to contribute to the debate on research and practice in the field of adult education by exploring:

- Which aspects of whiteness should be overseen during knowledge construction processes;
- What elements may come up during research practices that can foster learning processes and help uncover and critically evaluate assumptions about whiteness.

## **Theoretical Framework**

TLT (Mezirow, 1991) has provided theoretical foundations for explaining how individuals learn to interpret the world are influenced by the social context in which they grow up. These processes are declined through the constructs of meaning perspectives and distorted assumptions. More specifically, the value systems, norms, and expectations circulating in the environments and communities to which people belong are assimilated uncritically as a result of the socialization processes we activate from the earliest years of life.

Brookfield (2020a) recognizes TLT as one of the most significant sources to analyze how the white perspective influences the way adults interpret the reality around them. The white perspective refers to the worldview that the West has created through discourses and practices that have produced the system of distorted cognitive categories, representations, and imaginaries that functionally define Western culture as a hegemonic cultural model (Mills, 1997; Feagin, 2020; Bonilla-Silva, 2014). According to the author, it is among the forms of dominant ideology that circulate within societies and determine how people learn (Brookfield, 2020a).

Following in this line of thought, Fabbri and Melacarne's (2023) understanding of transformative learning processes that are activated in multiethnic everyday life contexts, the

white point of view can be interpreted as a form of pre-critical thinking, deeply influenced by distorted assumptions, which is not followed by the activation of reflection processes on experience (Fabbri & Bracci, 2021). This is because “becoming aware of how whiteness has inscribed itself on one’s consciousness is an example of highly complex systemic reflection “ (Brookfield, 2020a, pp. 118-119) given the reified nature of ideologies, which appear as taken for granted, and consequently difficult to recognize and inquire (Cranton, 2006; Brookfield, 2020a).

Based on these assumptions, it is possible to argue that this worldview also operates within scholarly communities in the field of adult education (Brookfield, 2020b; Paxton, 2010). Numerous scholars, coming from multiple areas of interest, have sought to underline the limitations of white epistemologies (e.g., preservation of rational onto-epistemologies, use of a dichotomous gaze, pursuit of objectivity and linearity, emphasis on macrostructures, emphasis on self-reflexive individualism). However, these components persist as the dominant paradigm. Their constant saturation of the space of knowledge reminds us how difficult it is to question the white perspective. Due to the significant cognitive and emotional effort involved in probing white assumptions, people often refuse to think critically about this perspective and thus fail to challenge a reductive, inadequate, and unfair system of knowledge production (Brookfield, 2020a).

### **Research Questions and Methodology**

The study is guided by three research questions:

- What interpretive categories are used by researchers to conceptualize their knowledge production processes?
- How do researchers acknowledge the effects of white perspective on their research practices?
- What aspects or events, occurred during research practices, led to the recognition of the possibility of conducting research based on white assumptions?

The methodological path will be informed by constructs pertaining to TLT and Brookfield’s (2020a), Feagin’s (2020), and Bonilla-Silva’s (2014) elaborations and systematizations of the white perspective. Data will be collected using narrative approaches and semistructured interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) with scholars engaged in the field of adult education in the Italian context (N=20, expected number) to investigate theoretical and methodological aspects, disorienting dilemmas and critical incidents related to research processes. The text corpus will be analyzed using thematic analysis (Creswell, 2012).

Following Michael’s (2015) suggestion, it is important to highlight that this study is not designed to denounce how researchers perpetuate racist practices and make judgments. As researchers who have begun to become aware of their white views rather than intentions, what we are interested in are the processes of knowledge production activated through scientific research, which are likely to be distorted, less open, and less representative of reality.

### **Early Findings**

The research is still ongoing. This section briefly summarizes some results and insights from the first interviews.

The data analysis points out an articulated frame of the ways in which scholars recognize the effects that whiteness has on their research practices. For example, most of them do not thematize these effects, grounding their worldviews in abstract liberalistic assumptions (Bonilla-

Silva, 2014) (*I have no borders in my mind, I do not recognize the nation-state. For me, the earth is round*). Others seem to have gained a certain level of awareness about how adopting universalist interpretations leads to distorted interpretations of their research data (*Perhaps my interpretation is a little different if I read the behaviors of that community not using our Western filters. It is a little different than dismissing that society as dedicated to exploitation, maybe they behave that way because there are different connections [...] we should also reflect on the concepts of right and wrong*) and how white privilege operates in research contexts (*When I went to Cameroon for research, in some contexts I was the only white person. I tried to see if I could feel the same way, but I could not because I always turn out to be a privileged white woman in a context that is not my life context, but I am treated like a princess*). The data seem to indicate that encountering challenging perspectives (e.g., studying non-Western authors or encountering the viewpoints of colleagues with different cultural backgrounds) plays a role in the acquisition of these levels of awareness.

While this is still an unsystematized frame, the study is beginning to emphasize dimensions related to epistemological distortions and disorienting encounters that may contribute to the ongoing debate.

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# Embracing Transformative Learning in Teacher Education: The Challenge of Italian Teaching and Learning Centers

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**Abstract:** This proposal explores the influence of transformative learning on adult education, particularly in the context of teacher education, and its integration into the emerging role of Teaching and Learning Centers (TLCs) within Italian universities. In the context of Italy's educational reforms, driven by the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRP), the imperative to transform teacher education in Italy comes to the fore. The establishment of TLCs within universities, as mandated by Law No. 79/2022, represents a crucial step towards comprehensive teacher development. TLCs are pivotal in fostering environments where transformative learning principles thrive. In this context, the pedagogical approach of transformative learning has the potential to challenge conventional teaching methods and promote critical thinking, empathy and self-reflection. Through the lens of Mezirow's theories, this paper examines the complex dynamics of adult learning, where skill acquisition is intertwined with personal growth and worldview reconstruction. Critical self-reflection is at the heart of this process, driving an authentic transformation of perspectives. This transformation could play a central role in the implementation of the Italian teacher education reforms and in the activities of TLCs.

**Key Words:** Teacher Education, Teaching and Learning Center, Italian Reforms

## Introduction

Integrating the main concept of transformative learning in teacher education represents a significant shift toward creating a more adaptable, reflective, and empowered generation of educators and learners (Javed, 2023). This educational paradigm is based on key points of critical thinking, self-reflection, and empathy, challenging traditional methods of knowledge transmission and promoting holistic development beyond academic achievement (Hobson and Welbourne, 1998; Mezirow, 1996). In today's rapidly changing and complex world, it is crucial for educational systems to adapt and adopt transformative practices. This contribution explores the relationship between transformative learning and teacher education, with a focus on recent reforms characterizing the Italian landscape and the development of university Teaching and Learning Centers (TLCs) (Wright, 2023; Kloos et al., 2021; Duckworth & Smith, 2019; Clark and Saulnier, 2010).

Law no. 79/2022 is a significant innovation in the Italian educational landscape, especially concerning the training, initial and continuous development of secondary school teachers. This law demonstrates Italy's dedication to improving the quality of education by supporting educators who bring more than just subject matter expertise to the classroom. The legislation underlines the importance of teachers fostering learning environments that encourage critical thinking and innovative problem solving among students. Also the National Recovery

and Resilience Plan (PNRR) has focused on Teaching and Learning Centers (TLCs) as a key component of the new educational scenario. These Centers are envisioned as hubs for developing and disseminating educational innovation and transformative learning practices. TLCs aim to support educators in enhancing their teaching methodologies, promoting deeper and more meaningful exploration of the material. The establishment of TLCs highlights the objective of institutionalizing transformative learning, which not only imparts knowledge but also prompts critical reflection on assumptions and beliefs by both students and teachers. This prepares students to adapt and respond creatively to the complexities of the contemporary world. The recent reforms reflect a holistic approach to education, with a focus on developing well-rounded individuals equipped with the cognitive tools necessary for lifelong learning, critical inquiry, and innovation. Within this environment, Italy aims to create an educational system that is responsive to the needs of society, capable of fostering the intellectual and personal growth of students, and supportive of teachers in their professional journeys through the enhancement of TLCs and the principles embedded in the reform.

Transformative learning involves a thorough examination of an individual's beliefs, values, and assumptions, enabling them to adapt to new paradigms and challenges. Learners engage in reflective discourse, question preconceived notions, and embrace the vulnerability of not knowing. The role of teachers in this transformative journey is crucial. Creating intellectually stimulating and emotionally supportive spaces can inspire students to begin their journey of self-discovery and transformation (Cunliffe, Easterby & Smith, 2017).

This article explores the method of transformative learning and illustrates how its principles can be effectively applied in the context of adult education and teacher development. Furthermore, this paper explores the potential of learning through the lens of Italy's recent educational reforms and the strategic deployment of TLCs. The aim is to provide a way forward that empowers teachers and learners to navigate the complexities of today's world with confidence and purpose.

### **The Italian Case of Teacher's Education and the Role of Teaching and Learning Centers**

In the current fast-paced educational environment, it is more important than ever to provide teachers with the necessary skills. This is because technology has been integrated into teaching, curricula are constantly evolving, and classrooms are becoming more diverse. Teachers need to be able to differentiate education, promote emotional and social learning, and encourage critical thinking and problem solving in students. In addition, it is crucial for teachers to embrace lifelong learning, continuously updating their knowledge and skills. Meeting these needs necessitates thorough training and ongoing professional development (Odell, et. al., 2020; Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012). Given this, it is increasingly important to promote teacher education that focuses on the principles of transformative learning. This will ensure that teachers, both current and future, pay attention not only to their cognitive processes (i.e. how they reflect), but also to the content of their thinking (i.e. what they reflect on), the goals of their thinking (i.e. why they reflect), and how their thinking influences their teaching practice in the classroom (i.e. what transformative learning they experience) (Liu, 2015).

This approach aims to create environments of open inquiry and mutual respect that encourage students to evaluate their surroundings critically, challenge prevailing norms, and participate in actions that promote the well-being of society. It embodies a comprehensive educational philosophy that values diversity and equity and empowers students as agents of

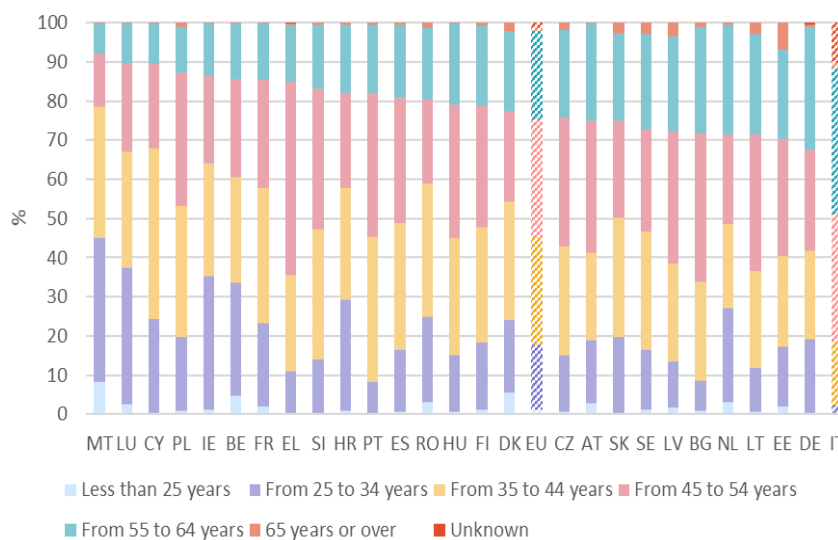
change. The recent education reforms in Italy and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) provisions demonstrate the country's commitment to revitalizing teacher education. These legislative and policy measures are a strategic response to the demand for an education system that offers students high-level academic preparation and empowers them, as future teachers, to positively impact a rapidly changing world.

### Teacher Education in Italy: a recent overview

The debate around initial secondary teacher education policy has been at the center of attention in recent years, not only in Italy (Bertagna & Magni, 2022; Morandi, 2021; Magni, 2019), but also in the European (European Commission, 2021) and international arenas (Madalinska, Michalak et al., 2021; Tatto & Menter, 2019; Murray et al., 2019). These discussions have highlighted the urgent need for significant reforms in the pedagogical, social, and political dimensions of teacher education. Italy's recent efforts, mainly through Law No. 107/2015 and Legislative Decree No. 59/2017, aimed at reforming the teacher education and recruitment system, unfortunately, were not implemented and did not meet expectation. Despite efforts, the Italian education system still needs to overcome significant challenges. For instance, the teaching workforce is progressively aging, with Italy having Europe's oldest secondary school teachers. Furthermore, there is a need for more teachers, particularly in STEM fields and certain geographical regions, such as the North area.

**Table 1**

*Figure 1: School teachers (ISCED 1-3) by age group, 2021, Source: Eurostat, UOE.*



As a consequence of these systemic problems, there has been a growing disparity in the quality and availability of education across the country. This is characterized by a surplus of teachers in some regions and subjects, compared to a severe shortage elsewhere.

Against this framework, the Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), as part of the broader Next Generation EU program, represents a promising opportunity. The PNRR aims to combine theoretical studies with practical in-school traineeship experiences, creating clear and high-quality pathways into the teaching profession. Its goal is to rejuvenate the teaching workforce, reduce precarious employment conditions, and forge a strategic alliance between schools and universities. The PNRR initiative aims to address the pedagogical,



organizational, and systemic issues at the heart of Italy's teacher education dilemma (Hansen, 2021).

The educational reform in Italy, encapsulated by the DPCM on August 4, 2023, represents a change in the landscape of initial and continuous secondary teacher education. The reform combines the principles of transformative learning with the urgent need for systemic changes identified in both national and international discussions. By integrating 60 ECTS in anthropological, psychological, pedagogical, methodological, and didactic disciplines, including 20 dedicated to in-school traineeships, this reform aims to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. The goal is to ensure that future educators are not only expert in what they study and teach, but also able to create environments that foster critical thinking, innovation, and empathy. The establishment of Teaching and Learning Centers supports this approach, as demonstrated in the following section. These Centers coordinate training activities for future teachers within the university and through collaboration between schools and universities. They also provide mentoring and tutoring led by experienced teachers (Klein 2022; Fabbri, Bracci & Romano 2021; Duckworth & Smith 2019).

Furthermore, the initiative reflects a profound commitment to transforming the educational experience, aligning with the transformative learning paradigm that emphasizes self-reflection, critical inquiry, and the dynamic interplay between personal transformation and collective experience. The reform's multifaceted objectives mirror the transformative learning goals of developing teachers who are reflective, informed, and capable of fostering transformative experiences for their students (Mezirow 2018; Dirkx 2018; Illeris 2014).

By creating a strategic alliance between schools and universities, this reform offers a unique opportunity to address pedagogical, organizational, and systemic issues at the heart of Italy's teacher education system, aiming to cultivate a more informed, reflective, and adaptive society where education acts as a conduit for transformative change.

### **The role of Teaching and Learning Centers**

In this scenario, universities have the potential to implement transformative learning. However, identifying and implementing such initiatives on campus requires administrative leadership and faculty consensus. A Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) can facilitate and support this transformation by providing pedagogical expertise to identify and evaluate transformative learning initiatives, offering a collaborative forum for implementing these initiatives, and serving as an integrated structure to safeguard the initiatives over time (EUA, 2024; Ableser & Moore, 2018). These centers are positioned at the intersection of interdisciplinary education and research and are designated to lead the revision of initial teacher education, among other initiatives. These Centers have several important missions, including coordinating new reform implementations, providing continuous teacher education, promoting teaching innovation and faculty development within universities. By collaborating with schools to conduct research, these centers are envisioned as the nexus of a harmonious alliance between educational theory and practice (Seddon, 2021).

Despite the differences in purpose, structure, and resources depending on the affiliated institutions (Lotti et al., 2022; Neisler, 2022), the main objective of a TLC is to support an environment that prioritizes quality on teaching and learning. TLCs mission is to elevate the academic community as a whole, aiming for educational excellence (Dickens et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2018). TLCs offer various services, such as training and mentoring programs, resource development, and assistance with teaching challenges. They also promote innovation and

continuous pedagogical improvements, supporting a culture of educational excellence (Varma Nelson & Turner, 2017).

Recent studies highlight the significance of acknowledging and valuing teaching excellence as a fundamental aspect of professional advancement (EUA, 2019). Following the guidelines of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA, 2020), higher education institutions are urged to acknowledge and certify the educational, creative, and evaluative competencies of their teaching staff. Additionally, a more comprehensive approach to academic progression is required, which involves more intensive engagement in the continuous professional development of lecturers, doctoral students, and young scholars (Troelsen, 2021).

TLCs prioritizes both teachers and students in its mission, fostering an inclusive and motivating educational atmosphere that treats both groups as complete individuals working together as one. TLCs encourages students to actively engage in their own education and training, recognizing the value of involving the whole person in the learning journey to go beyond routine learning (Bertagna, 2020).

This approach embodies the transformative learning framework, which emphasizes critical thinking, self-reflection, and questioning of existing beliefs and assumptions. By promoting environments that encourage these practices, TLC supports the development of educators who not only impart knowledge but also facilitate profound personal and social change.

The establishment of Teaching and Learning Center within the teacher education reform framework in Italy is a strategic move to embed transformative learning principles at the core of teacher preparation. TLCs create a supportive and intellectually stimulating environment that connects theory to practice. This approach not only addresses the immediate needs of competent and reflective teachers but also establishes the groundwork for a more adaptive, responsive, and socially aware education system. The Italian educational reform aims to develop educators who can navigate the complexities of the contemporary world and lead transformative experiences that will shape the future of education.

### **Conclusion**

Educators and teachers can challenge students to question preconceived notions, embrace uncertainty, and engage in open dialogue by creating a supportive and intellectually stimulating environment. Incorporating real-world issues and interdisciplinary methods enhances the significance and practicality of transformative education, enabling students to address intricate problems with creativity and flexibility (Dirkx, 2008; Cranton, 2002).

Gaining skills and other practical forms of knowledge often intersects with deeper processes of naming, contemplating, and reshaping aspects of adult experiences. Acquiring specific vocational skills or keeping up-to-date with professional developments can provide opportunities for redefining, contemplating, and reshaping one's self-conception and interaction with the world. Changes in perspective can manifest in two ways, each tied to new systems of meaning.

Firstly, changes can smoothly transpire through the buildup or interconnection of shifts within established frameworks of understanding (Mezirow, 1985). In this scenario, an educator might undergo a shift in perspective after experiencing a sequence of modifications in their conceptual frameworks or “the amalgam of ideas, convictions, evaluations, and emotions that constitute a particular worldview “ (Mezirow, 1994, p. 223).

Secondly, a shift in perspective might be a profound and demanding journey (Mezirow, 1985, p. 24), requiring an extensive and critical reassessment of one's self and belief systems. For example, teachers could critically reassess their views on the use of technology in primary or secondary education, leading to a recognition that their former beliefs are outdated (indicative of reflective learning within conceptual frameworks). Trained teachers create students aware of social injustices, environmental challenges and systemic inequalities, they are inspired to become agents of transformation themselves.

In the context of recent educational reforms in Italy the call for a common embrace of transformative learning principles becomes even more resonant. These reforms, aimed at revitalizing teacher education and establishing Teaching and Learning Centers, underscore the critical role of well-prepared teachers in actualizing the vision of transformative education. It is through their guidance, insight, and dedication that students are inspired to explore, question, and reconstruct their understanding of the world around them.

The goal is to prepare a new generation of well-trained teachers to meet the complexities and challenges of modern society (Kowalczyk-Walędziak et al. 2023; Menter 2022). As this narrative unfolds, it becomes evident that the success of transformative learning hinges on a collaborative effort that transcends individual educators and institutions. Policymakers, academic leaders, and educational practitioners must unite in their commitment to fostering an educational ecosystem that values and prioritizes transformative learning. This entails continuous investment in teacher development, innovative curriculum design, and the creation of learning environments that encourage open dialogue and critical inquiry. Moreover, it requires a concerted effort to integrate transformative learning principles into the fabric of educational policy and practice, ensuring that they are not merely aspirational ideals but tangible realities that shape the educational experiences of learners.

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# Exploring Addiction Recovery through Hoggan's Metatheoretical Perspective of Transformative Theory: A Comparative Analysis

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**Abstract:** The present study seeks to address the limitations of existing theories on transformative learning by incorporating Hoggan's metatheoretical reinterpretation. The study endeavors to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the intricate nature of addiction recovery. Hoggan's approach emphasizes significant and long-lasting changes in one's worldview, self, epistemology, ontology, behavior, and capacity for change as key indicators of transformative learning. The paper highlights the processual and quality-of-life-oriented aspects of addiction recovery as common themes, and proposes that Hoggan's model offers a transdisciplinary perspective for studying addiction recovery. Furthermore, it suggests that this model can guide adult educators in their efforts to support individuals in recovery.

**Key Words:** Addiction Recovery, Transformative Theory, Comparative Analysis, Transformative Learning, Transdisciplinary Perspective

## Introduction

This contribution aims to investigate addiction recovery from the perspective of transformative theory, as proposed by Hoggan (2016a; 2016b; Hoggan & Finnegan, 2023; Hoggan & Higgin, 2023).

The current debate regarding the etiology of Substance Use Disorder (SUD) is highly active. There are, in fact, various proposals for identifying its causes, contributing factors, progression, and the personal and social components that influence it.

The growth of research on SUD has been accompanied by the evolution of treatment models, culminating in the establishment of the concept of addiction recovery. This process encompasses the individual in their entirety, engaging the personal, relational, and social factors that contribute to their recovery (Dekkers et al., 2021).

The complexity of the addiction recovery process is well illustrated by the difficulty in defining it; nevertheless, the limitation of approaching it solely from a biomedical standpoint, with a focus on therapeutic and pharmacological interventions, is now evident (Hall et al., 2015; Arria & McLellan, 2012; Insel et al., 2010). Therefore, it is necessary to adopt, while incorporating the former, a psychosocial perspective (Ashford et al., 2019; Inanlou et al., 2020).

## The Addiction Recovery Process

The process of addiction recovery has been studied and analyzed by various researchers. According to Brophy et al. (2023), there are several common elements among different definitions of addiction recovery. It is a nonlinear process that focuses on improving the quality of life of individuals, who are recognized as the central figures in setting goals for the recovery process.

Moreover, Okrant et al. (2023) provided an overview of the target domains involved in recovery, which together form the recovery capital of individuals. These domains include personal, social, and contextual dimensions that can influence the outcome of recovery. In the individual domain, the person needs to engage in meaningful activities and establish goals for their life (*Meaning & Purpose*); achieve and maintain psychological well-being, beginning with self-care (*Psychological Well-being*); confront and manage life's problems, including emotional aspects (*Coping and Life Functioning*); manage risk propensity and build a balanced lifestyle (*Recovery Experiences and Risk Behavior*). Other important domains include securing adequate material and housing resources (*Environment, Housing, and Safety*) and exercising one's rights of participation and citizenship (*Community Connectedness*). The pursuit of physical well-being (*Health*), stemming also from maintaining sobriety, is also a crucial part of addiction recovery.

However, it is important to note that addiction recovery is not limited to mere abstinence from substance use, as defined by Wangensteen and Hystad (2022). While prolonged sobriety and abstinence, as well as remission of symptoms, are important indicators, they are not the only metrics for evaluating recovery outcomes. The improvement in the quality of life of individuals is also a crucial factor that should be considered. Kelly et al. (2018) emphasized the importance of considering the biopsychosocial perspective on recovery when evaluating its outcomes.

### **Addiction Recovery as a Transformative Experience**

The literature on addiction recovery alludes to the transformative outcome of this process, often described concerning concepts such as learning; however, explicit references to transformative theory are rare (Dekkers et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2021). This has resulted in a lack of consideration for the conditions and processes that underpin this form of transformative learning, with a predominance of interpretations based on the therapeutic and rehabilitative paradigm. Thus, recently, there have been several attempts to understand the process of addiction recovery through the lens of transformative learning theory.

Jordan, integrating Mezirow's theory (1991) with Illeris' perspective (2014), which posits that transformative learning reshapes an individual's identity, has critiqued the biomedical approach to addiction recovery (Jordan & Walker, 2023; Hall et al., 2015) and developed a model called *Addiction Recovery as Transformative Learning* (Jordan & Bedi, 2022). This model aligns Mezirow's stages of transformative learning with the three stages of recovery identified in the literature (Hitting bottom, Turning point, Maintenance). The transformative learning process, influenced by the socio-contextual dimensions in which it takes place, involves both rational and extra-rational mechanisms (Stuckey et al., 2022), achieved through the individual's narrative reconstruction of their identity.

Hansen, Ganley and Carlucci (2008) attempted to integrate Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross's transtheoretical model (1992) with Mezirow's model, while Moore (2005) made a broader attempt at integration.

Additionally, Hassan (2018) investigated the role of critical reflection, from a transformative perspective, in the recovery process.

However, these contributions often lack a comprehensive theoretical perspective that accounts for the complexity of the recovery process holistically. While Mezirow's theory is frequently referenced in existing literature, some critique it for its narrow focus on cognitive and rational dimensions, overlooking emotional and social aspects.

Transformative theory has experienced significant expansion, allowing for the reconsideration of a wide range of different processes and domains—extra-rational, social, and

spiritual—involved in the transformative process. Hoggan’s meta-theoretical review (Hoggan & Higgins, 2023; Hoggan, 2016a; Hoggan, 2016b) provides an opportunity to overcome the limitations associated with theoretical fragmentation in transformative research. This model considers a wide range of domains involved in the transformative process and proposes criteria for identifying truly transformative learning experiences, facilitating a deeper analysis of addiction recovery as a form of adult learning process.

### **Addiction Recovery: A Transformative Perspective Based on Hoggan’s Meta-Theoretical Analysis**

Hoggan’s meta-theoretical reinterpretation of transformative learning stemmed from the collective observation among researchers that the term “transformative “ had become overly generalized over time, losing its ability to capture the profound impact of individual experiences. Central to Hoggan’s contribution is the advancement of transformative learning as a meta-theory, encompassing the various developments emerging from Mezirow’s initial insights (Hoggan & Higgins, 2023; Hoggan, 2016b; Mezirow, 1978).

Through an extensive analysis of literature on transformative learning, Hoggan (2016a; 2016b) proposed a set of necessary characteristics defining transformative experiences, categorizing transformative learning outcomes into six domains. According to Hoggan, an experience can be deemed transformative if it promotes a change that has a profound impact on the individual (*Depth*), remains stable over time (*Relative stability*), and manifests in multiple areas of life (*Breadth*) (Hoggan, 2016b).

The first domain, called *Worldview*, concerns “a significant shift in [...] understandings of the world and how it works “ (Hoggan, 2016a, p. 69). This category includes changes related to basic assumptions and beliefs, ways of interpreting experience, and the qualitative complexity of one’s worldview, including the acquisition of new forms of awareness.

The second domain of transformation is related to the *Self*. Hoggan distinguishes between a change concerning the self with others and one that involves the identity and personality of learners: they alter how they view themselves, redefining their personal history or acquiring new forms of self-awareness. In this category, Hoggan also includes forms of learning that lead to an increase in the individual’s sense of responsibility and empowerment.

Another possible outcome of transformative experience consists of altering the way individuals acquire and evaluate knowledge (*Epistemology*). This pertains both to the ability to critically reflect on what is learned and to the willingness to use extra-rational means of learning.

Transformative learning can help modify the individual’s affective experience, habitual dispositions, or ways of being, also through the development of particular attributes or characteristics, such as generosity, trust, or integrity (*Ontology*).

The last two domains identified pertain to *Behavior* and the individual’s *Capacity*. The first encompasses actions that the individual undertakes consistently with transformative development (forms of social activism; changes in professional practices; new skills). The latter includes cognitive development, awareness, or spiritual dimension.

While numerous scholars have acknowledged the transformative aspect of addiction recovery, attempts to understand it from this perspective have often been constrained by a narrow focus on cognitive and rational dimensions, neglecting emotional, affective, social, and spiritual aspects. Adopting Hoggan’s transformative learning model offers a coherent theoretical framework focused on learning, within which the addiction recovery process can be situated. At the same time, it allows for consideration of a range of learning outcomes stemming from



transformative learning, relating to the affective, behavioral, and spiritual components of the individual.

For instance, comparing the dimensions of addiction recovery identified in the literature (see: Okrant et al., 2023), with Hoggan's domains of transformative learning reveals important predictors of sustained well-being post-recovery, such as the development of a new sense of purpose (*Meaning & Purpose*) and enhanced community connectedness (Pars et al., 2023). Additionally, research highlights how, in many cases, individuals develop a greater connection with the world around them and their community, significantly reducing feelings of isolation and maximizing, in times of crisis, the available support network (*Community Connectedness*). These changes require that individuals to redefine their worldview, develop new ways of interpreting experience and a different awareness of the world (*Self; Capacity*). Moreover, achieving psychological well-being, coping abilities, and optimal health in recovery necessitates transformative learning that impacts ontological, worldview, and behavioral dimensions.

Furthermore, the promotion of the individual's coping and life functioning abilities can support them in handling the daily challenges in their living environments. Addressing living conditions, economic circumstances (*Environment, Housing and Safety*), recognizing and managing risky behaviors (*Recovery Experience and Risk Behavior*), and maintaining health requires individuals to reassess their perspectives, define their roles in the world, and adopt behaviors conducive to their well-being.

### **Conclusions**

Hoggan's metatheoretical proposal stands out for its interdisciplinary orientation and aims to establish a common terminological and conceptual ground across diverse disciplines, while also nurturing professionals capable of fostering transformative experiences.

The conceptual hypothesis outlined in this contribution outlines a preliminary framework for the development of an addiction recovery model centered on transformative learning. Extensive research has identified dimensions crucial for a successful recovery process and factors predictive of long-term well-being (Banaciu et al., 2023; Okrant et al., 2023; Zemore et al., 2023). From this perspective, the learning outcomes delineated by Hoggan across various domains serve as potential mediators in the addiction recovery journey.

Moving forward, several avenues for further research and exploration emerge. Firstly, as already anticipated by Hoggan himself (2016b, p. 70), there is a need for refinement of the identified outcome categories, with a comprehensive analysis aimed at clearly defining each category and its subdomains. This effort would enable the operationalization of transformative learning outcomes, facilitating research standardization and comparison.

Secondly, it is essential to better define the relationships between the different types of outcomes, determining their structure, relative importance, and interactions with other domains within varying contexts or processes influencing the transformative experience. For instance, changes in worldview or self-understanding should logically correlate with behavioral shifts for credibility.

Additionally, further exploration of Hoggan's proposed criteria for defining transformative experiences — Relative stability, Breadth, and Depth — is warranted. Qualitative examination of outcomes and their nature in individuals' lives is necessary to ascertain the presence of these characteristics.

Regarding this paper's specific contribution, the proposed transformative approach to addiction recovery requires comprehensive field research to assess its potential and validity. The

theoretical framework presented herein serves as a preliminary stage for ongoing research aimed at investigating addiction recovery experiences from a transformative perspective, particularly within therapeutic community settings. This research seeks to understand addiction recovery as a transformative learning process, thereby advancing knowledge in the realm of transformative learning.

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# **Cultural Factors Enhancing Transformative Learning: A Study of Chinese Business Entrepreneurs in a Time of Crisis**

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**Abstract:** This study explores the cultural factors that facilitate transformational learning among educational entrepreneurs in China during the COVID-19 pandemic and a stringent state policy adverse to their business. Through in-depth interviews with 15 participants, questionnaires, and critical incident technique, we identified two crucial cultural factors: metaphorical thinking and historical consciousness. These factors enabled participants to alter their frames of reference and adapt to the crisis through critical reflection and peer conversation. Our findings highlight the significance of cultural factors in fostering transformational learning and resilience in times of crisis.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Cultural Factors, Metaphorical Thinking, Historical Consciousness, Critical Reflection, Peer Conversation

## **Background**

With more than seven years of experience in the field of adult learning and education, the researcher noticed that most prevailing theories in the field are predominantly based on Western scholars' research, which focuses on Western practices and experiences. There is a dearth of highly-regarded articles and theories on transformative learning from Eastern researchers concerning Eastern experiences and culture. The researcher is keenly interested in the distinctive Eastern approaches to transformative learning, particularly those that have been passed down for millennia in countries like China, India, and Turkey. Cultural factors present a significant challenge in transformative learning research as there is a scarcity of comprehensive studies evaluating its extent of influence on one's transformation. It remains a blind spot whether cultural factors directly or indirectly impact transformative learning.

During the researcher's dissertation on Chinese tutoring business leaders' learning and strategic thinking during a crisis, participants frequently referenced the influence of Chinese culture in their approaches to tackling the COVID-19 pandemic and the Double-Reduction Policy. Drawing from ancient Chinese legends, Confucian wisdom, classical texts like the Tao Te Ching, Sun Tzu's strategies, inspiring poetry, and even modern wars between China and Japan, the study was prompted to explore the role of Chinese culture in these business leaders' transformative learning in a time of crisis in his research.

## **Research Questions**

Based on the interview data from the dissertation, this research seeks to further understand the link between Chinese cultural factors and the transformation of business leaders. It will address two primary research questions:

***RQ1: What cultural factors did the business leaders emphasize as instrumental in altering their frames of reference?***

***RQ2: How did the business leaders transform or modify their perspectives under the influence of cultural factors?***

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

### **Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory**

Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (1994, 2000) posits that adult learning involves a deep, structural shift in thinking, feeling, and acting, resulting from critical reflection on experiences. This process involves a transformation of meaning structures, which are the mental frameworks, assumptions, and beliefs that shape our interpretation of experiences. The theory comprises five phases: experiencing, reflecting, conceptualizing, planning, and acting, with critical reflection being a crucial component. Through this process, individuals can modify their meaning structures, leading to personal growth and transformation. Mezirow's theory emphasizes the importance of experience, reflection, and self-awareness in the learning process, making it a significant framework for understanding adult learning and personal development.

### **John Dirkx's Transformative Learning**

John Dirkx's (1998, 2006) conceptualization of transformative learning theory deviates from the traditional cognitive-focused approach by emphasizing the crucial role of emotions, imagination, and inner development in adult learning. He highlights the significance of "soul work" and personal growth, suggesting that transformative learning can lead to profound identity transformations. Dirkx's approach is informed by Jungian theory, and he advocates for exploring the imaginative and spiritual dimensions of transformative learning. This perspective offers a more holistic understanding of adult learning, acknowledging the complex interplay between cognitive, emotional, and spiritual aspects of human experience.

### **Culture and Transformative Learning**

Various scholars have written about transformative learning and ancient Asian educational perspectives. Wang and Torrisi-Steele (2015) discuss how Confucius and Neo-Confucianism shaped Chinese thought and how Western and Chinese educators have different beliefs on transformative learning. Wang and King (2008) also talk about the concept of sagehood and the related quest for sagehood to promote transformative learning in Indian and Chinese learning. Edward Taylor (1994) explores the connection between intercultural competency and transformative learning. He conceptualizes intercultural competency as an adaptive capacity based on an inclusive and integrative worldview that enables individuals to effectively accommodate the demands of living in a host culture. Taylor's transformative learning process involves five stages: setting the stage (learning readiness), cultural disequilibrium, cognitive orientation (reflective/nonreflective), learning strategies (observer, participant, friend), and evolving intercultural identity (change in values and worldview). This process is underpinned by Mezirow's (1994) theory of perspective transformation, which involves critical reflection and a shift in one's perspective. Taylor's work extends our understanding of transformative learning and its application to intercultural competency.

## **Methods**

This research employed a multiple case study approach to explore how cultural factors influenced the business entrepreneurs' transformative learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Double Reduction Policy in education. As defined by Creswell (2014), case study research involves an in-depth examination of a real-life, bounded system over time using multiple sources of information. This exploratory case study aimed to discover how business leaders made sense of the crisis and learned to think strategically. However, it also incorporated elements of descriptive case studies to develop a narrative of the phenomena. The researcher

conducted interviews with business leaders to explore their learning processes, perceptions of the crisis, and learning strategies. This multi-case study design allowed for examining similarities and patterns across different cases, strengthening the validity of emerging theories. Case studies are particularly suitable for research on learning processes (Merriam, 1998), enabling the exploration of complex factors and contexts (Kyburz-Graber, 2004). This study aimed to identify commonalities in business leaders' thinking and the relationship between cultural factors and the leaders' perspective transformation by analyzing data within and across cases.

### **Participants**

This study interviewed 15 business leaders from the tutoring industry, eight from subject-tutoring companies, and seven from non-subject-tutoring companies located in various cities in China. Purposeful sampling, specifically snowball sampling, was employed to select participants with expertise in strategic thinking. The criteria for selection included: (1) current mid-level or top business leaders actively tackling the crisis, and (2) recognition as excellent learner and thinker by other interviewees. The selected participants brought valuable insights and expertise, enabling the researcher to explore the connection between the impact of cultural factors and the business leaders' transformative learning while tackling the crisis.

### **Procedures**

This study employed semi-structured interviews and a focus group to explore how cultural factors influenced the business entrepreneurs' transformative learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Double Reduction Policy in education. The interview protocol was developed based on the research sub-questions, and pilot interviews were conducted to refine the questions and approach. Fifteen business leaders from the tutoring industry were interviewed remotely via Tencent Meeting or Zoom, and the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. A focus group was also conducted with five participants to seek further data and enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings.

The data analysis process began with transcribing and translating the interview data, followed by coding and analysis using Nvivo software. The researcher read and reviewed the data, identifying categories and relationships between leaders' strategies and strategic thinking. Tentative ideas were written, and codes were refined throughout the analysis process. The focus group data was also analyzed using the same procedure, seeking to understand the shared patterns of strategy formulation and learning practices among the participants. By following this procedure, the study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of how business leaders learned to adapt to the crisis under the inspiration of cultural factors.

## **Findings**

### **Metaphorical Thinking**

Metaphorical thinking is a cognitive process that involves making comparisons between seemingly unrelated concepts, revealing hidden connections, and fostering creative and poetic insights (Cuofano, 2022). This mental process connects two distinct universes of meaning, uncovering innovative solutions to problems, objects, or situations. Research by Sloan (2020) highlights the significance of metaphorical thinking in transformative learning and strategy formulation, as executives consistently employed metaphors, such as parables, fables, or allegories, to describe and navigate complex strategic problems, demonstrating the power of metaphorical thinking in strategic thought. Metaphorical thinking includes using metaphors and analogies. Table 1 presents some metaphors used to describe the participants' situation or insights.

**Table 1***Some Participants' Use of Metaphors and Their Implication*

Participant	Example of Metaphor	Implication
A	“A child born in a famine year “	Participant A described spending money and great effort setting up a new campus right before COVID-19 happened. However, she was determined to raise this “child. “
B	“The operation of your organization is just like the functioning of a human body. “	Participant B wanted to emphasize the overall health of a business or an organization. Leaders should consider the good functioning of different sections of an organization.
C	“Be the Spring, don't just be a flower. “	Participant C highlighted the ability to endure hardship in crises. “To be the Spring “ brings you resilience after the cold winter; you also attract different flowers in your platform. However, if you were a flower, you would wither and never come to life again.

Besides metaphors, analogies were another tool that the business leaders used in their learning experience to understand the crises from out-of-the-box perspectives. Analogies are not the same as metaphors. Altair (2022, Sep 6) compares the difference between the two: A metaphor is a visual shorthand that plays on the reader's senses through sounds, images, scents, tastes, images, and touch to make an idea accessible. An analogy works by creating a logical argument comparing two things to make a point. Unlike the poetic figure of speech in a metaphor which lets one thing stand for another figuratively, an analogy aims to explain something.

Both metaphors and analogies create vivid images to illustrate the key learning highlights. They are also accommodating in explaining how people see and understand the world from different and creative perspectives. Table 2 presents some participants' analogies to describe their situation or insights into the crisis.

**Table 2***Some Participants' Use of Analogies and Their Implication*

Participant	Example of Metaphor	Implication
D	“Leaves grow in rainy seasons, while roots grow in dry seasons. “	Participant D emphasized the potential benefits a crisis brings to a company. It helps a company to develop in an invisible and profound way.



E	“If you lose a battle, run away in the direction with fewer enemies. “	Participant E shared the strategy in Sun Tzu’s The Art of War, which is running away if you lose the battle. E wanted to emphasize the importance of being alive and quick reaction in crises.
F	“You need to study the strategy of the head office, including what the head office’s chairman, CEO, and shareholders think, and also consider the external environment they face. “	Participant F thought people become emotional and irrational when they discuss politics. He suggested comparing the Chinese government to an international company, which may help us better understand their stance and policies, for example, the DRP.

### Historical Consciousness

Historical consciousness refers to the awareness and understanding of the historical context and development of a particular concept, idea, or phenomenon. It involves recognizing how the past has shaped the present and how historical events, cultural traditions, and social structures have influenced our beliefs, values, and practices (Gadamer, 2013). Utilizing historical consciousness provides a nuanced understanding of contemporary issues by situating them within their broader historical context. This approach challenges dominant narratives and assumptions, revealing complex dynamics and continuities that inform current challenges. By acknowledging the past’s influence on the present, we can develop a more critically informed perspective, foster empathy and understanding, and navigate complexities with greater insight and wisdom (Popa, 2022).

The first aspect of historical consciousness is the participants’ understanding of ancient Chinese wisdom from Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. The entrepreneurs came up with different quotes referring to the three major philosophical systems while sharing their strategies for dealing with crises. Such quotes provided the entrepreneurs with new perspectives on understanding their situations and relevant solutions.

In Taoism, when Yin goes to an extreme, Yang begins (Participant K).

If I were to do it again, I would persuade the board not to announce the decision in a hurry. I would tell my business partner, we need to deal with it in a Chinese way, the Golden Mean Way— wait for the best timing (Participant F).

The second aspect of historical consciousness is the participants’ use of historical events, especially wars and war strategies in both Ancient and contemporary times. Most of the war stories and thoughts were about struggling against odds and winning over a stronger enemy with persistence and strategies, which inspired the participants to deal with the challenges and enhanced their confidence in a difficult time. China has a long history and such stories are a common part shared by Chinese people.

When Mao Zedong was in his most daunting period in Yan’an (a poor mountainous shelter village for the Communist Party of China), he wrote down his famous philosophy articulating how to win the war against the Japanese invaders; that is, “the more persistently we fight, the more likely we will win the war against the invaders “ (Participant L).

Sun Tzu said, “Of all the 36 strategies, running away alive is one of the best “ (Participant E).

The third aspect of historical consciousness is a deeper understanding of the Chinese political system and its operational patterns. The political system in China is complex and sophisticated under the profound influence of communism, capitalism and feudalism. The Double-reduction Policy is a strict state regulation, but it is common in a centralized and communist country like China. Several participants pointed out the importance of understanding the tacit and sophisticated ways the Chinese government operates.

First, we must study policy trends, understand policy changes, and assess the situation. This is our entrepreneurs’ lesson, especially in the unique land of China (Participant K).

Imagine that the Chinese government is a Fortune 500 company. You need to study the strategy of the head office, including what the head office’s chairman, CEO, and shareholders think, and also consider the external environment they face (Participant L).

The formation of historical consciousness is a long-term and non-linear process. It may come from the entrepreneurs’ conclusions from their experience dealing with the challenges. It may also be spontaneous thoughts popping up from their past learning or memory to help them make meaning of the challenging situations. The three aspects of historical consciousness capture the essence of the impact of cultural factors on the entrepreneurs’ learning and strategies to deal with the challenges caused by COVID-19 and the Double-reduction Policy.

### Discussion

In this part, the writer will discuss the two research questions that guided this research.

#### **RQ1: What cultural factors did the business leaders emphasize as instrumental in altering their frames of reference?**

Based on the above findings, metaphorical thinking and historical consciousness are the two cultural factors that enabled business leaders to alter their frames of reference. Metaphorical thinking includes using metaphors and analogies to make meaning of the crises. Historical consciousness includes three aspects: understanding of ancient wisdom—Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, understanding of historical events, and understanding of the political system in China.

Metaphorical thinking enables participants to understand and make meaning of the situations from new and even unexpected perspectives. As Mezirow (2000) defines, transformative learning refers to “the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mindset) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action (p.76) “. Metaphors and analogies broaden learners’ frames of references to understand the situations and develop a growth mindset in the face of obstacles. Dweck (2006) argues that using metaphors that emphasize growth, development, and learning can help cultivate a growth mindset. When Participant D shared that “leaves grow in rainy seasons while roots grow in dry seasons “, he emphasized the positive impact of a crisis on an organization’s development. Meanwhile, the image and the message were effectively conveyed to his co-workers, cultivating their growth mindset.

Metaphors and analogies can also help participants to understand emotions and intuition in the face of challenges and hardship during crises. From Dirkx's (1997) perspective, transformative learning involves very personal and imaginative ways of knowing, which values more the intuitive and emotional sense of our experiences and gives voice to deeper, more imaginative and poetic expressions of self and the world. Metaphors and analogies can give voice to participants' inner world and promote their spiritual development.

Historical consciousness enables participants to learn from the past and contextualize the present with the knowledge and wisdom from the past. China has a long history, and Chinese entrepreneurs may have a higher historical consciousness as they grow up learning about historical events, war stories, and classic works from ancient sages like Confucius, Buddha, Lao Tze, and many other ancient scholars. The learning becomes a part of their memory and knowledge tacitly. The crises reactivate their memory and push them to learn from the ancient stories and wisdom to solve the problem they are encountering. Gadamer (2013) pointed out that historical consciousness provides a framework for understanding current issues, trends, and cultural norms and observing how they evolved over time.

### **RQ2: How did the business leaders transform or modify their perspectives under the influence of cultural factors?**

Two main approaches were used by business leaders to transform or modify their perspectives under the influence of cultural factors. The first one is critical reflection, and the second one is peer discourse or peer conversation.

According to Mezirow(1997), critical reflection is essential for transformative learning, enabling individuals to question their assumptions, beliefs, and perspectives, leading to personal growth and transformation. There are three types of critical reflection, according to Mezirow (2000), including

- 1) content reflection, reflection on the content or the “what “ of a problem,
- 2) process reflection, reflection on the process or the “how “ of a problem, and
- 3) premise reflection, reflection on the premise or the “why “ of a problem, which involves questioning assumptions and beliefs.

Both metaphorical thinking and historical consciousness promote critical reflection. Metaphors offer fresh and unexpected viewpoints, encouraging individuals to challenge their existing beliefs and assumptions (Sloan, 2020). Participants examined and reflect on their old frames of references with rich image and description of metaphors and analogies. Metaphors can subvert dominant narratives and challenge taken-for-granted assumptions, leading to a more critical examination of beliefs and values (Lakoff, 1993). There are vivid metaphors, analogies, and similies in Chinese culture. The Chinese characters are a visualized language that contains rich description and meaning by themselves, which may propel business leaders to critically examine their own beliefs and values. For example, the Chinese character about crises is Wei Ji ( “危机 “). Wei means danger while ji means opportunities. Many participants in this research mentioned these two Chinese characters and positively expressed that they believed in the potential opportunities after the challenge of COVID-19 and the Double-reduction Policy.

The second approach participants used in Chinese culture to shift their mindset was peer discourse or peer conversation. Mezirow (2000) argues that transformative learning involves participation in constructive discourse to use one's or other experience to assess reasons justifying hidden assumptions and make an action decision based on the resulting insight. The Chinese stories, culture, poems, and political stories effectively allowed business leaders to discuss their understanding, assumptions, and insights in conversations. For example, Participant

K shared that they summoned regular meetings during crises. One of the most critical tasks was discussing similar crises in Chinese histories and proposed sensible solutions at the end of the meetings. Their regular meeting not only offered them updated information about the crises but also supported them with peer learning and discussion of past crises.

Chinese culture also serves as a medium for participants to understand, summarize, and apply essential knowledge and insights they have gained from peer discussion. One of Participant K's entrepreneur friends was imprisoned because he made a wrong decision at the early stage of the crisis. He could have avoided it if he were not among the first to make such a decision. After several group meeting, Participant K realized that business leaders needed to practice "the Chinese Golden Mean way" as they were doing business in China. The Golden Mean Way is from Confucianism and means waiting for the best timing when making a decision, not being the first or the last.

### **Implications for building TL community**

When helping learners to modify or alter their frames of reference, adult educators or facilitators should consider using metaphorical thinking, the use of metaphors and analogies, and cultivating learners' historical consciousness, especially when the adult educators and the learners are from the same culture. Their shared culture, including legends, war stories, poems, and novels, may prove to be a handy and effective medium for the learners to examine and reflect on their beliefs, values, and assumptions.

Adult educators and facilitators should create a safe, open, and supportive space where learners can boldly and creatively discuss their understanding and knowledge of cultural phenomena, historical events, classic literature works, stories, poems, and even contemporary pop culture and fashion trends. It is equally vital to encourage learners to learn from their peers, even when they have contradictory opinions and viewpoints on the same topic. Adult educators can demonstrate how learners can conduct adequate critical reflection for perspective change or modification.

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# **Navigating Change: A Longitudinal Study of How Future Self-Guides Shape International Students' Motivations and Perceived Transformation at a Sino-Foreign Joint-Venture University**

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**Key Words:** International Education, International Students, Motivation, Future Self-Guides, transformative learning, Joint-Venture Universities, Intercultural Experiences

## **Introduction**

China's burgeoning interest in international higher education has witnessed a surge in Sino-foreign joint-venture universities (JVU), attracting diverse domestic and international student populations. In response to the growing number of international students studying in China due to the globalized nature of higher education, there has been a significant increase in research investigating their motivation for coming to China (Dervin et al., 2018; Wen & Hu, 2019; Xu et al., 2022; Yasmin et al., 2022), but there is a lack of research on the specificities of students attending JVUs. While research acknowledges the transformative potential of intercultural environments, there is a critical gap in understanding international students' pre-arrival motivations, their anticipated and perceived personal transformation journeys. This longitudinal study delves into these areas, offering valuable insights for stakeholders seeking to enhance the support and transformative potential of international campuses, while providing theoretical insights in the field of transformative learning.

International students are driven to study abroad by diverse motivational factors, including economic pursuits, academic advancement, and personal development desires (Altbach & Knight 2007; Chen 2017; Shanka et al. 2006; Singh et al. 2014). Furthermore, Transformative Learning (TL) theory highlights the potential for deep, multifaceted growth, often triggered by intercultural experiences (Mezirow, 2009; Pang et al., 2023). This raises the question that beyond trying to demonstrate whether international education can foster TL, scholars have tried to identify specific curricular aspects fostering deep, broad, and long-lasting transformation, often connecting it to intercultural development. Common transformation-promoting elements include high impact practices such as service-learning (Walters et al., 2016) and critical reflection journaling (Perry et al., 2012), while some scholars have delved into reflection types (Savicki & Price, 2019, 2021) and other individual and program characteristics (Terzuolo, 2018). While transformation does seem to take time to unfold, is constantly reinvented through narratives (shared and individual), and where stability of change poses a challenge for assessment, some students still do get a sense of change as they go through an experience. With time and room, some articulate how they changed, detailing causes, and illustrating transformations. However, the literature on TL and that on international students lack research on specific international education-induced transformation types. Future self-guides (Oyserman & Markus, 1990; Dörnyei, 2019), encompassing ideal, ought-to, and anti-ought-to selves, offer a framework for understanding how individuals envision their future and set goals to bridge the gap between current and desired selves. While studies explore these concepts independently, research

integrating them within the context of international students' motivation and anticipated and perceived transformation in international education remains limited.

### **Research Design**

The consistent inclusion of supplementary theories alongside TL in research on intercultural development, as observed by Pang et al. (2023), suggests a significant potential for utilizing combined frameworks to illuminate the complex dynamics of intercultural learning experiences. Examining the explanatory power of these motivational future self-guides, this longitudinal study explores the motivation of international students for applying to and attending a Sino-foreign JVU in China. A second related question investigates what they expect to experience, in particular in terms of deep and broad changes prior to matriculation. The third question addresses the perceived changes in terms of depth, breadth, and permanence which students experienced throughout their four years of study. Employing a longitudinal mixed-methods approach including a pre-during-post design encompassing the whole undergraduate experience, this case study focuses on international students enrolled at a Sino-foreign JVU in China. Multiple data collection points included a survey and semi-structured interviews pre-matriculation, then another round of semi-structured interviews at the end of their first year, and a survey and a final round of interviews at the end of their undergraduate studies. Data was analyzed inductively and thematically, identifying patterns and themes across participants.

### **Findings**

Data analysis reveals several key findings presented below.

#### **Motivations**

International students attending a Sino-foreign JVU reported a strong desire to distinguish themselves from peers at home and as future selves, hoping to be sometimes drastically different from themselves before starting their undergraduate studies. Their aspiration to step into the unknown and the perceived less beaten path, often as a reaction to external social consensus in order to stand out, was a particularly salient factor. They anticipated developing a unique and pluralistic worldview through in-depth interactions with a unique form of diversity and perceived "otherness" at the JVU and in China. Their initial motivation revolved around (1) anti-ought-to self, (2) integrativeness and international signaling, and (3) instrumentality to career benefits.

#### **Expected Changes**

Students expected experiences to lead to deep and broad transformations across various aspects of their lives, all mediated by the anticipated engagement with "otherness". They expected experiences at the JVU to broaden their perspectives and challenge their existing worldviews, to become more open-minded and embrace a global perspective, to deeply change how they see themselves, and to affect their behavior (Hoggan, 2016a, 2016b), transcending the Chinese or even intercultural academic environments to affect them long-term in their future academic and professional endeavors, but also in their personal lives, in their individual and social identities. These changes revolved reinventing themselves in an imagined environment, through improving cultural understanding, becoming mature and independent, developing language proficiency, and cultivating career-related skills.

The ultimate phase of the study will include quantitative and qualitative data collection at the end of the graduating year of the international students to explore the ways in which they

believe they transformed in terms of depth and breadth, as a result of their undergraduate journey, and to understand the experiences they believe contributed to their change.

Insights gained from this study inform us on the motivations, expectations, and perceptions of change of international students attending JVUs in China, highlighting the centrality of the desire of many students to distinguish themselves and to change in ways they already value. Beyond the theoretical implications on transformative learning, this study offers practical implications to better support international students throughout their international education journey to help them cultivate their visions of possible future selves.

It may be worthwhile to reflect on what we really mean when we discuss “transformation “. Can we truly be transformed if it is transformation in ways we plan and predict? Or is transformation inherently something that disrupts our plans and predictions? Those students who “plan to change “ (i.e. who vocalize expectations or hopes of increased globalism, open-mindedness, etc) often meant that they had a strongly predefined idea of what that transformation would look like and who their future selves would be – often emulating popular conceptions of a “global citizen “ and engaging in performative overtures to worldliness and erudition, and thus may not have been very “transformed “ as much as simply growing into a preconceived mold. On the other hand, those students who did not “plan to change “ likely meant that they did not have strong preconceptions of their future selves, and may have thus been more open to deep, fundamental transformation.

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# The Cultural Evolution and Transformative Learning Perspective in K-pop: Mamamoo

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**Abstract:** K-pop, blending traditional Korean music with Western pop, emerged in the 1990s and gained global fame by the early 21st century. Its influence extends beyond music, fostering a global fandom and cultural exchange. This study focuses on the transformative aspects of K-pop, using Mezirow's transformative learning theory and Turner's concept of Liminality to explain its continuous evolution and cultural significance. Transformative learning involves stages of awareness, critical reflection, and action, through which cultures evolve by integrating new experiences. K-pop exemplifies this process by incorporating diverse elements, challenging norms, and creating new cultural identities. Artists like Mamamoo's Hwasa challenge traditional beauty standards and gender roles, promoting self-acceptance and critical self-reflection. The concept of 'nunchi' in Korean culture parallels these transformative processes, emphasizing social adaptation. K-pop's ability to merge Eastern and Western elements creates a dynamic cultural form resonating globally. This continuous transformation establishes K-pop as a significant global cultural force, shaping and reflecting global cultural narratives.

**Key Words:** Transformation, Kpop, Liminality, Critical Reflection

## Introduction

K-pop, a genre-blending traditional Korean music with Western pop influences, emerged in the early 1990s. Early groups like H.O.T. and Girls' Generation introduced modern musical styles and choreography, establishing the genre's popularity in Korea. By the 21st century, K-pop had gained international recognition, with groups like Big Bang and Super Junior extending their reach globally. PSY's "Gangnam Style" in 2012 marked a significant milestone, propelling K-pop into a global phenomenon. Subsequent groups like BTS and Black Pink have dominated international charts. K-pop's influence extends beyond music, fostering a global fandom and cultural exchange through its music, visual art, and choreography, which captivate audiences worldwide. Its engagement with fans via social media has solidified K-pop as a significant global cultural force (Pacis, 2012). This cultural evolution positions K-pop as a significant phenomenon beyond entertainment (Russell, 2014; Valean, 2017; Kim, 2013; Ravina, 2009).

Stuart Hall's (1997) culturalism suggests that popular culture should be understood within a social context, focusing on its influence on identity and social interaction. This contrasts with structuralism, which posits that cultural phenomena are shaped by broader structures like ideology and society (Lévi-Strauss, 1971; Saussure, 1959). Structuralists analyze underlying structures and the meanings of signs (Lévi-Strauss, 1971). While culturalism has been more prominent in contemporary cultural analysis, this study highlights K-pop's "continuous and voluntary change" from a structural perspective. Mezirow (2018) states that transformative learning involves reconstructing perspectives through new experiences. K-pop exemplifies this by constantly incorporating new musical and cultural elements.

This study explores K-pop as a transformative cultural process through fusion and integration, forming new cultural identities. This concept connects to Turner's (2017) idea of liminality, where transitional periods dissolve existing boundaries and norms, creating new cultural forms.

### **Literature Review**

Transformative learning refers to a process where learners fundamentally alter their values, assumptions, or worldviews through experience. This concept, resonating with Mezirow's transformative learning framework, parallels Dewey's experiential learning theory. Dewey (1938) advocated that education should be experiential, occurring through interaction with the environment. Mezirow (1991) expanded this by emphasizing the critical reflection on these experiences as the catalyst for transformative learning. Both theorists view the experience as pivotal in learning, with Mezirow giving greater weight to cognitive and metacognitive processes involved in reshaping worldviews.

Vygotsky's (1978) assertion that community and social interaction are vital for learning echoes Mezirow's emphasis on dialogue in transformative learning. In educational settings, external influences can result in unintended outcomes as significant as direct educational activities. Vygotsky focused on social interaction's role in cognitive development, while Mezirow highlighted how social contexts facilitate reflective processes leading to transformation (Taylor, 1997). Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, emphasizing observation and modeling, intersects with Mezirow's ideas. Mezirow acknowledged the influence of others in shaping experiences but concentrated more on the internal process of evaluating and transforming these perspectives (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, defining learning as transforming experience into knowledge, aligns with Mezirow's framework to some extent, stressing experience conversion into knowledge, with Mezirow emphasizing critical reflection (Mezirow, 1997). Brookfield (1986) complements Mezirow's theory with his critical theory of adult learning, critically analyzing and challenging the cultural, political, and social structures shaping learning environments. Perry's Development Scheme (Moore, 2012), focusing on intellectual and cognitive development, parallels Mezirow's concept, emphasizing flexibility in the frame of reference through continuous critical reflection. Both studies are significant in terms of conversion, yet Mezirow's advocacy for flexibility in thinking diverges from traditional structuralist analysis.

Transformative learning comprises three stages: 'dialectical awareness,' where learners confront new information challenging their current frame of reference; 'transformation of thinking,' involving the exploration of new perspectives and critical examination of assumptions; and 'integration of action,' where learners apply newly formed values and perceptions in their lives. Similarly, Turner (2017) highlighted liminal spaces' growth and transformation potential. In liminality, individuals, stripped of previous roles and identities, encounter new perspectives and possibilities, leading to significant personal and social change. Turner expanded liminality's application from ritual studies to broader social and cultural phenomena, viewing it as a means to understand moments of social crisis, change, and transformation.

Mezirow's transformative learning and Turner's liminality examine change and transformation processes, focusing on a disruptive transitional phase that fosters critical reflection, personal growth, and redefined identity within a social context. They both identify transformative phases as transition periods and potential growth, emphasizing personal agency and empowerment in redefining perspectives and identities.

## Method

The planned research will primarily focus on the case study method, leveraging its ability to comprehensively understand specific entities, groups, events, or phenomena. This approach is particularly practical for investigating complex social phenomena within real-world contexts (Stake, 1995). The case study method's deep exploration and interpretation align closely with the research's aim of gaining a profound understanding of the subject matter (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Although the initial plan involved combining case study and content analysis methods to balance their strengths and weaknesses, prioritizing the case study method reflects its suitability for this research. It offers the opportunity to gain a deep, nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under study, which is essential for the research objectives.

Moreover, the case study method is advantageous when examining the intersection of K-pop, transformative learning, and liminality. K-pop presents a rich area for study due to its profound cultural impact and the transformative experiences it engenders in fans. This method allows for a detailed exploration of fans' liminal spaces, where they navigate different cultural identities and experiences, aligning perfectly with the research objectives and providing a rich understanding of this complex social phenomenon.

While case studies may have limitations in terms of generalizability, their depth and detail are invaluable for understanding the intricacies of complex social phenomena (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Brown, 2016). The nuanced exploration of specific cases makes this method particularly suitable for this research, outweighing the potential limitations of generalizing findings (Yin, 2014). Though useful for systematically analyzing large datasets and identifying patterns and themes, content analysis may lack the depth required for this study (Perez, 2019; Thornham, Bassett & Marris, 2009). Its strength lies in processing vast data to understand communication's quantitative and qualitative aspects, but it may not capture the deep contextual meaning a case study approach can provide (Krippendorff, 2013).

## Analysis

Unlike typical K-pop industry trajectories, Mamamoo's rise has relied less on the promotional mechanisms of significant entertainment corporations and their fanbases. Instead, their reputation is rooted in musical skill and the distinct identities of its members, cultivated through performances and music videos since their trainee days. Their music, marked by lyrics and compositions emphasizing individuality, diverges from stereotypical depictions of femininity, embracing a unique brand of individual expression (Copenhaver, 2002).

Hwasa, a member of Mamamoo, has become a pivotal figure in challenging and redefining societal beauty standards in South Korea. Her public statements and performances, particularly in her song "I Love My Body" (2023), actively contest and critique uniform beauty standards. These standards often blend Western ideals with Korean specifics, perpetuating a preference for underweight physiques, especially among female idols. For instance, in the lyrics of "I Love My Body," Hwasa sings:

"Have you lost weight or not? Why are you curious about that? The happy feelings disappear (yeah, yeah) A useless greeting 'cause my body's more than that Squishy in your mouth (yeah, yeah) I'm not something that can go up and down (na-na-na-na, na)" (Hwasa, 2023).

A discrepancy exists between perceived and actual body weight among Korean women, with many falsely considering themselves overweight. This aligns with Feinstein's concept of

public self-consciousness, where individuals are intensely aware of social evaluation. However, in the Korean context, ‘public’ takes on a meaning of collective judgment, closely related to the Korean concept of ‘Jeong,’ which embodies the collectivist nature of Korean culture (Lee & Jo, 2021). Wen (2024) highlights this collectivism as a distinct characteristic of Korean and other East Asian societies.

Hwasa’s public stance and musical articulations significantly impact the ongoing discourse on femininity and body image in contemporary Korea. By presenting herself as an alternative to the dominant beauty standards, she encourages reevaluating the aesthetic norms governing female bodies, promoting a more inclusive definition of beauty. Her lyrics often reflect a transformative learning process, as defined by Mezirow (2000), where individuals undergo a profound change in their perspective through critical self-reflection and challenging existing norms. Hwasa’s music serves as a medium for such transformation, inviting listeners to question and redefine their own standards of beauty and self-worth.

In her song “Maria “ (2020), Hwasa addresses societal pressures and the pain of being judged, yet she turns this critique into an empowering message. The lyrics express a journey of self-acceptance and resilience, illustrating transformative learning by encouraging listeners to confront and transcend societal expectations:

“Maria, Maria, don’t torture yourself Oh Maria, Maria, what are you doing? This is for you (the answer is simple) Just keep being yourself “ (Hwasa, 2020).

Through these lyrics, Hwasa embodies Mezirow’s (2000) concept of transformative learning, where significant learning occurs through experiences that challenge existing frameworks of understanding. By sharing her personal struggles and triumphs, Hwasa invites her audience to reflect on their own experiences and to embrace a more empowered and authentic self-identity. ‘Nunchi’ in Korean society—an intuitive understanding and responsiveness to the moods and dynamics of social interactions—parallels Mezirow’s transformative learning and Turner’s liminality, emphasizing continuous adaptation and social awareness. ‘Nunchi’ involves intuitively understanding social dynamics and adjusting behaviors based on new information, aligning with Mezirow’s ‘dialectical awareness,’ where individuals transform their understanding to fit the context (Mezirow, 2000).

Turner’s concept of liminality is crucial for understanding K-pop fans’ transformative journeys. Liminality refers to a transitional phase of ambiguity and disorientation, allowing new structures to emerge. K-pop fans experience liminality as they engage with a new cultural world that challenges their previous identities and norms (Turner, 1967). ‘Nunchi’ mirrors Mezirow’s ‘transformation of thinking’ stage, where individuals critically evaluate and integrate new perspectives, akin to relying on online reviews and social media for decisions. This process involves refining social acumen and balancing external inputs with personal insights to navigate complex environments effectively. ‘Nunchi’ also implies empathy and social competence, comparable to ‘wits’ and ‘sense’ in English, acknowledging social hierarchies and sometimes leading to patterns of subordination. The term “알짝따깝센 (aljjaktakkalssen) “ represents tactful conformity within social settings (Seo, Leather & Coyne, 2012). The culture of reviews in Korea reflects ‘nunchi,’ positioning individuals under societal scrutiny and influencing behaviors. This ongoing evaluation can limit individual expression but also facilitates personal and social change by sensing emotional tones and adjusting behaviors accordingly. Both ‘nunchi’ and liminality highlight the importance of social acuity and emotional intelligence in navigating and transforming social landscapes (Turner, 1967).

Hwasa’s lyrics in “I Love My Body “ further emphasize this transformative perspective:

“Love my body, my shiny hair All the way down to my toes, my body (yeah, that’s my body) Yeah, that’s my body, my lovely tummy Unique arms and legs (yeah, that’s my body) Love my body, yeah, I do love me Even my amazing smile (ooh, ooh) Love my body, nothing can change me I want to love you until the end of the earth, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah “ (Hwasa, 2023).

Her public stance and musical articulations significantly impact the ongoing discourse on femininity and body image in contemporary Korea, encouraging a reevaluation of the aesthetic norms governing female bodies and promoting a more inclusive definition of beauty. By incorporating the principles of ‘nunchi’ and transformative learning, Hwasa’s music challenges existing standards and provides a framework for listeners to critically assess and transform their perceptions and behaviors, fostering a culture of greater self-acceptance and authenticity.

### **Discussion**

Hwasa, a member of Mamamoo, exemplifies transformative learning principles and Turner’s concept of liminality within K-pop. As Mezirow (1997) outlined, transformative learning involves stages where individuals confront new information, critically examine assumptions, and integrate new perspectives. Hwasa’s career reflects these stages as she challenges traditional Korean beauty standards and societal norms. Her song “I Love My Body “ (2023) represents ‘dialectical awareness’ by questioning existing beauty ideals. Through bold performances and public statements, Hwasa promotes self-acceptance and resilience, aligning with the ‘transformation of thinking’ stage.

Turner’s concept of liminality, describing transitional phases where old structures dissolve, and new ones emerge, is evident in Hwasa’s journey. Hwasa navigates the space between traditional and modern representations of Korean femininity, fostering personal and social transformation. Her music, such as “Maria “ (2020), addresses societal pressures and encourages listeners to confront and transcend societal expectations, illustrating transformative learning.

Hwasa’s public persona and music also align with the Korean concept of ‘nunchi,’ emphasizing social awareness and adaptation. By embodying transformative learning and liminality, Hwasa plays a crucial role in reshaping cultural paradigms within K-pop. This ongoing evolution highlights Hwasa’s impact as a transformative cultural figure, contributing significantly to the discourse on gender norms and societal values in contemporary Korea and beyond. Through these processes, Hwasa’s influence extends beyond music, promoting critical reflection and adaptation among her audience, and solidifying her role in K-pop’s dynamic cultural landscape.

### **Conclusion**

This study has explored K-pop’s evolution through transformative learning and liminality, highlighting its dynamic nature and global impact. K-pop’s development exemplifies Mezirow’s transformative learning stages—‘dialectical awareness,’ ‘transformation of thinking,’ and ‘integration of action’—integrating diverse musical and cultural elements to create a unique global phenomenon. The genre’s fusion of Eastern and Western elements has redefined cultural paradigms, enabling varied cultural elements to coexist within a global milieu (Russell, 2014; Valean, 2017).

K-pop’s success in challenging traditional gender norms, seen in artists like Hwasa and groups like Mamamoo, reflects broader societal engagements with gender equality and identity. Turner’s concept of liminality helps us understand the transformative phases experienced by both

artists and fans, fostering personal and cultural transformation through critical reflection and adaptation (Turner, 2017). The concept of ‘nunchi’ in Korean society parallels Mezirow’s transformative learning and Turner’s liminality, emphasizing continuous adaptation and social awareness. This practice reflects critically evaluating and integrating new information, which is essential for navigating K-pop’s complex cultural dynamics (Mezirow, 2000; Kim & Hutt, 2021; Yoon, 2023).

Interpreting K-pop’s cultural overlap as a straightforward fusion is reductive. Instead, K-pop’s uniqueness lies in its departure from existing cultural discourse, enabling diverse cultural phenomena to coexist within its framework. This evolution aligns with Mezirow’s transformative learning and Turner’s liminality (Kim, 2013). K-pop’s evolution in gender roles, moving from ‘Flower body’ aesthetics to a blend of masculinity and androgyny, reflects transformative learning and liminality (Lee, 2015). Mamamoo and Hwasa’s challenge to traditional gender roles and beauty standards marks a significant cultural shift, promoting diversity and new cultural archetypes (Trifoso, 2022).

In conclusion, K-pop’s continuous evolution and transformative impact illustrate transformative learning and liminality principles. Its ability to challenge and redefine cultural norms has established it as a significant global cultural force, shaping new cultural identities and influencing global cultural narratives (Russell, 2014; Valean, 2017; Ravina, 2009). K-pop reflects and shapes societal values, contributing significantly to cultural change and globalization discourse.

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# Exploring Transformative and Educational Practices Within Social Movements: A focus on the LGBTIQ+ Community

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**Abstract:** Within this framework, this paper aims to explore transformative practices, which are practices that generate innovation within communities of practice in social contexts. Using Gherardi's practice construct, practice is considered a situated, dynamic, and social human activity that takes place within 'communities of practice.' Transposing this construct to social movements, this paper seeks to examine educational practices, i.e., those practices implemented to produce or develop new knowledge, within communities of practice in social contexts, specifically within the LGBTIQ+ community as a social movement. This study offers a perspective that may expand upon a construct from a different viewpoint, promote understanding of the educational strategies of social movements, and pave the way for new research on the innovative capacity of social movements, enriching the academic discourse on internal practices that shape their social and political impact.

**Key Words:** Transformative Practice, Educational Practice, Social Movements

## Introduction

Transformative learning studies represent an important field of research in education and personal development. These studies originated with the work of Jack Mezirow in 1991, but over the years they have been debated and expanded, involving multiple perspectives and researchers who have contributed in different ways to this area of study.

As mentioned earlier, Jack Mezirow was one of the forerunners of transformative learning. He developed the theory of transformative learning, which focuses on the process by which people are able to profoundly change their perspectives, beliefs and attitudes. Mezirow emphasized the importance of critical reflection, exploration of new ideas and a willingness to embrace change as key elements of transformative learning (2003). To exemplify how the debate has broadened, we can cite Kokkos (2010), who contributed to the extension of the transformative learning debate by applying this concept to the aesthetic context and analyzing how appreciation of art and aesthetics can lead to significant personal and cognitive changes. His work highlighted how aesthetic experience can foster a deeper understanding of the world and of oneself; Loretta Fabbri, Claudio Melacarne and Maura Striano (2014) emphasized the importance of practice in transformative learning, highlighting that concrete action and practical experience play a crucial role in the process of personal transformation. This means that it is not enough just to reflect on new ideas, but it is also necessary to put what has been learned into practice through concrete actions. Finally, Aliko Nicolaidis (2015) and Victoria Marsick (1998) contributed to the debate on how transformative learning can help people deal with complex situations and challenges in life and work. Their research has highlighted how transformative learning can help people develop a greater awareness of their personal and professional realities. Dealing with complexity and acquiring skills to manage it effectively.

In general, research on transformative learning continues to evolve and embrace a wide range of context and perspectives. This field of study is important because it highlights how people can grow, change and adapt to life's challenges through learning and critical reflection. It also demonstrates that learning is not only knowledge acquisition, but can also involve profound personal and social transformation.

### **Theoretical Framework**

For several decades, numerous studies have been conducted on social movements, mainly focusing on their political, emancipatory aspects and/or their impact in society (Melucci, A., 1985; Tilly, C., Castañeda, E., & Wood, L. J., 2019; Porta, D. D., & Diani, M., 2020). The existing literature has highlighted the need to deepen and develop new research by focusing on practices and, more specifically, educational practices.

The first construct on which the proposal is based is Gherardi and Bruni's concept of practice. Practice can be broadly defined as a situated, concrete and social human activity involving action and meaning, emphasizing the situated and dynamic aspect of human activities and the crucial role of social context and interactions in shaping practices. Practice thus becomes an integral part of daily life within communities of practices, influencing and being influenced by social dynamics (Bruni, E., & Gherardi, S., 2007).

All practices are social practices, in the sense that they are socially recognized and supported ways of doing certain things in a certain way. Behind every practice is a community of «practitioners», that is, people who are socially recognized as legitimate participants in a situated doing and which is sustained by them as a correct and current mode of that doing. (Bruni, E., & Gherardi, S., 2007)

Translating this construct to social movements, the research aims to examine educational practices, that is, those practices enacted to produce or develop new knowledge.

As mentioned by Gherardi and Bruni, behind every practice is a community of practitioners. The second construct underlying the proposal is Etienne Wenger's (2006) concept of communities of practice. Communities of practice are social groups in which people share a common interest or passion for a particular topic. These communities promote learning through social interaction and active participation. Communities of practice are seen as places where people acquire knowledge and skills naturally and collaboratively.

The community is the place where the individual is realized as a social entity: this is where the educational task of community pedagogy is drawn [...]. The capacitating value of community pedagogy is in giving the individual a horizon of accomplished fulfillment and the community the possibility of engaging in the foundation of a society capable of transforming both its individual components [...] and the identity of the collective subject itself. (Manfreda, A., & Colazzo, S., 2019)

The third construct is Jack Mezirow's transformative learning: transformative learning is a theory of learning that focuses on personal transformation through educational experience. It often begins with a disorienting experience, leading individuals to engage in critical reflection and redefine their beliefs and perspectives leading to deeper understanding and personal growth. The theory takes context into account and can be applied in a variety of educational settings.

## Methodology

Through the theoretical framework set forth above, the proposed research aims to investigate formal and informal educational practices within social movements and, specifically, within the LGBTIQ+ community. The LGBTIQ+ community can be seen as a community of practice with, at its core, its own organizational culture and practices. Using Gherardi and Bruni's concept of practice, investigating educational practices is useful not only to understand how and what formations are enacted, but gives the possibility to investigate the transformative power of these practices and their innovative potential within the group. The investigation will be carried out by collecting interviews with 10 people who are part of the LGBTIQ+ community and active within associations and organizations dedicated to LGBTIQ+ instances. The data that will be exposed were obtained through an analysis of the interview following verbal transcript, this allows for an in-depth undertaking of the participants' experiences and opinions.

## Conclusion

Examining training practices within this community can highlight the importance of inclusion and diversity in training activities and value the transformative potential of these practices. This research could contribute significantly to the understanding of how the organizations and initiatives within this community influence the learning and development process of the people involved. In addition, this research could pave the way for new research on the innovative capacity of social movements, enriching the academic debate on the internal practices that shape their social and political impact.

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## How Transformative Learning Can Create the Conditions for Perspective Transformation in a UK Defence Healthcare Setting

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**Abstract:** Much leadership development focuses on the delivery of the content, relying on traditional leadership theory frameworks, paying little attention to the actual pedagogy wrapped around the delivery. In this paper the authors will propose how a disruptive pedagogical approach to facilitating leadership development has demonstrated a positive impact in a UK Military Health Defence setting. Hayes & Corrie's (2020: Pg.88) model of disruptive pedagogy based on Mezirow's (1990) multiple ways of knowing, serves as a conceptual framework to emphasize the complexity of applying transformative learning in a leadership development setting. Using techniques to set Mezirow's (2000: Pg.13) 'ideal conditions for discourse', the authors will demonstrate the connection between the facilitated theory and its impact on practice. This paper will share the experiences of both the facilitator (IC) and a participant (SP) who, having attended the full program, interpreted, and distilled her own learning into a condensed programme as an introduction to 'transformative learning in a military clinical leadership environment'. In conclusion, this paper will elucidate the connection between Transformative Learning theory, the praxis, and the experience of both the tutor, and the student (participant), and ultimately the clinicians in practice in a UK Defence Medical Services environment.

**Key Words:** Disruptive Pedagogy, Transformative Learning, Reflective Practice, Leadership, UK Military

*"the teacher is of course an artist, but being an artist does not mean that he or she can make the profile, can shape the students. What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves".*  
Horton & Freire (1990)

### Introduction

This paper will share the experiences of both the facilitator and a participant who, having attended the full program, interpreted, and distilled her own learning into a condensed programme as an introduction to 'transformative learning in a military leadership environment.' In this case the participant, a senior Army Officer, and a clinician, became the facilitator sharing her reflective journey of transformation and utilized cognitive models and transformative learning theory to support perspective transformation in others. A case study approach will be used as an overarching methodology to present the data in an impact case study, (Merriam, 1998) quantitative and qualitative data will be analyzed using Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic

analysis method. The design and successful delivery of the program relies on the skill and ability of the facilitators to deviate from traditional teaching and instructing methods to engender transformative learning as a mindset. This can be troublesome for participants, facilitators, and the organisation as each have their own frame of reference. Previous learning experiences influence participants expectations, which are typically associated with information transmission, or more explicitly a ‘tell me what I need to know’ mindset. The facilitator’s challenge is to help participant’s recognise that they are the experts in the room. Whilst organisations can find it difficult to deviate from commissioning the traditional ‘chalk and talk’ approach, relying on scripted and timed delivery focused on the delivery of content rather than the embodied learning.

### **Background**

The context of the delivery is within the UK Ministry of Defence (MOD) healthcare setting comprising a cross section of clinical and non-clinical attendees from across MOD civilian and all three-Armed Forces services, Royal Navy, British Army, and the Royal Air Force. Several internal surveys and organisational reviews highlighted the need for a fresh approach to delivering leadership development, providing the opportunity to change the way in which leadership development was positioned. The existing progressive range of roles and training available to those pursuing mainstream military or civilian Defence careers, is not an easily accessible or realistic option for those whose principal role is the direct provision of clinical care. Leadership development within the Defence Medical Services needed a solution that could be delivered within the time and opportunity available for development of clinical staff. This approach also placed specific focus on the leadership requirements and context of the healthcare environment.

### **Defence Medical Leadership Programme (DMLP) Design and Delivery**

The 12-month (DMLP) leadership development program was designed (see figure 1 below) using Mezirow’s (2000) transformative learning theory embedded into three modules of delivery; (1) a Transformative Learning and Leadership module, where the concepts of Transformative Learning in leadership, and in this case its components of (identity) critical professionalism, understanding personal values, beliefs and behaviours, and reflective and reflexive practice are taught. The formative assessment involves students developing an artefact to reflect their module learning journey and present it to their peers. This is supplemented with a summative reflective essay evidencing their learning and its impact on their medical leadership behaviours in the workplace; (2) a Transformative Coaching module, ‘Coaching and Mentoring’, supports students with theoretical and practical development of transformative coaching skills at , and the skills to become a coach and mentor within the Defence Medical Services environment. After studying the theory and developing their coaching practice, a summative essay is submitted to demonstrate how they apply coaching as a leadership style in their professional practice; (3) ‘Work Based Learning’, demonstrates the theoretical and practical learning applied within the workplace to enable demonstration of the impact of the learning on practice.



**Figure 1**  
*Defence Medical Leadership Programme*

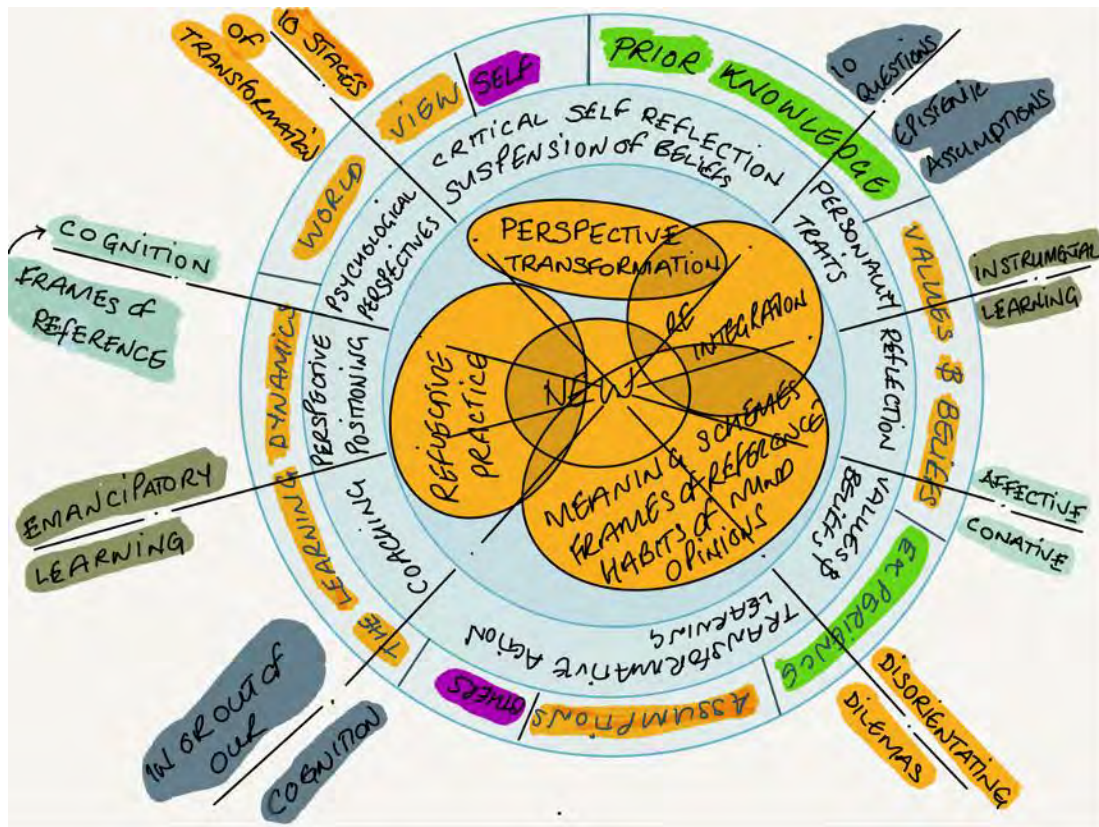


Each of the modules has woven into it Mezirow’s (2000) theory and focuses on the 10 stages of transformation, supporting the participants to understand how rationale discourse, analytical self-reflection, discovering and testing of epistemic assumptions, and reflective discourse can support perspective transformation. Cognitive models are used as frameworks for the participants to examine their values, beliefs, and behaviours, in relation to the ‘perceived’ and ‘actual’ self, based on participants positioning learning to perspective take. This disruptive pedagogical approach supports the participants to develop epistemic cognition, (Mezirow, 2000: Pg.20) and enables them to understand how they create and apply knowledge in practice as an embedded part of life, their authenticity, and personhood, rather than a commodity to be acquired (Hayes & Corrie, 2020).

### **Disruptive Pedagogical Model and Explanation**

The transformative teaching framework in Figure 2 below has been described fully in Hayes & Corrie (2020), However, for clarity we offer a summary below:

**Figure 2**  
*Disruptive Pedagogical Model*



The outer ring represents the ‘frames of reference’ and learned experience that the students bring with them, the second ring identifies the cognitive frameworks used with students, the centre represents the proposed perspective shift. The cross-cutting themes are indicated to represent the key facets of Mezirow’s theory that contribute to the transformative learning process, the 10 stages of perspective transformation are on the same axis as disorientating dilemmas, these are connected through the 10 stages, and may be utilized with the professional students individually or consecutively. Cognition, and frames of reference are connected to the affective and conative aspects of understanding, which can have a strong influence when reframing. Understanding the threshold concepts of emancipatory and instrumental learning enables the professional students to appreciate that the purpose of instrumental learning is to manipulate the environment as in task-oriented problem solving for performance, a concept that the professional students are familiar with. Emancipatory learning is knowledge achieved through reflection to identify and challenge distorted meaning perspectives, and assumptions about learning and the use of knowledge. As the professional student develops awareness of epistemic cognition, Mezirow’s (2009: Pg. 21), ten epistemic questions are brought into the student’s awareness to help them assess their epistemic assumptions. This provides a repository of questions that the professional students can reflect upon whilst engaged in solving ill-structured problems, in this case critical reflection on self, which raises the question of the limits and certainty of their knowledge of self.

*The facilitators reflection (IC) on this process is that this can surface troublesome knowledge for students, as generally they have no frame of reference for this. This can cause them to push back and, in some cases, project their fears onto the facilitator, as they are at their edge of knowing, and this can be an uncomfortable space to be in, and in some cases creates a disorientating dilemma. The facilitators strength lies in taking the expert out of themselves and managing their ego state to appreciate that the experts in the room are in fact the students who need time to process at this point in their learning journey. This starts the process of sense making and meaning making, as well as the discovery of new knowledge of their own assumptions about themselves and others.*

### **Sue's Reflection as a Successful DMLP Professional Learner**

Attending DMLP, and Sue's (SP) own developmental journey gave her the motivation and agency to become a wider change agent within Defence Medical Services. Sue took the core components and key elements of the disruptive pedagogy approach and distilled it down to a scalable accessible route to enable wider participation and adoption within Defence, (not everyone had access to the DMLP due to the number of places being available). Sue's own reflection here was:

*Two years ago, I had recognised some of the work required to accelerate change within the DMS, but the DMLP has given me the framework through a transformative adult learning approach and the right tools in my bag to be more impactful.... cementing the mindset of this improved way of being. Arguably the biggest legacy I can offer to those around me is to pass this onto as many people within the organisation as possible, thus exposing them to a liberated perspective; to a world of work that energises, fulfils, and makes a difference, the way it has for me. In short, become a social agent for leadership development change.*

### **Design and Delivery of DMLP Light Programme**

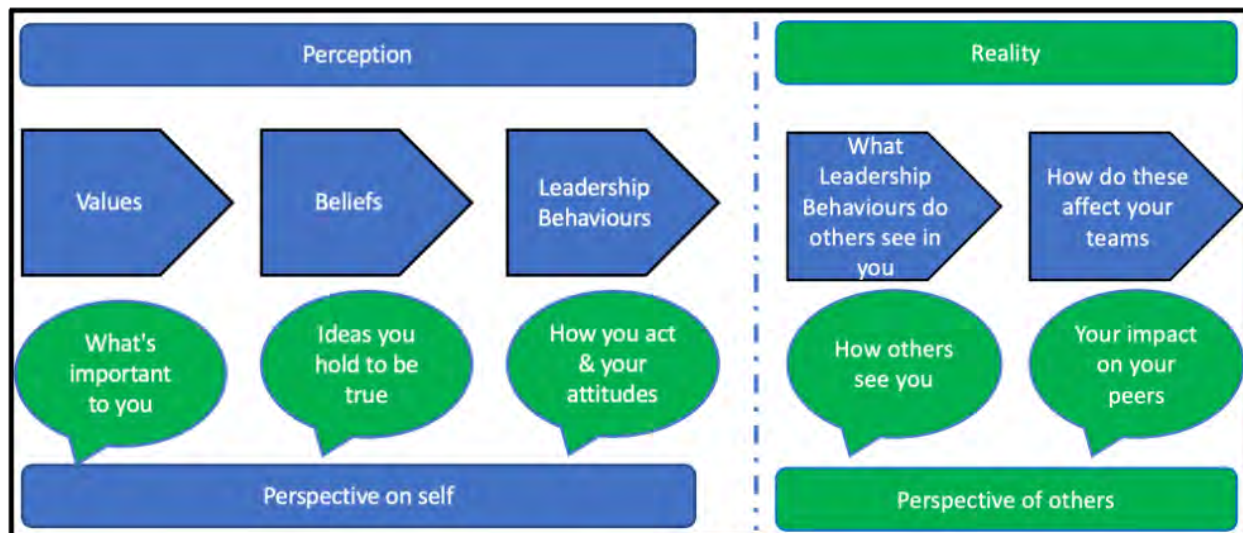
The program was delivered over two separate days to 15 attendees and consisted of several distinct elements. The first day's face to face delivery was undertaken on the 26th of July 2022, the second day was undertaken on the 17th of October 2022. Reflective sessions were set up on TEAMS to allow the participants to form a community of professional practice to enable peer support and a 'metaphorical handrail' for the facilitators to maintain the momentum. A workbook was sent out outlining the pre-course reflection exercises explored personal start points and motivations, allowing participants to become familiar with reflection, self-reflection and to state their own aspirations for their participation on the two-day programme.

The in-person delivery involved the facilitation of critical self-awareness and perspective positioning, alongside introduction to coaching skills acquisition. Between taught days participants were invited to observe, reflect, and record changes in behaviours within their own workplaces and return to share reflections on experiences within the safety of the group. These were conducted through the on-line reflective sessions on TEAMS and on the second days face to face delivery. This built a personal view of 'self', and how others may view them, based on the Corrie & Rowland (2023: Pg 119-122) Values, Beliefs & Behaviours Model that supports

participants to critically self-reflect on their own and the perspectives of others in relation to their positionality, authenticity, and behaviours as a leader, see figure 3 below.

**Figure 3**

*Values, Beliefs and Behaviours model*



Other cognitive models such as O’Neil & Marsick’s (2007) Action Learning Sets were used to enable participants to see different perspectives as they worked together to solve real world problems within their clinical and non-clinical contexts. This was led by a facilitator/coach supporting participants to challenge their own assumptions about self, organisation, and others, shaping their perspectives on their own sense and meaning making. This was taking place within a safe space creating the ideal conditions for discourse, allowing deeper self-reflection and creative and positive challenge from their professional peers.

### **Methods and DMLP Lite ‘Synopsis of Detailed Delivery**

A workplace-based project was conceived attempting to explore the impact of a condensed transformative learning intervention with a small group of volunteers. The Programme was designed to distil the main elements from the Sue’s own experience of the Masters syllabus, and was designated as ‘Defence Medical Leadership Programme lite’.

The delivery was split into 4 phases; (Phase 1) pre-course self-awareness (identifying values) and reflection exercises (motivations for attending, personal objectives to explore), all of which were recorded in a reflective workbook; (Phase 2) day 1 face-to-face connections, values, beliefs, behaviours and light touch Transformative Learning theory, perspective positioning, reflective practice skills and use of action learning sets; (Phase 3) a 6 week period of self-awareness, reflection and recording observations of own leadership behaviours and impacts, informal optional remote group mentoring sessions; (Phase 4) day 2 face-to-face covered sharing personal reflections within the group, coaching theory intro, coaching practical skills demo – active listening, coaching questions and signposting to the other DMS leadership development initiatives available. The second day concluded with further shared discussion of personal key learning points and personal change stories with pledges of future behaviours that participants aspired to continue.

## **Methods – Data Collection, Learning Activities Survey and Thematic Analysis**

Case study will bound this single case, as Merriam, (1998) posits, case studies are differentiated from other types of qualitative research in that they are intensive descriptions and analyses of a 'single unit' or 'bounded system', or 'bounded phenomenon', Merriam (1998: Pg. 21). This case is specifically focused on the

Data was collated after each of the sessions based on the same 2 questions used within the Defence Medical Leadership Programme;

*Q. 1 "What was your key learning point from today "?*

*Q.2 "What will you do differently after this short Programme "?*

A follow up questionnaire using King's (2009) Learning Activities Survey (LAS) was distributed one week after the completion of day 2 to capture the reflections of the attendees. The details of the respondents are;

- a) 15 started Day 1 - and provided feedback to the two questions above.
- b) 6 completed Day 2- and provided feedback to the two questions above.
- c) 6 anonymous respondents completed the LAS questionnaire (reduced numbers were due to deployments and Covid-19).

Examples of the immediate feedback collected on the closing of day 2 (6 participants).

*Q. 1 "What was your key learning point from today " (1 from each person who completed the day):*

Respondent (1) "Disorientating dilemma" as a concept helps to crystallise the issue and dismantle it to explore it – to hopefully resolve it. "

Respondent (2) "Identity and values – the "why" we do/see/behave the way we do. "

Respondent (3) 'Empowered. "

Respondent (4) 'The importance of self-awareness – who am I? What do I bring? Where am I coming from? What are my assumptions'?

Respondent (5) "To enable staff to make leadership decisions by not solving others' problems – giving ownership over, encouraging personal thinking. "

Respondent (6) 'The value of ongoing reflection. "

*Q2. What will you do differently after this short Programme?*

Respondent (1) – "Prepare differently for conversations, consultations and mentoring ".

Reflect Respondent (2) – “More! The “Leadership green-cross code “ – STOP, LOOK, LISTEN!  
“

Respondent (3) – “Commitment: to try to take a coaching approach to coaching myself and those around me, instead of always trying to fix things for others “.

Respondent (4) – ‘Take time for myself with boundaries and use of “No! “, and reflect more often  
“.

Respondent (5) – “Listening and reflection; diagnostic and active listening with reflection as to problem solve “.

Respondent (6) – “Be solution focused rather than problem focused; avoid “rescuer “ role and “victim “ roles; empower others “.

As already discussed, the key components delivered were based around self-awareness (values, beliefs, behaviours) and individual skill acquisition/enhancement (critical reflection, active listening, open questioning through coaching conversations. The LAS questionnaire questions, full responses, and the data analysis will be shared in more depth at the presentation.

An extract of the impact and some reactions obtained through the reflections on day 2 and through the LAS revealed some common elements;

*Key factors in course design were felt to be the adult learning environment – trust, a safe space for shared experiences, with peers and facilitators providing both support and challenge. Participants felt they had created a community of practice.*

*Common themes expressed were solidarity with others as to experiences, gaining insight and strength from group problem-solving, the value of continuous reflection in and on leadership actions and the power of story-telling.*

*The utility of a coaching mindset and practical skills – listening and questioning skills.*

*The hugely positive impact of greater self-awareness and willingness to adopt alternative perspectives on self and colleagues (more collegiate, compassionate working environments).*

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion this short intervention demonstrates utility in adopting a disruptive pedagogical approach within a military medical environment. A number of positive experiences were reported across the participants, with particular value gained from using reflective practice, story-telling and adopting alternative perspectives on both self and colleagues. As a result, behaviours were modified, allowing more collegiate and compassionate working relationships. The full results will be shared when this paper is presented.

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# **Making New Spaces of Possibility: Fostering Transformative Learning of Hungarian Organizational Leaders**

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to present the case study of a unique leadership initiative in the Hungarian leadership development landscape that created spaces for leaders to engage in self-reflection, and collective learning and discovery to inform compassionate and caring practices in the development of healthy and sustainable organizations. The Praxis Initiative was formed in 2015 to allow for the integration of practical and theoretical knowledge where contemplation and self-reflection ( “vita contemplativa “) is an integral part of practice ( “vita activa “). At the time of the submission of this paper, the study is in progress and the findings will be discussed at the conference.

**Key Words:** Leadership Development, Self-reflection, Mindfulness, Transformative Learning, Hungary

## **The History of the Leadership Initiative**

The three Hungarian founders of the Praxis Initiative - a senior organizational development (OD) consultant and executive coach with many years of experience as senior organizational leader; a former university professor, senior OD and leadership development consultant and coach; and a university professor, OD consultant and coach - witnessed the decline of organizational life and the unsurmountable challenges faced by organizational leaders in developing healthy and sustainable organizations, and in maintaining their own health and well-being. Thus, they had a vision of creating a transformational space far from the hustle and bustle and stressful daily lives of the leaders where they can “slow-down “ - a space for mutual learning, reflection, experimentation, deep discussions and dialogue in a safe environment. This space was located in a retreat-like environment in a beautiful natural setting in Hungary.

The founders piloted their ideas by inviting 12 senior leaders and leadership and OD consultants to participate in a three-day retreat in the summer of 2015. Based on the feedback received from the participants, two sites were selected for a series of retreats attended by 12 senior leaders (six at each site). At the present nine leaders (five and four respectively) are still engaged in these programs. Meanwhile the name of the initiative transformed into the Port Initiative, offering a safe harbor for organizational leaders, with the same vision that drove the formation of the Praxis Initiative. The founders also organized a series of five “Harbor Nights “ with an average of 40 participants that allowed leaders to learn from experts and have meaningful discussions at dinner and in informal spaces close to nature about the spiritual tenants of five religious beliefs and their applicability to organizational leadership.

## **The Leadership Development Program**

The three-day retreats were designed to allow for morning silent meditations, Qigong healing exercises and walking in nature, leading to increased mindfulness. Participants engaged



in dialogues on professional and personal issues (e.g., decision-making and responsibility, the health and sustainability of organizations and individuals, holistic well-being, ethics, morality) in different settings leading to collective and self-reflections, creativity, compassion, care, and emergence of tacit wisdom in the pursuit of balanced healthy professional and personal lives.

The feedback received from the leaders at the end of the retreats showed that they experienced deep engagement with the program and each other. They talked about the importance of having a collective experience within a stable group of participants where they felt safe and supported by the others. Participants reflected on the importance of the collective for mutual learning, for questioning and pushing the boundaries, and for nurturing a feeling of care, compassion, and love among participants who at the beginning did not know each other. The deep relationship built among the members of the group allowed for both collective reflections and individual discoveries. Participants talked about how they felt free to share their experiences, thoughts, and feelings, and how they were inspired to self-reflect and change. Using the metaphor of the mountain path from the nature walks, one of the participants noted, “when you descend from the mountain you are not the same person who ascended it.” Another participant reflected on the space where they can feel closer to themselves than in any other space while another one talked about the “life-saving” nature of the experience. Over the years, two participants (one from each site) left the group and one sadly passed away, which had a deep emotional impact on the group.

The case study methodology was selected to understand the learning experiences of the Hungarian leaders who participated in this unique leadership development program. Data collection includes interviews with the program participants; review of documents related to the program and of the reflective notes kept by two of the founders of the initiative who led each of the retreats. The findings will be discussed in relation to the literature on transformative learning (Cranton, 2005, Cranton & Higgin, 2012, Kegan, 2000; Taylor and Snyder, 2010), as critical reflection, dialogue and experience are essential components of the transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991), and spaces where learners question “the integrity of deeply held assumptions and beliefs based on prior experience” (Taylor, 2009, p. 7) are also essential. Given the importance of space for self-reflection and learning, the role of physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and environmental spaces in individual and collective learning and transformation will also be discussed.

Although the literature showed evidence of studies related to leadership development and coaching approaches to enhance critical reflection, self-awareness, and mindfulness of organizational leaders (Ciporen, 2010; Crook, Alakavuklar & Bathurst, 2021; de Mello, de Almeida Cunha, da Silva & Dandolini, 2023; Dix, Norton & Griffith, 2022; Frkal, 2018; Karssiens, van der Linden, Wilderom & Furtmueller, 2014; Long, 2020; Mbokota, Myres & Stout-Rostron, 2022; O’Brien & Allin, 2022; Urrila, 2022), no studies were found on the impact of a longitudinal retreat-based leadership development program designed to create spaces for mutual learning, reflection, experimentation, deep discussions and dialogue in a safe environment. Thus, this study has high significance for leadership development and coaching professionals striving to design meaningful programs to benefit the well-being of leaders and their organization. Implications for theory, research and practice will be presented at the conference.

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## **Moving Between Perspectives: The Practice of Senso-Biographical Walk as a Way of Learning and Transformation**

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**Key Words:** Ecosystemic Sensitivity, Senso-Biographical Walks, Perspective, Transformation

The proposal presents the practice of senso-biographical walks as a way of ethnographic and autoethnographic investigation, starting from the experience of the two authors. Antonella and Silvia are social workers and researchers from Northern Italy who collaborate with the University of Milan-Bicocca and Professor Laura Formenti in research related to the application of the systemic approach in different fields of investigation. Contemporaneity with its transformations is here interpreted as a systemic process where human and non-human dialogue (Formenti, Luraschi & Cuppari, 2022).

This contribution was inspired by one question in the call of ITLC 2024: “How can we radically question our (own) (self-)understanding of what it means to transform ourselves, the communities we live in and society as a whole? “. Our assumption is that walking informed by ecosystemic sensitivity (Luraschi, 2021), and autobiographical memories may constitute not only a valid method of research but also a personal and professional practice useful to activate learning oriented towards transformation. Nurturing an ecosystemic and eco-logical sensitivity means to seek out and cultivate connections destroyed or marginalised by linear logic, control, and conscious intentionality (Bateson, 1972).

Senso-biographical walks are embedded ethnographic research which is sensitive to the sensorial, biographical, and cultural experience of the participants (JärviLuoma, 2017; Inkeri, 2021). Antonella applied the method in a research project involving persons with disabilities resident in Lecco and students of the Milan Polytechnic on the topic of the inclusive public city. The aim was to explore the inclusion experience of a group of people with disabilities who lived in that city, in relation to the material and immaterial elements they encounter in their habitual life paths. In these studies, walking together was experienced as an embedded method of connection between self and others, human and non-human. Walking activated a process of evoking sensory and biographical memories that, in dialogue, elicited commonalities and differences useful in re-reading participants’ relationships and narratives. On her side, Silvia experimented for the first time in Italy sensobiografic walking (JärviLuoma & Murray, 2023) with young adults native of the city of Lecco and with migratory background as a form of embodied dialogues between differences of perception and transformative learning (Luraschi, 2021).

In recent months, we are sharing our respective practices of walk as ways to nurture certain key attitudes: the adoption of a moving ‘perspective’ (Formenti & West, 2018, p. 34), for a multiplication of viewpoints aimed at opening new possibilities related to the way we approach our knowledge of ourselves and the world; an exercise in looking and moving as if we were someone or something else; sensitive attention to our being in relation to the landscape. These practices are inspired by Ingold’s concept of correspondence (2015; 2021). According to Ingold, the person who walks acquires knowledge in moving forward. In this sense, movement becomes knowledge. This kind of knowledge is exploratory and open, a form of thinking in motion. As

Ingold claims, correspondence is a continuous, responsive, creative, and dialogic process that opens perception to happening. This constitutes the shift from interaction to what he calls “in-between-ness of entities and things “ (Ingold, 2021, pp. XIX-XVI). The attitude to correspond described by Ingold reminds us of the concept of “living transformation “ (Lange, 2022, p. 733), a type of learning generated in a thinking by relations and grounded in the continuous becoming of self. Transformation is here intended as a participatory and spontaneous process that emerges from connection with others. Learners move beyond the anthropocentric ethos and are brought into engagement with the natural world. According to Lange (2012), experiential activities in natural contexts allow all our relationships to be re-enacted and reactivate a relational mode of knowing.

In this contribution we would like to share two experiences related to our practices of walking that constituted ways to reinterpret ourselves, our profession as social workers and researchers and our way of being in the world and with the world. Antonella describes a series of exploratory walks aimed at looking for her cat, who accidentally fell from her balcony. While in the first walks, rhythm, trajectories, and perceptions started from a predominantly human perspective of research, the encounter of a volunteer expert in the feline mind and in research of missing animals allowed the walk to transform. Changing the cadence of the walk, the moments of the day to explore, and the trajectories started from a radical change in perspective, closer to that of a cat. This change in perspective allowed Antonella to become aware of unfamiliar aspects of the environment and relationships around her own home, and this elicited disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 1991) about how to perceive herself and what she usually considers familiar. Writing field notes, transcribing dialogues with the volunteer and reflections in a research journal allowed Antonella to make these dilemmas generative of new possibilities for thinking not only about her own daily life, but also to reflect critically on the implications of this awareness for her profession as a social worker and researcher. In a different way, Silvia describes her embodied experience of walking at the Archaeological Park in Ostia Antica where she participated at the first International Ecological Arts and Eco-somatic Residency in Italy - a forum for embodied practices concerned with reconfiguring relation of ‘being with’ body and earth and being human and nature. This experience was an inspiration for working with nature as an agentic force of somatic experience and artistic processes as gentle acts of repair (Eddy, 2017).

To conclude, the senso-biographical walking practices reported here constituted embedded and dynamic learning experiences that changed the way we think about ourselves in relation to others and the landscape. We believe that these methods can be useful not only in the field of ethnographic and autoethnographic research but also as practices for promoting ecosystemic sensitivity.

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# **Transformative Learning for Students' Aspirations: a Case Study of Student Experiences in Informal Higher Education Settings from the Capability Approach**

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**Abstract:** Higher education is more than the formal educational setting where students acquire professional competencies to develop as adults; it is also a period where their life aspirations can change through meaningful informal experiences. This research uses transformative learning theory and the Capability Approach to explore three case studies of students' experiences in informal settings in South Africa, Colombia and Spain's higher education institutions. With an interpretative paradigm and a constructivist approach, this research uses qualitative data sources, including interviews, focus groups, and documentary analysis. The findings show how, in these experiential situations, students can generate and readapt experience-based meanings and action-oriented decisions through a transformative learning process that includes critical reflection, inclusive discourse, and collective action. Based on the contradiction between prior learning and disorienting dilemmas, students realise what they really value, readapting their life aspirations. The research highlights how informal learning settings based on student experience can allow higher education to promote human development by expanding the student's capability to aspire.

**Key Words:** Aspirations, Transformative Learning, Capability Approach, Informal Experience, Higher Education

## **Introduction**

For many students who enrol in Higher Education institutions, this time becomes one of the most significant in their lives due to the new knowledge, relationships and environments they meet. For this reason, in recent years, universities have been paying more attention to thinking and designing their campus with a student-oriented approach (Buultjens & Robinson, 2011; Woodall et al., 2014), but with learning focused on its instrumental value for employability (Illeris, 2009). For educators, formal education has become an "apathetic task where no real engagement with learning happens " and where the value of learning for students is measured as "a credential that the labour market allegedly desires " (Kromydas, 2017:9). This scenario requires to think in new learning environments that provide students with a greater awareness and critical reflection regarding their agency beyond their professional skills, as Jack Mezirow (1978, 1990) understood as the ultimate aim of adult development. In this way, the Capability Approach for Human Development tells us the need to focus on what students want to become and what they want in the future (Nussbaum, 2006; Wilson-Strydom, 2017; Wood & Deprez, 2012). Therefore, this research explores three case studies of student experiences in Higher Education based on informal learning settings (Gross & Rutland, 2017) to explore their experiences as learning processes to identify 1) how the informal experiences of higher education students enhance or limit transformative learning processes, 2) to what extent the transformative learning processes of higher education students contribute to their aspirations, and

3) how higher education contributes to human development through transformative learning processes that expand the capability to aspire.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Learning has been conceptualised as an experiential learning process where new meanings and decisions can arise (Bergsteiner et al., 2010; Kolb & Kolb, 2017; McCarthy, 2016). According to each context, the cases show how critical reflection, inclusive discourse, and collective action processes operate in a transformative learning process (Chawla, 2018; Herlo, 2018; Laruffa, 2020; Mezirow, 2003; Mkwanzani & Melis Cin, 2020). During the experience, the strain between prior learning and disorienting dilemmas (Christie et al., 2015; Cranton & Taylor, 2013; Mezirow, 1997) is identified as a trigger to reshape and expand the capability to aspire of the students, as it is understood from the Capability Approach (Hart, 2013, 2016; Powell, 2012).

### **Informal Experience for Transformative Learning**

In transformative learning theory, frames of reference are quasi-stable mental structures conformed during our transition to adult life through culture and language. They give coherence to the meanings we attribute to our experiences and, consciously and unconsciously, form our predisposition to accept or reject everything that we can fit or not with them. The situation or event whose meaning cannot fit into them, called a disorienting dilemma (Christie et al., 2015; Mezirow, 1990), challenges us to transform a problematic frame of reference to make it more inclusive, perceptive, open, reflective and emotionally valid. This change is a transformative learning process (Mezirow, 1997, 2003), which evolves according to reflection, discourse, and action processes. First, the reflection (and self-reflection) process on the assumptions helps to reassess the content and the formation of our frame of reference and prior learning. Second, to get a better judgment about our assumptions, the discourse process, as a dialogue with others, arises to assess new meanings and decisions collectively guaranteeing free and full interaction participation (Mezirow, 1990, 2003; Taylor, 1994). Third, putting into practice the new assumptions through action, which includes decision-making and agency, tests the validity of a potential new frame of reference as a new alternative (Mezirow, 1991a, 1991b).

### **The Capability to Aspire**

The Capability Approach is a normative framework introduced by the economist Amartya Sen (2009) and expanded by the philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2000) that can help to conceptualise human well-being, justice, and development from a multidimensional perspective. It has mainly used in fields such as development, economic analysis, social policy, and political philosophy, but it is versatile for use in other areas, such as education (Boni & Walker, 2016; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007; Wilson-Strydom, 2017), policy (Bonvin & Laruffa, 2018; Laruffa, 2020), or sustainability (Kronlid & Lotz-Sisitka, 2014; Pelenc & Ballet, 2015). Thus, its application goes from philosophical and theoretical contributions to practical applications in empirical cases (Chiappero-Martinetti et al., 2015; Robeyns, 2005). Regarding education, Boyadjieva & Ilieva-Trichkova (2018) claim that the Capability Approach can provide a framework to analyse learning from different perspectives, specifically in adults: (a) understanding learning as a process of agency; (b) expanding the meaning of what valuable learning for individuals and society is; (c) reinforcing the role of the context for learning and (d) evaluating learning policies and results. As capabilities are “what people are effectively able to do and to be “ and that, “upon reflection, they have reason to value “ (Robeyns, 2005:94), Walker (2012) claims that non-formal and informal learning needs more attention regarding how



they influence the people's capabilities. Each person has their own "set of capabilities", where aspirations such as hopes, wishes, dreams, ambitions, goals, longings and yearnings influence how we understand the present and the future. They are "future-oriented, driven by conscious and unconscious motivations and they are indicative of an individual or group's commitments towards a particular trajectory or end point" (Hart, 2016:326). Hobson & Zimmermann (2022) link the capability to aspire with how individuals imagine the future and the potential to achieve it. The capability to aspire is shaped by how the context allows us to imagine futures and perform agency, which can generate alternative future scenarios and a new freedom of agency. It refers to our options to imagine an alternative future "out of the box".

### **Methodology**

The research follows an interpretive paradigm and a constructivist approach. Forty in-depth semi-structured interviews with higher education students, staff members, and teachers, as well as a focus group and documentary analysis, were carried out through all cases to explore the experience from student and university perspectives. The first case looks into the Student Representative Council (SRC), the formal group of students elected or designed to perform student representation at the University of the Free State (UFS) in South Africa. The SRC has the mission to represent the student community, lead their transformation, improve their environment, promote representation, and develop the necessary structures to improve campus student's lives. The second case analyses the Paz y Región (PyR) programme, a final compulsory semester for all undergraduate students at the University of Ibagué (UI), Colombia. The students move to live for 4-6 months in a town in the Tolima region and join a local organisation in a multidisciplinary project. The third case focuses on two active pedagogical strategies, the action learning module (AL) and the external internships (EI), in the Master in Development Cooperation (MDC), a two-year master's degree at the Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV), Spain. The MDC aims to train development professionals who may act as agents of change in their professional lives using active pedagogies and critical approaches to promote critical reflection in students and orient them to action as future practitioners. During the first year, the main theoretical contents are development theories, the development cooperation system, research methods, project management, and planning development processes. At the end of this year, in AL, students and local people from vulnerable Valencia neighbourhoods share learning spaces at the university and the city to work on a shared development project. During the second year in EI, students move abroad to join a development organisation for 2-4 months to work as development professionals.

### **Reflection, Discourse and Action in Transformative Learning**

First, in the SRC as a political experience, the SRC members confront a disorienting dilemma when their political activity conflicts with their academic issues, provoking they have to manage the strain between their own well-being as students and their agency for social justice as political agents. For some students, this dilemma comes from their activist past, as they realise the difference between activism and representation in student politics. For others, it comes from the lack of experience in student politics. The students highlight learnings during the SRC experience regarding 1) ideology, 2) political knowledge about the governance system and leadership, 3) campus social issues and diversity, and 4) interpersonal skills such as sacrifice, self-confidence, empathy, and sensibility, which helped them navigate the experience. As the experience is intense and short, they do not have time to reflect on their own assumptions about

student politics, only later, when their SRC membership ends. However, they have an inclusive discourse among students, supporting each other, especially when meeting with university administration staff, with whom they feel they do not have an inclusive discourse. The inclusive discourse allows them to reshape assumptions about how they can be student representatives beyond their frame of reference. Moreover, the strain from the student-activist balance triggers them to perform a critical agency as a collective action. They prioritise their role as student representatives over their own well-being as students, allowing them to practice and validate their new assumptions about how they want to act in student politics.

Second, in the PyR programme, a disorienting dilemma arises when they must leave their homes to move to a conflictive area. Tolima region has a particular history with FARC and right-wing paramilitary groups that generate in students biases and fears about security and whether it is worth going there. To confront that, the learning process designed by the PyR staff combines disciplinary, personal, relational, professional and contextual learning. Students express learnings during the experience regarding 1) autonomy, combining theory-practice, interdisciplinarity, and co-learning as self-directed learning (Brookfield, 2009); 2) values about citizenship, engagement and prejudice; 3) an understanding of the region as a valuable learning space with the university; and 4) communication skills and interdependence with other people. Students recognise that after weeks of living in the town, they do not feel insecure, so they engage in a reflective process that encourages them to reconsider their fear assumptions about the region. This process is also supported by the inclusive discourse with the town population, both in formal meetings with the organisation and in informal conversations, which allows them to understand their frame of reference about the region. However, the process is experienced from each student's individuality, limiting collective action and testing new frames of reference during the experience.

Third, in both MDC pedagogies, AL and EI, the disorienting dilemma occurs when they must apply the theoretical content and use the tools and methods they learned during the master's, facing the complexity of theory and practice in development projects. Students recognise learning in both experiences regarding 1) skills related to problem-solving, teamwork, and communication, 2) critical thinking, ethics and values about real issues in the context, and 3) the intrinsic value of learning. Students have spaces for reflection in the classroom during the first year, where they reconsider or reaffirm the new frame of reference acquired during the MDC. However, in AL and EI, the critical reflection becomes more explicit, as those spaces support the interaction with people in a real context, from a neighbourhood in AL or abroad in EI. The interaction provokes an inclusive dialogue where students can incorporate new external visions into their assumptions about development cooperation. Moreover, due to the action-oriented feature of AL and EI, students are continually putting into practice the new frames of reference as they will as development professionals.

### **Transforming the Capability to Aspire**

Students transform their frame of reference in the three cases due to the informal experience, where reflection, discourse, and action happen somehow. The SRC members readapt the meaning of student politics and check the consequences of the decisions they make as critical political agents, provoking an expansion of their capability to aspire to a different way to perform student politics more critically and committed to other students, more empathetic, more connected to real issues, and that they can perform within and outside the system. PyR students experience a change in their mindset about their professional future and calm down about fears

and biases about their security in the region, opening new life opportunities. This lets them expand their capability to aspire to a different Tolima region where they can fit, personally and professionally, as they enlarge their critical thinking, re-evaluate how they learn, are open to new professional choices, and reassess the value of non-academic people as co-learners. MDC students can put into practice the theoretical and methodological content in two processes that allow them critical reflection and inclusive discourse. This provokes an expansion of their capability to aspire to a new way to think of themselves as ethical and critical development professionals grounded by connecting reality and context from feminist, decolonial and inclusive approaches and contributing to a reparative development cooperation system (Delgado-Caro et al., 2023).

### Conclusions

All three cases show how the students' experience beyond the classroom is a source of life-related learning, where pedagogical intentionality can help to recognise learning, although it is not a necessary condition (Toni & Makura, 2016). Informality within formality allows for a better combination of the “duality” of reason-emotion (Gross & Rutland, 2017), where informal experiences can be educational settings where unexpected disorienting dilemmas can arise. Reflection, discourse, and action processes do not always happen in transformative learning, especially in a critical, inclusive and collective way. Nevertheless, any of these allows working on change within a frame of reference.

Finally, all the cases show the contribution of transformative learning to Human Development in Higher Education, specifically in informal settings where learning processes are grounded by experience. Through transformative learning, students can reshape and expand their capability to aspire and reconsider their set of capabilities politically, contextually, and professionally. Through critical reflection, inclusive discourse and collective action, students can develop themselves, thinking, finding out, debating and putting in common what kind of adult development they want as students and what kind of society they want as future professionals and citizens. As educators, we ask how to create learning environments to provoke disorienting dilemmas and foster transformative learning. However, in student experience and informal settings, we can have the conditions for that. We can find answers beyond the classroom.

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# **Transforming Professional Understanding and Practice in Social Work with Children and Families Facing Vulnerability**

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**Abstract:** In front of the numerous crises investing contemporary life at a global level, professionals working with vulnerabilities face complex phenomena that can no longer be analyzed using a mono-disciplinary lens. Vulnerabilities (social, financial, environmental) do not allow the identification of linear causes and trajectories; nor is it sufficient to envisage solutions centered on single issues entrusted to isolated professionals.

LabT is a collaborative space, embedded in the Italian program P.I.P.P.I. (Programme of Intervention for Preventing Institutionalization) in which researchers and professionals use the Change Lab method within the Cultural Historical Activity Theory approach to design innovative actions to support vulnerable parents and children at a local level. The research explores the ways LabTs - as interprofessional dialogic contexts - produce a change in defining the work objects through a case study on a local team engaged in better understanding the concept of “environment “ in their work with children and families, and discusses the role of the collaboration between researchers and professionals in enhancing transformative learning.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Sfard (1998) observes that two main metaphors used to describe learning are “acquisition “ and “participation “: the first includes the ideas of learning as the transfer of knowledge, where knowledge is interpreted as a commodity and learning as a process of appropriation by an individual (of concepts, theories, facts). The second metaphor, participation, emphasizes the interactions inherent in the learning process. In the theories of learning as participation, the goal of learning is not the acquisition of knowledge, but participation in the activity of knowing, an activity situated and closely related to the context in which it takes place.

These two concepts do not exhaust the debate about learning: the idea of transformation (Bateson, 1977; Mezirow, 2016; Engeström, 1987; Formenti, Hoggan-Kloubert, 2023) can overcome the opposition between acquisition and participation: according to Engeström and Sannino (2010), the first two interpretations reduce the issue of learning to the individual-community dichotomy alone, while the idea of “expansive learning “ (Engeström, 1987) encourages a multidimensional analysis that emphasizes the role of the learning community: in this learning process, in addition to the subjects, the context is also transformed.

## **Research Object and Questions**

The study explores the work of a multi-professional group working with children and families called LabT in a local community in Italy. LabT is a part of the national program P.I.P.P.I. (Program of Intervention for Preventing Institutionalization). P.I.P.P.I. is an Italian



social and educational program for supporting children and families who live in a situation of vulnerability, implemented since 2011.

LabT was born within the program as a way to support actors from different organizations in reflecting on their own practice and organizational models to produce innovative actions that better respond to children and families needs, in dialogue with the data emerging in their local context.

In this research, LabT is assumed as a new activity system emerging from the collaboration between social services, school, families, healthcare, and other professional and volunteer actors.

In the local context where the research has been carried out (Casale Monferrato), practitioners were facing the difficulty of giving stability and formalization to the contributions of informal resources that impact the well-being of children and families. Their main issue is that with each attempt to establish a collaborative network between support services and informal actors (associations, families...), the availability of informal actors and their actions fail.

Starting from this critical situation, the research questions that guided the research are:

- What contradictions emerge in the relationship between institutional and informal actors?
- How do the actors make sense of these contradictions?
- How are the emerging contradictions used as a motor of transformation to overcome the crises encountered?

### **Method**

LabT is a multiprofessional context involving actors from different organizations and it is designed as a reflective space inspired by the Change Lab method (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013). Participants discuss starting from local data concerning the results of their intervention programs with children and families, and questioning their own professional practices as well as the support network they build. The discussion is facilitated by researchers and aimed to collaboratively construct a local (innovative) project for improving their work.

The data we collected are notes and transcriptions of recordings from 4 group discussions over 6 months with 35 professionals, families and informal helpers connected by a common engagement in child protection and child and family support. The group discussions involve social workers, healthcare professionals, teachers, school principals, social educators, foster families who interact on the outcomes of the P.I.P.P.I. program to identify the main needs as well as strengths and weaknesses of their collective action towards vulnerable children and families.

We chose to use the lens of Activity Theory to better understand the learning processes and outcomes in LabTs, seen as activity systems involved in qualitative change driven by the emerging contradictions.

The LabT phases follow the steps defined in the expansive learning's cycle (Sità, Di Masi, Petrella, 2023): questioning, analyzing, modeling, experimenting, implementing, reflecting, consolidating (fig 1). The activities are preceded by an initial training involving all the new participants to share the tools designed, the main methodological aspects and the activities plan.

**Figure 1**  
*The Expansive Learning Cycle in the LabT*

<b>Phases</b>	<b>Aims</b>	<b>Actors</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Expected result</b>
<i>Questioning</i>	Identify a research question or hypothesis starting from a shared data analysis conducted with professionals and researchers	Professionals involved in the local LabT, researchers	A four-hours online meeting to define the LabT Activity System Model.	Define the motive of the LabT Activity System
<i>Analyzing</i>	Reflect on the conflict experienced by the LabT members to identify the main contradictions affecting the Activity System, using narrative tools (i.e. ecomaps)	Professionals involved in the local LabT, the Activity System stakeholders, researchers	A day-long workshop organized by the Local LabT in a relevant location for the development of the project (School; Municipality, Family Center; Social Service, NGO,...).	Realize a dialogical context with all participants and analyze the contradictions identified.
<i>Modeling</i>	Design a prototype of the new activity system to overcome emerging contradictions	Professionals involved in the local LabT, researchers	A four-hours online meeting with the LabT members to discuss the data collected during the workshop and the shared analysis.	Make visible and explicit the new object and all the elements (tools, rules, community and division of labor) of the new Activity system
<i>Implementing</i>	Realize the actions defined in the local innovative project constructed on the new activity system	Professionals involved in the local LabT, the Activity System stakeholders	8-12 months local Innovative project implementation	Experiment the new model and collect data
<i>Reflecting</i>	Document and share the achieved results and the processes carried out in every LabT to nurture the community of practice	Professionals involved in the local LabT, researchers	Present the Local Innovative projects during the Unconference, a day-long peer to peer event	Share knowledge, experiences, learned lessons and good practices with colleagues involved in different LabT
<i>Consolidating</i>	Make local Innovative project sustainable and redesign the actions according to new information collected during the previous implementation	Professionals involved in the local LabT, the Activity System stakeholders, researchers	A new implementation of PIPPI Advanced Module (LabT) or online meetings with researchers to discuss follow-up	Generalize new practices and support participatory action-research in social work

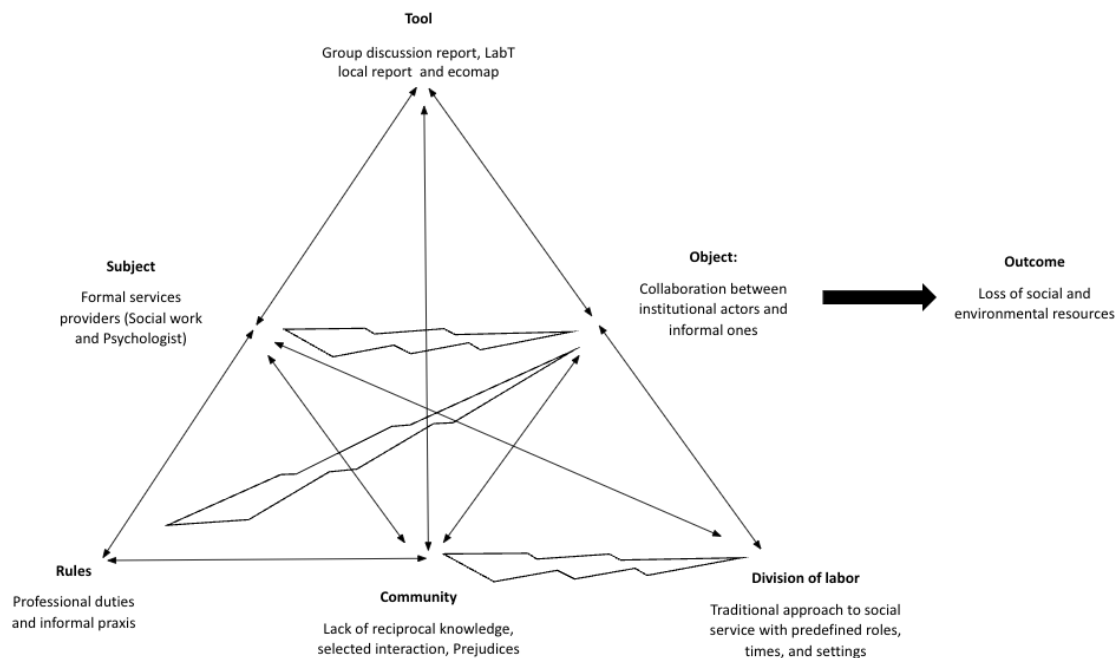
### **Main Results and Discussion**

The results are based on the LabT conducted in Casale Monferrato, and they focus on conflicts, contradictions and the new Activity system.

- 1) Conflict: professionals expressed their frustration with the difficulty of involving informal resources in supporting families. They feel there is a reputational issue that does not allow them to have a transparent and open collaboration with stakeholders: formal services are bound to times and practices that tend to classify, make diagnosis, and to constrain the relationship with informal actors (Fig. 2).
- 2) Contradiction: emancipatory approach pushes professionals to look for resources in the context, the traditional (welfarist) one, based on control, produces a stigmatization process: the «pathologizing» effect.

## Figure 2

*Conflicts in the Casale Monferrato Activity System Analyzed by LabT Members*



- 3) New Activity System: LabT's innovative project was devoted to stabilizing a newborn local network called «Tavolo InConTra» involving schools, associations, libraries, foster families, sportscenters. «InConTra» has a double meaning, it means “meeting “ and it is at the same time a word consisting of three prepositions: in-with-between. The «Tavolo InConTra» aims to co-design the educational policies developed in the local community in order to create new opportunities to know each other, overcome prejudices, and establish a common agenda for being a source of support for children and families.

The network is now a permanent structure of exchange and interaction on emerging needs and ways of working as a system, and not just a meeting schedule on individual cases in moments of need. Over time, what began as a local network, with a strong presence mainly of

schools and social services, has spread to become a plurality of meeting circles involving healthcare professionals, the third sector, voluntary actors and associations, in a whole renewed activity system.

In general, LabTs working on contradictions: 1) have improved professional self-knowledge as a system; 2) have developed a research sensitivity and research skills; 3) have promoted organizational change.

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## Promoting Transformative Epistemologies in Teachers to Counter Youth Existential Distress at School. Reflections and Proposals

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**Abstract:** The problematic nature of reality (Bertin, 1968; Frabboni & Pinto Minerva, 2013) and the changes currently taking place challenge the paradigms of signification and epistemic assumptions that have always guided its understanding (Formenti, 2017). The inability to give meaning to reality leads, at all ages of life, to experiences of disturbance and the perceived inability to actively act in it. This can be attributed to the rigid and unchanging systems of meaning attribution (Mezirow, 2016). These do not allow the activation of complex thinking (Morin, 2000) and critical reflexivity (Mezirow, 2016) if acquired uncritically and applied naively. Thus, they lead to experience existential frustration (Frankl, 1952/2018). This paper aims to highlight how much the meaning attribution systems teachers possess affect the formation of students' meaning attribution systems (Cooley & Larson, 2018). The educational proposal is to foster the development of teachers' awareness of the process of signifying reality as a strategy to prevent and counteract youth distress widely experienced and manifested within the school.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Epistemology, Teachers Training, Youth Distress

The manifold changes happening nowadays, sometimes sudden, abrupt, and radical, challenge, at every age of life, the system of theories, ideas, values, and beliefs that allows us to give meaning to the world and its events. The problematic nature of reality (Bertin, 1968; Frabboni & Pinto Minerva, 2013), which shows its complexity in the plurality of possible ways of making meaning and narrating it, poses continuous *disorienting dilemmas* (Mezirow, 2016) that challenge one's belief systems and oppose the patterns of signification of events customarily adopted to understand and act in it.

The process of meaning-making, as highlighted by Jack Mezirow (2016), consists of ordering the events of reality in such a way that they can be understood. Each subject has a specific way of giving meaning to reality: based on their past experiences and on the way they have been signified, each person interprets events by adopting their system of patterns and perspectives of meaning (Mezirow, 2016). The meaning attribution system takes shape through language and cultural symbolic systems (Bateson, 1972/2008). It is constructed from childhood and throughout life through relationships with educational figures of reference, interactions with one's sociocultural environment, and the acquisition of formal learning (Mezirow, 2016; Formenti, 2017). In fact, the neuroscientific hypotheses suggest that (Siegel, 2001/2021) the meaning attribution system is permeated with emotional experiences and orients the epistemological processes that determine the understanding of reality. In other words, it constitutes the *habitus*, or the embedded systemic matrix that makes us act (see, feel, think) in a way that we feel is appropriate to the situation here and now (Formenti, 2017, p. 3).

Given its experiential origin, this is often learned uncritically and, consequently, applied naively, thus proving – especially in adulthood – difficult to modify. In addition, the underlying rigidity that drives the epistemologies widely adopted by Western societies, based on Cartesian

tradition and positivist orientation, makes the process of understanding the current world even more complicated. Indeed, contemporary hypercomplexity, to be truly understood, requires *complex thinking* (Morin, 2000) and *critical reflexivity* (Mezirow, 2016), both of which are oriented toward conscious and transformative action of the criticalities occurring in one's life context (Freire, 1968/2011). Instead, if accustomed to adopting the paradigms of understanding already possessed, uncritically acquired, and naively applied, when faced with changes in reality one finds oneself lacking the useful strategies to make meaning of them. This, often, causes an upset that results in the hardening of one's way of thinking and paralyses the perceived ability to be able to act. In this way, the aspiration that underlies the motivational theory (Frankl, 1952/2018) of each person, which guides and supports actions aimed at achieving a goal, is disheartened. This aspiration has been called by Viktor E. Frankl (1952/2018) the will to meaning (p. 27), or the visceral human need to make sense of one's life (Mezirow, 2016, p. 6). The habit and rigidity typical of linear and separative thinking lead one to accept only what is adaptable to one's habits of thought and reject what is not. As a result, one tends to adopt a *blind* gaze in the face of the complexity of reality, unable to adopt reflective thoughts (Fabbri, Striano & Melacarne, 2008; Mortari, 2009), and implement conscious and responsible actions to transform it.

The ineffectiveness of uncritical formulas of thought, coupled with the impossibility of finding unambiguous explanations of events, has led to the emergence of the need to translate one's system of signification from an affirmative/confirmative logic, i.e., rigid and static, to an interrogative/dubative logic, i.e., dynamic, flexible and transformative. If the former turns out to tend to consider reality only those elements that confirm the validity of the assumptions from which its premises move, the latter adopts instead a posture of constant research (Bellantonio & Scardicchio, 2023). It exercises doubt as an existential posture that is authentically ad-active and, therefore, transformative. The moment the possessed system of meaning attribution proves unable to perform its clarifying task, then, through transformative learning (Mezirow, 2016) it turns out to be possible to modify one's way of thinking, reevaluating the epistemologies adopted and beliefs already possessed. In this way, it enables one to constantly construct and re-generate one's interpretive paradigms of reality and mitigate the sense of loss resulting from the inability to make meaning of it.

The fact that adults possess rigid and crystallized paradigms of the signification of reality proves to be an important pedagogical issue since it affects the way young subjects learn to make meaning of reality and, consequently, to act in it. This questions all educational professionals, especially teachers. Indeed, they assume within society a crucial role, full of responsibilities (Cornacchia & Tramma, 2019) from an educational as well as political and social point of view. Indeed, as pointed out by several studies conducted in academia (Cooley & Larson, 2018), the mindset possessed by teachers influences the formation of students' mindsets concerning themselves and their way of being able to act within reality after making meaning of it. This issue is crucial when one considers the current educational emergency of youth distress that is manifested, especially, within schools. In Italy, data show that many adolescents engage in behaviours indicating a precarious state of well-being and mental health (Autorità Garante per l'Infanzia e l'Adolescenza, 2022; Consiglio Nazionale dei Giovani, 2022; Health Behaviour in School-aged Children, 2022) and that often manifest themselves, in different ways, within the school. In educational terms, it is possible to hypothesise that they are the result of a perceived inability on the part of students to adopt alternative strategies for signifying events and coping with critical issues. For these reasons, it is necessary for teachers, first and foremost, to be able to

learn and to signify reality transformatively, so that they can pass it on, through vicarious experience, to their students.

Highlighting how the meaning attribution systems possessed by teachers influence the formation of students' meaning attribution systems is therefore of fundamental importance. The educational proposal wants to foster the development of teachers' awareness of this process as a strategy to prevent and counteract the youth discomfort, widely experienced and manifested within the school. This is possible through the implementation of continuous research-training processes (Formenti, 2017), which see both teachers and students simultaneously engaged in the recognition of their meaning attribution processes.

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# **Embodied Praxis: Transforming Social Structures through Collective Somatic Engagement and Critical Reflection**

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the transformative potential of collective freedom dreams, co-generated somatic arenas, and mutually embodied practices in social transformation. Drawing on embodied cognition, critical theory, transformative learning, and non-affirmative education, I argue for transcending linguistic articulation and embracing somatic knowing and embodied practices. Using Mezirow's Transformative Learning theory (1991), adult learning perspectives on acculturation, generative-somatic case studies, and considerations of the function of efficacious appraisal, I demonstrate how embodied practices and collective efficacy, rooted in radical vulnerability and resource decolonization, can lead to cultivation of the resilience, solidarity, and perspective shifts required to dismantle oppression and create equity. Implications for social transformation, education, and research are discussed, underscoring the need for intentional and iterative examination of both implicit and explicit curricula to overcome the continued reproduction of harmful social schema.

**Key Words:** Embodied Cognition, Transformative Learning, Collective Efficacy, Radical Vulnerability

Freedom-dreaming discourse often centers on individuals as primary change agents (Kelley, 2002), but misrepresenting it as solely individual and over relying on cognition may perpetuate systemic injustices (Dillon, 2014). Integrating embodied cognition (Varela et al., 1991), critical theory (Horkheimer, 1982), transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991), and non-affirmative education (Uljens, 2002, 2016), this paper examines the limitations of individualistic freedom-dreaming and argues for collective freedom-dreams, co-generated somatic arenas, and mutually embodied practices to drive social transformation.

The transformative potential of collective freedom-dreaming and embodied practice lies in recognizing individuals' inherent interconnectedness within sociocultural contexts. By attending to the wisdom of the body and cultivating awareness of our own and others' somatic experiences, we can access a more holistic understanding of the impacts of oppressive systems and develop strategies for change (Caldwell, 2018; Haines, 2019).

The power of co-created imagined realities and shared somatic experiences amplifies the transformative potential of collective freedom-dreaming and embodied practice. As individuals engage in collaborative, embodied exploration of alternative futures, they develop a heightened sense of collective efficacy and agency, recognizing their shared capacity to effect change and dismantle oppressive structures (Bandura, 2001; Ginwright, 2016). This process of co-creation and mutual empowerment is essential for cultivating the resilience, solidarity, and transformative power necessary to navigate the challenges of social transformation and build more just and equitable realities.

### **The Limitations of Individualistic Freedom Dreams and Verbal Articulation**

Individualistic freedom dreaming fails to account for the socially constructed nature of oppressive realities (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Foucault, 1977; Lefebvre, 1991). Social structures and individual agency are mutually constitutive (Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1984), limiting the effectiveness of individualistic approaches to social transformation. Moreover, an overreliance on verbal articulation fails to capture the complexity and nuances of oppressive systems (hooks, 1994; Galtung, 1969; Maturana & Varela, 1987), as the intractable conflicts and multi-pronged variables that constitute these systems render it nearly impossible to articulate all the elements contributing to their existence and perpetuation.

### **Transformative Potential of Somatic Knowing and Embodied Practices**

To effectively address systemic injustices and create lasting change, we must move beyond the limitations of linguistic articulation and embrace the power of somatic knowing and embodied practices (Johnson, 2007; Hanna, 1986; Levine, 2010). Somatic knowing, the knowledge arising from bodily experiences and sensations, offers a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the impacts of oppressive systems on our lives and the lives of others. This understanding of the transformative potential of somatic knowing is deeply rooted in the work of scholars such as Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Gendlin (1978), who argue for the primacy of embodied experience in shaping our understanding of the world.

Embodied practices, such as theatre of the oppressed (Boal, 1979), somatic experiencing (Levine, 2010), and community-based participatory research (Wallerstein & Duran, 2006), offer powerful tools for exploring the complexities of oppressive systems and developing strategies for resistance and transformation. These practices prioritize the body as a site of knowing, recognizing that our experiences of oppression and liberation are deeply embedded in our physical, emotional, and spiritual selves (Alexander, 2005; Caldwell, 2018). By engaging in these practices, individuals and communities can develop the embodied capacities and efficacy necessary to approach and navigate the challenges of social change and create more just and equitable realities (Haines, 2019; Ginwright, 2016).

### **Collective Embodiment and Mezirow's Theory of Transformative Learning**

Mezirow's (1991) steps of transformative learning are deeply embedded in the process of collective embodiment. Provisional trial of roles in collective somatic practices allows individuals to explore and challenge their most exercised, acted on, or externalized frames of reference and as well as the unconscious realm of biases and limiting beliefs that shape their dominant intersections and identities. This process facilitates a disorienting dilemma, self-examination, and critical reflection on assumptions, as participants confront the limitations and biases of their worldviews (Kasl & Yorks, 2016).

As individuals recognize their dissatisfaction with current realities and explore alternatives through embodied experimentation, they develop action plans encompassing individual and collective transformation. The acquisition of new knowledge, experimentation with roles, competence building, and reintegration of new perspectives are supported by collective efficacy (Bandura, 2001). Collective embodiment thus serves as a catalyst for transformative learning, enabling individuals to "try on" new ways of being and relating that challenge oppressive norms and structures.

### **Radical Vulnerability, Resource Decolonization, and Collective Action**

Collective somatic practices promote radical vulnerability, challenging capitalistic notions of scarcity and individualism. Resource decolonization recognizes how hoarding resources perpetuates power imbalances. By practicing vulnerability and cultivating community aid, participants challenge oppressive paradigms and create support networks (Carruthers, 2018; Ginwright, 2016) - a form of somatic justice that transforms embodied oppression through care, mutual aid, and collective action (Brown, 2019; Haines, 2019).

### **Co-creating Imagined Realities and the Power of Somatic Attunement**

Co-creating imagined realities through shared embodied practice cultivates collective efficacy and transforms oppressive systems (Ginwright, 2016; Kelley, 2002), rooted in somatic attunement - the ability to resonate with others' embodied experiences and develop an awareness of interconnected struggles and collective healing potential (Haines, 2019; McGill, 2013). As individuals engage in collaborative, embodied exploration of alternative futures, they contribute to the generation of "embodied utopias" (Sánchez, 2020, p. 117) - shared visions of liberation grounded in the felt experience of collective struggle and possibility. These embodied utopias serve as powerful catalysts for transformative action, inspiring individuals and communities to take concrete steps towards the realization of more just and equitable worlds.

### **Epigenetic Implications of Embodied Practice**

Embodied practices and collective somatic navigation have significant epigenetic implications. Collaborative exploration of alternative futures may influence gene expression and generate simulated borders (Meloni, 2014; Toyokawa et al., 2012). Epigenetic changes induced by embodied practices and collective somatic experiences can lead to increased efficacy (Bandura, 2001) beyond role trying, fostering the adoption of novel identities (Eldaly, 2021), resilience, and enactive experiences (Varela et al., 1991). These changes amplify the transformative potential of co-created imagined realities.

Embodied practices cultivate interconnectedness and radical vulnerability, catalyzing social consciousness and action. By recognizing the interdependence of personal and collective well-being, individuals engaged in collective somatic practices can begin to build resilient, regenerative communities (Haines, 2019). This recognition of the fundamental interconnectedness of all life forms the basis for a perspective that emphasizes the intrinsic value and agency of all living beings, and the need for a radical transformation of human consciousness and behavior to create a more sustainable and just world.

### **Implications for Social Transformation, Education, and Research**

Centering the embodied knowledge of marginalized communities, social justice movements can develop effective strategies for challenging oppression (Carruthers, 2018; Ginwright, 2016). Integrating somatic practices and transformative learning in education fosters the development of embodied capacities and collective efficacy necessary for social change (Ginwright, 2016; Haines, 2019). Future research should explore the role of collective embodiment in transformative learning, the potential of somatic attunement for perspective-taking and solidarity-building, and the epigenetic and ecological implications of embodied practices (Meloni, 2014; Toyokawa et al., 2012).

## Conclusion

The path towards collective liberation and the dismantling of oppressive structures requires an integral shift in our approach to social transformation. By transcending the limitations of individualistic freedom-dreams and linguistic articulation, and embracing the transformative potential of collective somatic engagement, we can cultivate the resilience, solidarity, and efficacy necessary for creating lasting change. The integration of embodied cognition, critical theory, transformative learning, and non-affirmative education offers a powerful framework for understanding and enacting this shift, highlighting the centrality of somatic knowing, embodied practices, and collective efficacy to our human experience.

The transformative power of collective freedom-dreams, co-generated somatic arenas, and mutually embodied practices lies in their capacity to generate new forms of knowledge, agency, and solidarity that challenge the hegemony. By engaging in collaborative, embodied exploration of desired states, individuals and communities can develop a heightened awareness of their own and others' somatic experiences, cultivate a sense of shared purpose, and co-generate novel strategies that would not have been reached had it not been for the perspective shifts demanded by the factors of social and agentic interdependence. It's through engagement in these modalities of praxis that we contribute to the creation of more just and sustainable futures for all.

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## Experienced Time in the Adult Learning Process: Between Turning Points and Long-term Reflexivity

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**Abstract:** The aim of this contribution is to make explicit the transformations experienced during adult learning over time. Specifically, it focuses on the conscientization of acquired knowledge, the reconfiguration of meaning it engenders, and ultimately the transformation of the learning subject. To this end, we compare Jack Mezirow's (1991/2001) "transformative perspective" and François Jullien's (2009) work on "silent transformations". This highlighting of moments experienced by adults in long-term learning processes could reflect stages of transformation or be precursors of impending change. This cross-fertilization is a re-reading of Mezirow's transformative learning theory, explored here as an occidental vision of adult education, in light of the contributions of Jullien's oriental-inspired philosophy. The data are drawn from two separate action research projects. One involved individual interviews focusing on the learning narratives of young adults in a work-study program, and the other involved interviews with managers in peer-to-peer professional development. A discussion of the findings allows us to examine the complementarity of the two approaches in identifying and understanding transformative processes in adult learning over time.

**Key Words:** Adult learners, Long-term Learning Processes, Transformative learning, Silent Transformations

As Bretesché (2018) points out, "acceleration, speed, urgency and change constitute our modern experience of time". The succession and multiplicity of learning experiences in a context where everything is becoming faster and faster (Rosa, 2010, Wallenhorst, 2018), forcefully questions the impact of time and rhythm on learning processes (Alhadeff-Jones, 2017). More specifically, it questions the temporalities necessary for the awareness of the process, the meaning and gains that result from it, the reconfiguration of the meaning of the experiences it generates, and ultimately the transformation of the learner (Mezirow, 2001/1991).

Mezirow extends learning to adults' entire lives, including their professional activities. He argues that adults engage in a considerable amount of self-education, an assertion based on presuppositions due to the diversity of their previous acquisitions (Mezirow, 2001/1991). Building on the elements of this framework, the theory of transformative learning suggests that the transformation of an experienced moment into a lasting and transformative dynamic usually involves several stages: awareness, reflection, social inclusion and social integration, or changing

schemas and perspectives. This vision, which is particularly common in Western professional contexts, places learning through reflexivity in the context of understanding the causes and meanings of the transformations experienced (Eneau & Bertrand, 2019).

In a completely different epistemological and theoretical tradition, François Jullien develops a philosophical thought of Eastern, more precisely Chinese, obedience that in many ways turns its back on the Occidental tradition. The question of “lived time“, as “experienced time“ is a good example of this. Based on the idea of “silent transformations“, Jullien evokes changes “that never cease to occur and to manifest themselves openly before us“, mostly without our consciousness, although “we only notice the result“ (Jullien, 2009). If these transformations escape the subjects themselves, it is because Western vision, culture, and tradition of thought do not allow us to “capture“ this unspeakable silence. According to Jullien, “cracks“ (as symbolic fissures) are the manifestations of those imperceptible shifts in which “our lives are constantly tilting either to one side or the other“ (Jullien 2021). These tipping (or turning) points and situations of inflection would then be the starting points for detecting cracks, the “weak signals“ of these transformative moments.

Our relationship to time is inextricably linked to our relationship to learning. What, then, can be said about learning processes that “take time“, and, even more so, “take a long time“? How do they affect recall and memory, the integration of new knowledge, and the transformations that take place? In the case of long-term training programs that we have studied, such as a sandwich course work-study program over four years or a peer group learning program for managers over six to seven years, we have found that the learners involved in these processes are not always able to identify what led them to change. Even when they later realize that they have changed, that these years have transformed them, they often struggle to make explicit the changes and processes they have experienced, and their transformations of meaning sometimes remain inaccessible.

Therefore, the aim of this contribution is to explore this process in order to understand the transformations experienced during learning over long periods of time. To this end, we discuss Mezirow’s perspective and Jullien’s approach in order to analyze the “silent transformations“ that have taken place in these two different but complementary fields of research in terms of long-term reflexivity. Our theoretical goal is to develop and, if possible, enrich our frameworks for understanding and analyzing lived time in adult long-term learning processes by comparing Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning, which we have used until now in a “Western“ vision of adult education, with the perspective derived from Orientalist philosophy developed by Jullien, which, to our knowledge, has rarely been used in work on adult education and transformative learning.

We will therefore draw on the results of two different action research projects:

- In the first project, 12 young adults were interviewed using narrative interviews in a “Maison Familiale Rurale“ (rural family home), a work-study training organization. These young adults, who were struggling to cope with the fast pace of their learning program, were in the final cycle of a vocational high school diploma. The data, collected between 2019 and 2021, focused on their learning experiences.
- The second project is part of a training program that the “Association pour le Progrès du Management“ (society for the advancement of management) proposes to its members. A total of 17 autobiographical interviews focused on the learning experiences of the managers involved in the training program, supplemented by explanatory interviews, were carried out.

Used as methodological tools for collecting and analyzing data, narrative and autobiographical interviews as well as “explanatory interviews” share the goal of “developing subjects’ awareness and power to act on their experiences”, in order to reveal their transformative effects (Ganivet, 2023).

Cross-referencing the results of these two action research projects allows us to observe the similarities and differences that the two theoretical approaches make possible in identifying and understanding transformation processes over long periods of time. We then propose to identify “subtle lines of fissuring” in the learning narratives as the beginnings of transformation described by Jullien (2021), and to relate them to the moments that subjects become aware of when they reflect on and interpret their experiences. Moments of awareness or “conscious moments” can then be viewed as tipping points or “silent turning points” of a long-term reflexivity, triggering elements to enter into a “Western” reflection, and ultimately facilitating access to the change of viewpoints, expectations, or assumptions into a transformative experience.

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# **Saving Lives: Transformative Experiences in the Emergency Industry**

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**Abstract:** Navigating life and death on a daily basis is part of working in the emergency industry. An industry that is considered to be a high risk profession with higher suicidal rates as well as negative impacts on mental health due to frequent and repeated confrontation with trauma. Saving lives also holds value and offers many defining moments for transformative experiences (Paul, 2016) and transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991) that may lead to personal development and growth, “teaching you something new, something you could not have known before having the experience, while also changing you as a person “ (Paul, 2016, p. 17). Paul (2016) describes a transformative experience as the potential to reconstruct one’s way of being in the world. This study uses a qualitative approach where 57 paramedics and firefighters reflected on their experiences working in the emergency industry and on the impact these experiences had on them and their lives. By empirically charting out the territory of transformative experiences, the current notion of transformative learning is being troubled, as the data sheds light on partial and incomplete processes of transformation as well as voids within the theory of transformative learning.

**Key Words:** Transformation, Transformative Experience, Workplace Learning, Mental Health, Emotions

## **Extended Abstract**

Navigating life and death on a daily basis is part of working in the emergency industry, an industry that is considered to be a high risk profession with higher suicidal rates (e.g. Whiting et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2017) as well as negative impacts on mental health due to frequent and repeated confrontation with trauma (e.g. Regehr et al., 2002; Behnke et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2005; Halpern et al., 2012). One of these negative impacts is being described by firefighters and first respondents as an experience of emotional deadening (Eschenbacher, 2023): “I often feel numb, I cannot enjoy the little things in life. (After years working in this job) I feel like my emotional pendulum isn’t swinging enough, neither in the positive nor negative direction “ (Participant #27).

It seems opposite to what it means to learn transformatively, as frames of reference might not be more inclusive and discriminatory as a result of this learning experience (Mezirow, 1991).

However, current research shows that saving lives offers many defining moments for transformative experiences (Paul, 2016) and transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991) that may lead to personal development and growth (Eschenbacher, 2023), ultimately changing “how we think and experience our lives, and by extension, ourselves “ (Meadow & Paul, 2021, p. 10-11). To better understand the transformative potential that working in the emergency industry holds, it is helpful to broaden our current understanding of transformative learning and the phenomenon of transformation. One possible way forward is to turn towards philosophy and the concept of transformative experiences: Paul (2016) describes a transformative experience as the potential to reconstruct one’s way of being in the world. Her work helps us understand the experience of

transformation beyond transformative learning theory. It is not limited to only positive outcomes as Mezirow's (1991) notion of transformative learning, while acknowledging the transformative nature of an experience. By empirically charting out the territory of transformative experiences the current notion of transformative learning is being troubled, as the data sheds light on partial and incomplete processes of transformation as well as voids within the theory of transformative learning (especially Mezirow's notion of transformative learning).

This proposal offers empirically-based as well as theoretical insights into the experience of transformation. The results are based on 57 reflective writings from 2nd year undergraduate students from the Management of Catastrophe Defense program at Akkon University (Germany). As qualitative, half-standardized forms of episodic, biographical self-completed interviews, the reflective writings were analyzed using Mayring's Qualitative Content Analysis (2015).

The data shows that learning to cope with traumatic experiences is key to maintaining the mental health and well-being of first responders and firefighters, so that they are able to continue working as long as possible in their profession. Almost all respondents shared the idea that in order to be professional they need to reduce feelings of emotion whilst at work. This mechanism is so widely adopted in the emergency industry, there is a term for it; Abstumpfen: When asked to explain it, the participants described it as deadening of emotions or of achieving comfortable numbness. Living through stressful events on a daily basis and deploying this tactic often affects a critical point of their identity changing what it is like for them to be themselves. Transformative experiences confront them with their own vulnerability and resilience. This results in them reflecting on their lack of coping mechanisms and a new desire for learning and growth both professionally and personally. This data helps us to understand the complex relationships between the phenomenon of transformation (Nicolaidis et al., 2022) in the workplace, privately, as a community and in practice.

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# **My Theory, My Tool, My Tribe: Unpacking Scholars' Perspectives on Transformative Learning's Evolution**

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**Abstract:** We examined the evolving perspectives on transformative learning theory (TLT) through a meta-analysis of scholars' engagements within the field. We incorporated narrative interviews with twelve scholars, using thematic analysis to draw insights from their experiences and contributions. Employing the Community of Practice (CoP) framework, we explored the collective shaping of TLT by its academic community, exploring themes such as critical views on foundational concepts, the theory's applications, its geographical expansion, and community building. The findings highlighted the dynamic and socially constructed nature of transformative learning field and its adaptability to diverse contexts and contemporary challenges. The study underscored the importance of collaboration and community-building among scholars, which not only sustains the theory but also propels its evolution, ensuring its continued relevance. Moving forward, we advocated for continued innovation in theory and practice within the transformative learning community.

**Key Words:** Community of Practice, Field Evolution, Meta-analysis, Scholarly Collaboration, Transformative Learning Theory

## **Introduction**

A recent summary of the last 45 years' literature characterizes transformative learning (TL) as a reasonably developed body of ideas at this point, and advocates for more clarification, new theoretical developments, and significant and fruitful advancements (Hoggan and Finnegan, 2023). To move forward, tracking the development of TL theory (TLT) is essential. Whereas the tracking has historically been done mostly through literature review, insights drivable from empirical meta-studies involving individuals that have worked on, with and in the TL field have been significantly ignored. We posit that a meta-perspective on the scholars' engagement with TL will illuminate the current state of the theory and offer pathways for its future development. Hence, the research question that guided this study is: What are scholars' perspectives on TLT, and how have key factors such as critical perspectives, applications, research, and community efforts collectively shaped the evolution of the theory and the field of study?

## **Theoretical Framework – Community of Practice**

The theoretical framework for the study draws upon the concept of communities of practice (CoP) as a lens through which to explore the development and evolution of TLT. The concept of CoP is rooted in the idea of social learning, where members collectively shape their shared practice and future. According to Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015), "communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (p. 2). While CoP might be formed intentionally or not, three characteristic components that are crucial to having a CoP are the domain (TLT or TL field), the community (TL experts), and the practice (experiences, stories,

tools, theories, and methods) (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Applying the CoP framework to this meta-study allows us to view the evolution of TLT not just as the product of individual scholarly contributions but as a collaborative and socially constructed body of knowledge.

### **Methodology**

To appreciate the temporal, spatial and relational evolution of TL, we adopted a narrative research approach, relying on the stories and experiences of scholars in the field of TL. The participants were selected using criterion and snowball sampling techniques to ensure a diverse and representative sample for the study. They included 12 adult education professors in the United States and were mostly affiliated with TL associations, conferences, and journals. The participants are (in order of the interviews): 1. Edward Taylor 2. John Dirx 3. Victoria Marsick 4. Elizabeth Tisdell 5. Randee Lawrence 6. Lisa Baumgartner 7. Chad Hoggan 8. Ted Fleming 9. Aliko Nicolaides 10. Elizabeth Kasl 11. Juanita Johnson Bailey 12. Doug Paxton. Data were collected using a 14-item semi-structured interview guide. The narratives were analyzed using the thematic analysis technique.

### **Findings**

Relevant themes that emerged from our analysis include critical and appreciative perspectives on Mezirow, contemporary critiques and limitations of TL, expansion of TL beyond North America, applications in various contexts, scholarly contributions to literature, the participants' outstanding contributions, and collaboration and community building.

#### **Critical and Appreciative Perspectives on Mezirow**

The participants expressed various views on the role of Jack Mezirow in the conceptualization of TLT. For instance, Tisdell narrated that she was interested in TL during her doctoral education, but "Mezirow's theory at the time didn't really deal with issues of power, privilege, and oppression." Lawrence and Nicolaides spoke to Mezirow's openness to others' perspectives. Meanwhile, Taylor recognized Mezirow's work as the first integral adult learning theory and Dirx commended its depth, describing Mezirow's perspective on deep learning as very impressive. These acknowledgments underscore Mezirow's significant impact on the field.

#### **Contemporary Critiques and Limitations of TL**

Beyond the classic criticisms of the theory such as being excessively rationally and individualistically oriented, there are contemporary criticisms of TL. Some participants, notably Taylor, believed that the theory lacks sufficient grounding and is sometimes fragmented, risking getting stuck in its evolution, especially as a theory of adult learning. A further observation reflected the tendency to attribute the term "transformative" even to what does not have its characteristics, as pointed out by Dirx, Hoggan and Kasl.

#### **Expansion of TLT Beyond North America**

The general perception of the participants was that TL has found a greater openness to international boundaries, shifting discussion from the US context to Europe and beyond. Through this, a community of scholars has been created who, by working and debating with one another, allow the theory not to become paralyzed, but rather to grow and complexify. Lawrence reported how conferences dedicated to TL are attended by a multitude of people from different countries, a sign of significant expansion.

## **Applications and Research**

Analysis showed that the application spectrum of TLT is evidenced in various settings, including cultural identity, relationships and learning, social change and justice, education and teaching approaches, medical and well-being applications, methodological and contextual diversity in TL. highlighting its significance in fostering change and addressing societal imbalances. This theme underscores the theory's adaptability, the role of educators in facilitating transformation, the theory's potential in non-traditional settings and its ability to impact broader societal issues.

## **Publications and Research Contributions**

The analysis further showed that the scholars have notably contributed to TLT's development through literature reviews, conceptual clarifications, meta-theoretical formulations, and practical applications, thereby enriching Mezirow's foundational concepts and fortifying scholarly coherence within the field. Jack Mezirow and Associates' seminal work, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (1991), was referenced as a key source influencing other scholars. Also, as Nicolaides said, leading the publication of *The Palgrave Handbook of Learning for Transformation* (2022) meant a "management of 50 perspectives on transformation."

## **Participants' "Unique" Contributions to TLT**

Self-reported outstanding contributions of the participants include, in no particular order: understanding informal incidental learning and complexity within TLT (Marsick); the intersection of TLT with spirituality (Tisdell), lens of gender and culture on TLT (Johnson-Bailey); the role of art and imagination (Lawrence); imagination, emotions and depth perspective (Dirkx); generative knowing and leadership TL community (Nicolaides); clarifying and defining terms (Hoggan); "naming of how transformation happens" (Paxton); deep analysis of the development of Mezirow's theory (Baumgartner); synthesizing literature and research (Taylor); embedded cooperative inquiry and developing leaders for social transformation (Kasl).

## **Collaboration and Community Building**

In their narratives, the participants mentioned examples of their collaborative works with several scholars. Describing her collaborators as "thinkers," Nicolaides spoke about collaborations as opportunities for partnering, working, and learning. Also, the word "friendship" emerged as a founding pillar of the community connected to TL. Nicolaides' reflection, "This is my tribe," encapsulates the sentiments and essence of communal belonging and intellectual unity prevalent within the TL community.

## **Discussion**

The TL has evolved over time, driven by shared interests and mutual engagement among scholars, aligning with the CoP (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). The relationships formed within this community—ranging from formal academic collaborations to personal friendships—enhance the theory's vitality and ensure its ongoing relevance (Cranton, & Taylor, 2012). The findings underscore the theory's status as a living, adaptive framework that continuously absorbs and responds to new insights, criticisms, contexts, and methodologies (Nicolaides & Eschenbacher, 2022). Factors such as the critical perspectives, publications, research and community-building all reflect the CoP's emphasis on learning as a social, participatory process, where knowledge is constructed through communal interaction and sustained engagement. The imperative to synthesize diverse perspectives and establish a coherent

trajectory for TLT (Hoggan & Finnigan, 2023), resonating with the CoP's emphasis on creating a shared repertoire of knowledge and practices.

### Conclusion

This study not only highlighted the enduring impact of Mezirow's work but also reaffirmed TL as a dynamic and evolving field, shaped by a vibrant and committed community of scholars. Through collaboration, critical discourse, and shared practices, the community not only sustains the theory but also propels its evolution, embodying the core principles of CoP. Moving forward, embracing reflective perspectives, innovative applications and research, and community-oriented initiatives within the TL field will be essential in navigating the complexities of adult learning in an increasingly interconnected and changing world (Hoggan & Finnigan, 2023). Thus, our study suggests a future for TLT that is both rooted in its foundational principles and responsive to new challenges and opportunities.

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# Transforming Initial Teacher Education: Community Philosophical Dialogue to Develop an Intercultural and Social Justice Perspective<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Initial teacher education is crucial to acquire a habitus oriented towards reflexivity and transformative learning that enables teachers to become self-aware about their frameworks, reformulate those and construct new ones. It is about understanding complexity by acquiring multiple lenses to face reality and challenging it with flexibility. Our paper fits into this discussion by proposing the use of philosophical community dialogue according to the model developed by Matthew Lipman to design initial teacher education paths on intercultural issues and social justice in education. We explore its potential to reflect on educational processes in heterogeneous and multicultural contexts and question: how it could be employed in initial teacher education; what contribution it can make to the development of a reflective and transformative learning-oriented professional habitus; and if the use of this approach could become a resource for initial teacher education to address intercultural issues. We deal with this theme from a theoretical-conceptual point of view, starting from an experience developed in a teaching course of the master's degree course in Education at the University of Turin (Italy), in which pre-service teachers were engaged in philosophical community dialogues on the topics of intercultural education.

**Key Words:** Community Philosophical Dialogue, Intercultural Education, Transformative Learning, Initial Teacher Education

## **Initial Teacher Education between Transformative Learning and Reflexivity**

Initial teacher education is becoming increasingly central (European Commission, 2021; OECD, 2023) so that all students can rely on equitable, inclusive and quality education and learn to take an active role in today's complex societies. It is precisely this complexity that makes it necessary for teachers to be able to develop a reflexivity-oriented professional practice (Schön, 1984) to respond to the growing challenges of school contexts (Cochran-Smith et al., 2014; Feucht et al., 2017; Voinea, 2019).

Providing pre-service teachers with an education that enables them to become aware of their frameworks, to reformulate them and to construct new ones is becoming a crucial issue. These are three central aspects of the theory of transformative learning developed by Mezirow (1991; 2012): they emphasise that understanding complexity consists of gradually acquiring multiple lenses to face reality and question it more flexibly (Rodriguez-Aboytez & Barth, 2020).

This ability to interpret experience through multiple and changing ways and patterns is a constant exercise in reflexivity (Striano, 2020): it accompanies action by making sense of complexity and engaging students in lifelong learning (Dewey, 1949; Fook, 1999; Holland, 1999; Salzman, 2002).

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<sup>1</sup> The paper is a joint reflection of the two authors. Isabella Pescarmona wrote § 1, Valerio Ferrero § 2.



In that way, developing solutions that go beyond transmissive modalities in teacher education may favour approaches that support the process of questioning implicit beliefs and knowledge about teaching and building complex professional interpretations (Hunt, 2013). They can open “disorientation “ that create imaginative spaces for new scenarios for educational action in the classroom and for the professional identity (Fabbri et al., 2021; Milani & Nosari, 2022).

### **Community Philosophical Practice for Initial Teacher Education about Intercultural Issues**

Our paper fits into this discussion by proposing the use of community philosophical dialogue according to the model developed by Matthew Lipman (2003; 2008) to design initial teacher education paths on intercultural issues and social justice in education. Lipman’s approach has traditionally been used in schools for the promotion of complex thinking (Gorad et al, 2017; Kennedy, 2012), but its potential can also be explored for initial teacher education, especially to reflect on educational processes in heterogeneous and multicultural contexts. In fact, it promotes the active participation of pre-service teachers in the form of an inquiry exercise that allows them to give original interpretations and unexplored perspective of the topics discussed, and to develop an ethical posture thanks to the confrontation with different perspectives (Oliverio, 2014; Santi et al., 2019). After having read a text and having formulated knowledge questions, participants choose what they want to dialogue about and construct new knowledge together through philosophical inquiry. The activity ends with a self-assessment of the way in which the dialogue was conducted and the in-depth investigation was carried out.

This process can trigger a virtuous circle between philosophical dialogue, transformative learning and reflexivity (Anderson, 2016; Lewis, 2022), which can support pre-service teachers to develop the ability to question their own beliefs about education, move between different systems of meaning and open up to shared frameworks.

Our contribution deals with this issue from a theoretical-conceptual point of view starting from an experience developed in a teaching course of the master’s degree course in Education at the University of Turin (Italy), in which pre-service teachers were engaged in philosophical community dialogues on the topics of intercultural education (Pescarmona et al., 2021). As established by the Lipmanian model (Trickey & Topping, 2004), they were given original pretexts that elicit questions on issues related to diversity and social justice in school contexts, encouraging them to test themselves in the co-construction of pedagogical ideals, reflect on their implicit knowledge and beliefs about diversity, and transform their usual perspectives on education through philosophical dialogue.

Our paper aims to open a discussion around some central issues, such as: how could philosophical community dialogue be employed in initial teacher education? What contribution can it make to the development of a reflective and transformative learning-oriented professional habitus? Could the use of this approach become a resource for initial teacher education to address intercultural issues? With such a perspective, we would like to explore if and how philosophical dialogue can be a tool for dismantling imaginaries around diversity and the usual way of considering the teaching-learning process, in order to promote transformative learning and nurturing a culture of dialogical education in academic contexts.

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## Getting Into Good Trouble Through Learning-Based Work

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**Abstract:** In this paper we challenge the assumption that “good “ academic research should always build on prior research. This is especially important in the context of transformative learning which, at its core, is about questioning existing knowledge based on taken-for-granted perspectives and effecting change in a frame of reference. Indeed, to study transformative learning while working within the bounds of conventional academic wisdom might be perceived as oxymoronic or even hypocritical. Using duoethnography, a dialogic research methodology, we explore our own experiences delving into the “unknown unknowns “ of learning in the workplace amidst complexity. We examine our somewhat unconventional research approach, which led us to the discovery of learning-based work (LBW), a framework for addressing emerging organizational challenges and opportunities. We conclude that, in order to embody the full meaning of transformative learning, the transformative learning community must continue to push the boundaries of academic research.

**Key Words:** Transformation, Duoethnography, Workplace Learning, Complexity, Academic Research

### Troubling Dominant Premises of Academic Research

The idea that good academic research should build on prior research is deeply ingrained in the philosophy of scholarly inquiry. Researchers are taught early on that knowledge is cumulative and that new knowledge must be based on what is already “known. “ In theory, each new piece of research builds on what already exists and expands the boundaries of knowledge, contributing to a more holistic and nuanced understanding of a subject. The “trouble “ for educators and researchers who focus on the phenomenon of transformation and transformative learning is that, as “the process of effecting change in a frame of reference “ (Mezirow, 1997), transformative learning is fundamentally about questioning existing knowledge based on taken-for-granted perspectives presumed to be “true “ and strongly held. Therefore, to study transformative learning theory while working within the bounds of conventional academic wisdom can be perceived as oxymoronic or even hypocritical. That is not to say that it is impossible to effect change in a frame of reference by building on what is already known; rather the “trouble “ is related to the lack of research that delves into the realm of the unknown unknowns (Snowden & Boone, 2007) because there is no acknowledged academic precedent.

Also problematic is the orientation of academic research toward the past—a necessary result of the understanding of knowledge as cumulative. Whether or not it suits our academic discourses, complexity and its “wicked problems “ (Rittel & Webber, 1973) are increasingly challenging our most basic assumptions about the ability of the past to predict or control the

future, in particular when it comes to learning and transformation. Found “in the transitional space between order and chaos “ where “rules “ (Pendleton-Julian & Seely Brown, 2018, p. 45) are, in a sense, suspended, complexity forces us to reframe our “ways of learning and working, our ways of creating value, and imagining, innovating, and shaping our futures “ (p. 28). The vision of our world is of emergent entwined ecosystems in which people and systems are constantly adapting and co-evolving with no clear outcome other than future potential. Similarly, Scharmer and Kaufer (2013) describe “two fundamentally different modes of learning: learning from the past and learning from the emerging future “ (p. 239, italics in original). They explain learning from the future as a process that taps into multiple ways of knowing:

In order to learn from the emerging future, we have to activate a deep learning cycle that involves not only opening the mind (transcending the cognitive boundaries), but also opening the heart (transcending our relational boundaries) and opening the will (transcending the boundaries of our small will). (p. 239, parentheses in original)

### **Learning-Based Work**

Our own recent research on learning in the workplace has reinforced for us this norm-breaking, future-oriented approach to learning and transformation. Learning and work have become so intertwined that, in many instances, it is no longer possible to see learning as subservient to work. In an earlier paper, we defined this increasingly dynamic interplay and symbiotic relationship between learning and work as learning-based work (LBW), or work “privileges learning in order to build individual and organizational capacity to better address emergent challenges or opportunities. “ Whereas work-based learning is the performance-focused development of capabilities needed to achieve explicit goals by integrating learning into real or simulated tasks and challenges, LBW has to do with innovations, adaptations, or even complete departures from what is known or predictable. Its purpose is, first and foremost, learning in order to then guide and/or influence the nature of work undertaken.

LBW challenges the notion of expertise, another orthodoxy of academia. In LBW, the role of the learning professional is less about subject matter expertise and more about creating a learning-rich culture. It embraces decentralized collaboration as outlined in the essay, *The Cathedral and the Bazaar*, (Raymond, 1999) and the theory of the “wisdom of the crowd, “ in which diverse groups of people, when aggregated, can often make more accurate and insightful decisions than a single expert or small group of experts (Surowiecki, 2005).

### **Research Methodology**

In this paper, we use duoethnography, a dialogic research methodology in which researchers examine and reconceptualize their own assumptions, values, and beliefs (Sawyer & Norris, 2012), to explore our own experiences with LBW and how they have influenced our approach to our own learning and growth as researchers and practitioners. We consider how our dialogues shifted our perspectives as we analyzed and attempted to make sense of the interviews two of us had conducted for a book project on rethinking learning and development. We also reflect on our ongoing exchanges about LBW as a framework for learning amidst complexity. In addition to exploring the implications for our own future research, we consider what it might mean for the transformative learning community as we shift from a past to a future-oriented approach to transformation.

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# The Sociological Imagination and Transformation Theory: A Tribute to Oskar Negt

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**Abstract:** The psychological imagination has played a significant role in the evolution of transformative learning (TL). This paper explores the sociological imagination as an under-utilized ingredient in TL relying on C. Wright Mills and Alfred Schutz to reclaim the unrealized potential of their ideas in the early development of TL. It is also an enriching thread for TL today. The paper goes beyond these authors and integrates the sociological imagination of the German critical theorist/adult educator Oskar Negt with TL. Mills and Schutz were known to and quoted by Mezirow. Negt's concepts of sociological imagination, exemplary learning, obstinacy, imploitation and the dialectical nature of the personal social connection are explored and form a basis for moving TL toward a critical theory of adult learning.

**Key Words:** Sociological Imagination, Exemplary Learning, Oskar Negt

*Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble.* (Lewis, 2018)

I recently came across a letter from Jack Mezirow that started; 'Glad to hear from you and know that you are still causing trouble' (Mezirow, 1996, p. 1). Causing 'trouble' was a perennial ambition that Jack had for himself, and others. The conference theme suggests there is a value in making 'good trouble' for TL.

Mezirow relied on the psychological imaginations of Piaget, Kohlberg, Fingarette, Gould and others for the development of TL and also on the sociological imaginations of Marx, Habermas and Freire. In prioritizing the psychological imagination, the sociological imagination may have been neglected. Finnegan perceives a 'stuckness' in TL (Hoggan, et al., 2016, p. 49), an emphasis on 'rationality at the expense of emotional' intelligence (p. 55), and 'downplaying' the role of sociological imagination in what Mezirow borrowed from Habermas (p. 59). There are also (Finnegan, 2023, p. 127) relatively low levels of work done on 'social justice', and integrating critical sociology, political philosophy and social class with TL. This paper attempts to integrate the historic sociological imaginations of C. Wright Mills (1916-1962) and Alfred Schutz (1899-1959) with TL and the contemporary sociological imagination of Oskar Negt. These help address some of the 'stuckness' and progress TL. Though aware of Schutz and Mills, Mezirow did not integrate their work on the sociological imagination with TL.

## What is Sociological Imagination?

For C Wright Mills, the originator of the concept, sociological imagination means a study of the historical context of social events in terms of the meaning they have for the individual's inner life. It takes into account 'how individuals, in the welter of their daily experience, often become falsely conscious of their social positions' (Mills, 1959, p. 5). Sociological imagination connects individual experiences and problems with the broader structures of society. This

connecting is important in TL when connecting one's individual problems with broader social issues.

### **The Plan**

This paper explores the sociological imagination as understood by Mills and Schutz as an under used, even neglected, ingredient in TL but an enriching thread for TL today. It goes beyond these authors to the German critical theorist/adult educator Oskar Negt. Together these make 'good trouble' - 'necessary trouble' - for TL (Lewis, 2018). Mills and Schutz were known to Mezirow and quoted by him.

### **C Wright Mills: Sociological Imagination**

In *The Sociological Imagination*, Mills (1959) outlines the impact of society on individuals by constructing social reality and individual experience so that 'neither the life of the individual - nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both' (Mills, 1959, p. 3). We can only know our own chances in life by 'becoming aware of those of all' (Mills, 1959, p. 5). One's biography is lived in society. Biography and history are grasped and connected by the sociological imagination allowing us to 'shift perspective from the political to the psychological' (1959, p. 7). The remedy for over using the psychological imagination in TL is not to abandon it, or latch onto the sociological imagination, but to integrate them as dialectically intertwined.

Mills conveniently uses the concept of 'troubles' to refer to problems that occur in everyday life (1959, p. 8). The second stage in the process of TL involves making connections between one's individual 'troubles' and (social) issues providing an opportunity to integrate the sociological imagination of Mills. Making 'good trouble' can have this resonance, predating John Lewis. Including Mills is necessary trouble! This should have provided a way to address some of the critiques of TL that suggested, and indeed convincingly argued, that TL had an inadequate concept of the social. Social science must include 'both troubles and [social] issues, biography and history, and the range of their intricate relations' (Mills, 1959, p. 226). Including sociological imagination in sociology makes it 'more sprightly' (1959, p. 18) - with the same potential for TL.

Mills (1959, pp. 195ff) outlines how 'intellectual craftsmanship' helps integrate the sociological imagination in studies of reality. He intended to keep the 'imagination spurred' (p. 211) with a 'playful mind' (p. 211) and a fierce drive to make sense of the world (p. 211). This will 'release the imagination' (p. 215). Mills (1959, p. 186) describes the work of social scientists:

What he ought to do for the individual is to turn personal troubles and concerns into social issues and problems open to reason - his aim is to help the individual become a self-educating man [sic], who only then would be reasonable and free. What he ought to do for the society is to combat all those forces which are destroying genuine publics and creating a mass society...his aim is to help build and to strengthen self-cultivating publics.

It is clear that our authors explicitly connect their ideas with supporting vibrant public spheres - the supporting infrastructure of democracy (Schutz, 1976; Negt, 1973).



### Alfred Schutz: Sociological Imagination

Mezirow (2003, p. 326) references Schutz, quoting him in his paper at the 5<sup>th</sup> TL Conference in TC. He (1979) borrowed from Schutz, but Schutz has a low profile in TL scholarship and conference papers. Schutz described the *lifeworld* as the preconscious and taken-for-granted presuppositions, understandings that determine how reality is experienced. It is the taken-for-granted horizon within which we understand the world (Schutz, 1970). It is subject to a ‘sociopathological form of *internal colonization*’ by the system (Habermas, 1987, p. 305). For Habermas this is the pathology of modernity. Mezirow used lifeworld to describe uncritically accepted frames of reference and sets of unquestioned assumptions that inform our thinking and actions. The lifeworld (frames of reference) gets transformed in TL. Much of the sociology of Schutz centers on the lifeworld.

*Typification* (Schutz, 1967) refers to the process that we use to make meanings and to categorize people and things in order to better understand them. Typifications act as form of *recipe knowledge* or handy unquestioned projections onto others as to how we perceive them. For Mezirow, our ways of typifying are unquestioned sets of meanings that make sense – until they do not. Typifying uses imagination to abstract from reality. We make meaning by taking for granted our beliefs in the world by the ‘suspension of doubt’ (1967, p. 229). We are always pre-acquainted with the world through socially given meanings as a ‘stock of knowledge at hand’, ‘biographically determined’ and ‘sedimented’ (p. 247). These form a ‘socially approved set of rules and recipes for dealing with reality’ (p. 34) and are the ‘sediment of previous experiences’ (p. 33).

The sociologically imagination also includes *bracketing* suggesting that in making meaning what we put ‘in brackets is the doubt that the world and its objects might be otherwise than it appears to him’ (1967, p. 46). If some event arises that brings into question the reality as we experience it, then we may change the assumption that we have been seeing things as they actually are (Schutz, 1967). This requires an active sociological imagination. These concepts also inform TL. According to Mezirow, bracketing (of doubt) is an example of uncritical thinking. But seeing these concepts as part of sociological imagination has not been utilized in TL. The necessary concept - indeed necessary trouble - of the sociological imagination escapes attention.

Other concepts from the phenomenological sociology of Schutz also form part of the vocabulary of TL and the theory of sociological imagination. These (Schutz, 1967) include *role taking* (the ability to see the self through the eyes of others) and *multiple realities* (the experience of being able to interpret experiences from different perspectives). Mezirow (1979) was able to suggest that multiple realities were suggestive of frames of reference or provinces of meaning (Schutz, 1970) – but never named as involving sociological imagination.

Schutz (1945, p. 571) theory of sociological imagination has a well-developed concept of *dialectic thinking* that is surprisingly neglected in TL scholarship. Dialectical thinking involves a dynamic relationship between individual actors and social structures; between objective reality and subjective phenomenon; between structure and agency; between the body and world (Fleming, 2024). Two things are achieved by integrating it with TL. We integrate a necessarily troubling ingredient of TL. It also forms a bridge to the sociological imagination as understood by Negt. The idea that our personal problems, or disorienting dilemmas are connected to broader social issues now needs to be re-defined within TL. Without identifying the dialectic connection between the personal and the social we misunderstand both the individual problem and the social context. An early stage of TL involves making connections between one’s own individual

problem and broader social issues. That connection is dialectical. A number of the stages of TL must now be reinterpreted.

The political is personal – but dialectically. For example, the actions one takes as the essential completing stage of TL are dialectically interconnected actions at personal and social levels. It requires that one perceives how internal oppressions and external injustices operate dialectically. This critical reconstruction of TL moves it toward a critical theory of adult learning.

### **Oskar Negt: Sociological Imagination for Transformative Social Change**

Negt was a critical theorist in the Frankfurt School tradition. He died in early 2024 – prompting this paper’s dedication to him (Langston, 2024). His first book (1971), *Sociological imagination and exemplary learning*, provoked considerable discussion in European workers’ education circles. He worked with his movie-making colleague Alexander Kluge (Kluge, 2024; Negt, 2024) and they also assert that individual experience cannot be properly understood unless it is seen in dialectical relationship with one’s social environment. Disorienting dilemmas then become more complex than Mezirow’s version (1991) and changes how TL is understood. Without the dialectical relationship between individual experience and social contexts each is misconstrued. In the literature on TL the dialectical nature of these connections is absent. We must avoid falsely dichotomizing social and personal aspects of TL - we need to integrate them.

Habermas (2008, p. 14) addressed this forcibly when he wrote that the ‘public domain of the jointly inhabited interior of our lifeworld is at once inside and outside’. Even in the most personal moments our consciousness thrives on the ‘impulses it receives from the cultural network of public, symbolically expressed, and intersubjectively shared categories, thoughts and meanings’ (Habermas, 2008, p. 15). It is difficult to imagine a stronger statement than this of the false dichotomy between individual and society. TL requires an ability to imagine the world in this connected way. There is not a psychological imagination and another unconnected sociological imagination with which we understand experience and the world. The final stage of TL involves taking action on the basis of new transformed perspectives. These actions are both individual and social.

Negt (1971, p. 27) links his teaching technique that he calls exemplary learning with the sociological imagination of Mills. He organized instructional materials that addressed workers’ interests and class consciousness with a view to supporting them taking emancipatory actions. Uniquely, among critical theorists Negt (and Kluge) present teaching materials and instructional methods as part of his pedagogy of the sociological imagination.

Kluge and Negt were aware that our imaginations are compromised by neoliberalism which subverts people’s inner resources. They borrowed the concept of ‘*imploitation*’ from Bertolt Brecht to describe this impact. Quoting Brecht, Kluge and Negt (2014, p. 445) state how exploitation operates in the inner world: ‘Since the object of exploitation is put inside them, they are, so to speak, victims of *imploitation*’ that prevents understanding the real conscious experience of oppression and how systems undermine ‘workers’ imagination’ (Negt & Kluge, 2016, p. 35). They reclaim imagination calling it the ‘productive force of the brain’ (Negt & Kluge, 2016, p. 37) - neglected and ‘barricaded into the ghettos of the arts, dreaming, and the “delicate feelings “ (p. 36). In typical expressive language they see this undermined imagination as the ‘vagabond, the unemployed member of the intellectual faculties’ (Negt & Kluge, 2016, p. 37). According to Kluge and Negt an obstacle is erected for emancipatory practices when this productive force of the brain is divided (imploited) so that it cannot obey its own laws of operation. The imagination cannot imagine. An important tool is lost for the ‘self-emancipation

of the workers' (Negt & Kluge, 2016, p. 37). But all is not lost. They introduce the imaginatively original concept of *obstinacy* to describe the extraordinary capacities of human nature to not only survive exploitation but to have the potential to be awake (Kluge, & Negt, 2014). We recall that Mills (1959, p. 197) and Schutz (1967, p. 212, 1970, p. 72) associate the sociological imagination with being 'awake'. The struggle for recognition, the resilience of learners and the drive for learning that is transformative are multiple ways of expressing obstinacy and a deeply engrained posture of being wide awake (Fleming, 2024).

Negt's pedagogy involves, thinking independently, dialectically, systemically, with sociological imagination, utilizing critical reflection. Adult learning is a process of analyzing and bringing into awareness the historical process of how learners' interests are defined for them and how relationships of power are experienced, so that they can learn about their roles in society (Negt, 1973). He goes beyond the teaching of competencies and emphasizes understanding 'workers existence as a social problem' (Negt, 1971, p. 4). This involves learners, analyzing social situations, in order to understand the causes of these situations and informing actions to change them. He developed a transformative pedagogy and teaching manual so that learners may identify actions to change unjust realities. When Negt and Kluge (2016) assert that experience is the most important thing that 'workers actually produce' (p. xlvi). I suggest that learners, acting as learners, produce experience. When we then understand how experience is influenced by social structures, there is the possibility of what Maxine Greene (1995) - quoting Schutz - calls breaking through the inertia of convention when people 'are enabled to explain their "shocks" and reach beyond' (p. 39). Such a pedagogy, Greene continues, 'offers life; it offers hope; it offers the prospect of discovery; it offers light' (1995, p. 133). These moments can help engage one's sociological imagination in the process of social transformation (Negt & Kluge, 2016) and TL. Negt's pedagogy involves an exercise in sociological imagination in order to re-imagine the lived experiences of learners and the submerged possibilities that emerge through exemplary learning. Exemplary learning is Negt's pedagogy that combines six competencies and sociological imagination.

Negt's (2010, pp. 218ff) six competences essential for exemplary learning include the competences of: Identity; history; social justice; technology; ecology and economics. His curriculum of exemplary learning links learners' individual experiences (of misrecognitions and injustices) with social issues; investigates and explores the interconnections in order to see how individual experiences and structural issues are connected – dialectically. Exemplary learning is transformative.

In contrast to TL, with its much-criticized focus on abstract critical reflection, it is imagination - sociological imagination - that provides the firm grounding for transformation. Negt's education goes beyond views of education that emphasize personal growth that may lead to fitting into the social structures of the current world (Negt & Kluge, 2016).

TL has an absence of teaching methods in publication about TL. Kluge and Negt (2014) collect an archive of pedagogical methods for facilitating the exploration of how things could be different. Using literature, science fiction, satire, fairy-tales, film, documentaries and a range of innovative materials they support the critical and sociological imaginations of learners. They make trouble, good trouble, necessary trouble, trouble that leads to disorienting dilemmas. It makes trouble for what is preconceived and taken for granted. Making trouble may be mild expression compared to Kluge's (1996) book title that refers to their pedagogy as *Learning processes with a deadly outcome*.

In contrast to TL's rather tame political interest, Negt's learning nudges TL toward social and political arenas. It provides a framework for an historical and material interpretation of subjectivity as produced by capitalist systems as well as a source for a new more just and caring social order – this demands sociological imagination. All our accomplices (Mills, Schutz, and Negt) are aware that social change is difficult, involving what Kluge (2017) calls in his book title (quoting Weber), a slow and powerful *Drilling through hard boards*. This is a rare excursion into adult learning theory by a scholar linked to the Frankfurt School.

### Conclusion

As a tribute to Oskar Negt, and in the style of his teaching for exemplary learning with a sociological imagination, I offer this fragment. Beyoncé - a prominent singer and cultural figure - has recently published a recording of Paul McCarthy's civil rights inspired song 'Blackbird'. It makes, I think, 'good trouble, necessary trouble'. Listen with a sociological imagination and a TL ear! Play on YouTube (Simpson, 2024).

Blackbird singing in the dead of night  
Take these broken wings and learn to fly  
All your life, you were only waiting  
For this moment to arise.

Blackbird singing in the dead of night  
Take these sunken eyes and learn to see  
All your life, you were only waiting  
For this moment to be free.

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# **Power, Communication and Identity Building: A Duoethnography on Transforming Relationships in Academy**

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**Abstract:** This paper addresses power, communication, and identity formation in academia by building on a duoethnography between a senior and a junior scholar. By exploring the communication events that accompanied the evolution of a relationship started as an asymmetrical PhD supervisor-supervisee deal, the authors reflect on how power is constructed and deconstructed, affirmed, or questioned, but always present, although in different forms and to different degrees. Transformative learning is here used to reflect on the relational, occupational, and identity transitions that led to overcome asymmetry on certain regards (e.g., in teaching and writing together) but maintaining it on others. We advance that shared reflexivity is effective in building awareness about the never accomplished transition to a researcher's identity. Besides, it sustains a sense of "we-ness" and broadens our understanding of the intergenerational power dynamics that may be reproduced when teaching and interacting with students in an intricate web of relationships.

**Key Words:** Power, Communication, Relationship, Transformative Learning, Reflexivity

## **Communication as "Doing Identities in Relationships"**

Hi Davide,

I am thinking about our project for the conference in Siena and how to get along with the duoethnography. We need to be clear about the method and share criteria. How can we explore the evolution of our relationship? What "data" do you want to analyze together? [...] let's stick to some concrete object/artifact. In our phone call, we were talking about analyzing email exchanges, WhatsApp messages and objects like my introduction to your book and our book together. Is there anything else that you would add?

If you are OK with this, I will try to track back our first meetings and exchanges. I realized that you have changed your account from campus.unimib to unimib.it. If we think in terms of "doing transitions" (I would like to use this framework, among the others), the institution defines people as "students" or "academics" by this simple event. I will explore the "before" and "after" from my perspective. Is this meaningful for you? [...]

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Hi Prof! (Does this sound good in English?)

I think we have lots of materials to work with considering all the emails, WhatsApp conversations, and books... I'm excited and curious to see how things have changed. There are also a lot of oral conversations that made a huge difference, even though they're harder to take track of. I remember, for example, the very first day we met, during my interview for my PhD.

That was a particularly meaningful moment for me. Then there was the day when I asked you to be my supervisor, and then the famous day of our lunch that is mentioned in my book. Plus all the telephone conversations and calls. It's difficult to remember exactly everything, but I would like to keep in mind this constellation of events and try to position them in a simple timeline. I guess this could help us make more sense of all the other data we are analyzing.

Actually, now that I think about it, maybe it can be interesting to trace a visual timeline where we insert significant moments, like critical incidents (e.g., our lunch), insights, and particularly relevant occasions... If not for the “broader public “ maybe for us, to better navigate all these experiences? I'm very curious to start this process. I know I changed a lot during these years, and so did our relationship. I will keep you posted.

Thank you, and happy liberation day! Davide

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This paper addresses power (de)construction in the relationship between a senior and a junior researcher (the authors). We use duoethnography, a dialogic experience-based research method devised by Sawyer and Norris (2012) to support the building of shared critical knowledge through collaborative writing. We interrogate the evolution of our relationship from the initial PhD student-supervisor deal to the present and ongoing construction of shared authority, an highly desirable evolution for the well-being of our relationship and for our growth as researchers. In exploring the individual, relational, and institutional dilemmas related to power over 7-years interactions, we use reflection, reflexivity, metacommunication, and the interrogation of our perspectives of meaning as means to cope and learn. Power relationships are everywhere in adult and institutional life, too often misconceived or simplified in ideological terms. Transformative learning theory can sustain our understanding of how relationships are conceived and conducted, not only individually, but in the academic community. As academics who are interested in understanding and fighting oppression and institutional violence, we may ironically reproduce these very dynamics in the way we communicate and interact with students and peers. Shared authority could be the answer, if we define knowledge as incomplete, ever-changing, multiple, and socially constructed.

So, we play with our insiderness and adopt ethnographic and linguistic lenses to explore the hidden structures of power enforced in our experiences with social and institutional structures, roles, rituals. See the signatures in the emails reproduced above: they offer clues on how deontic power is built (Searle, 2016). Shared authority is more complex: it entails using and transforming deontic, epistemic, and emotional power (Stevanovic and Peräkylä, 2014), considering this word as the possibility to influence and be influenced by the other, the ongoing conversation, and the circumstances.

How are different forms of power negotiated in academic relationships to create shared authority? To answer this question we have chosen duoethnography. The exchange of emails shows how a communicative space can be used its institutional aim to do research, share data from different sources, and discuss them in an ongoing open conversation. We identified those moments that have shaped our paths as researchers and built our “we-ness “. By zooming into our communicative exchanges we magnify small insignificant details that expose power and its effects. Duoethnography is based on difference, and we are different in many respects: age, gender, regional origins, personality, scientific interests and expertise. We both study communication, but Laura’s focus is on complex systems (Bateson, 1972; Morin, 1992), languaging (Maturana, 1990) and conversations (Cronen, 2016), while Davide brings a critical cultural-pedagogical perspective on media ecologies and their contribution to our understanding of the social world (Granata, 2015; Silverstone, 1999).

“We communicate, therefore I think “ (Cronen, 2016): reflexivity is difficult, almost impossible without another perspective that contrasts ours. Duoethnography pushes us to multiply and challenge our perspectives (Sawyer & Norris, 2012). It nurtures shared reflexivity as a learning strategy and an antidote to the dominant rationalistic, individualistic, intrapsychic epistemology. In our duoethnography, we share stories of epiphanies (personal memories), social media communication (WhatsApp conversations, emails), and students’ writings and posts. Here, we share and discuss some of the data that are emerging from the still ongoing analysis.

22 October 2021 [WhatsApp]

D: Prof scusi, siccome ho visto che su Moodle c’è ancora il programma vecchio volevo chiederle se è confermato che intervengo il 10 e il 17/*Sorry Prof, I saw on Moodle the old syllabus is still there so I wanted to ask you if my lectures are confirmed on the 10th and the 17th.*

28 October 2021

L: Ciao Davide, per il 17 novembre [...] come eravamo rimasti? *Hi Davide, about November 17 [...] What did we decide?*

D: Ciao Prof, sto guardando/*Hi Prof, I’m looking at it*

Laura - Sometime between 22 and 28 October 2021, you changed your language. The English translation misses the point: in Italian respect and power are expressed by using the third person with older and powerful persons. In your first message you call me Her, I answer by younging you. This asymmetry marks my deontic power. Then, you started using “Ciao Prof “ (with a capital P). Is this your creative solution to the dilemma of being respectful while searching for a more even ground?

Davide - I remember when you asked me to use the second person with you, in 2021; then, around April 2023, you asked me to call you Laura. While both options sounded strange to me at first, the former sat better with me, but I never really incorporated the latter. I guess this has to do with my biographic experience as a student. In Sicily, where I grew up, the relationship between students and teachers tends to be very formal and respectful. Also, academically speaking, I always wanted to have a mentor. Having a mentor in my mind entails respect (even if I would want my students to call me by my name). It is not a form of “awe “, but recognizing the role a person has played and plays in your life. To me “Prof“ includes all of that and more. Combining it with the second person allows me to be in a more equitable relationship while recognizing an asymmetry that in my view does not undermine my authority, but enriches it.



Being a senior and a junior scholars means there is always something that I'm going to learn. I know learning is mutual, you told me yourself that you learned from me as well, but I do like the idea of continuing learning from a person who played a significant role in my education.

### **Power and Authority**

Intergenerational power is always at stake in academic life, where most older people have an academic position, while the younger are students or early career researchers. We started our relationship as a supervisor and a PhD student some years ago, now we are colleagues in the same Department. But relationships evolve slowly, through signals that are sometimes hidden, ambiguous, even paradoxical. Our communication exchanges (in presence, in institutional emails, chats, videos and phone calls) can be interpreted within the systemic framework as the constitution of transitional spaces for “doing authority “, “doing identity within the relationship “ (Who am I for you? Who are you for me? What are we doing here, what is at stake?) and “doing learning “. As stated by Caronia and Nasi (2022), authority is constituted through communication; using conversation analysis, Watson (2018) uses systemic lenses to explore the building of shared authority in conversations between professionals and users of care services, a different context, but with similar challenges of unbalanced power. “Be my friend “, “be my peer “ is a paradoxical message, a double bind (Bateson, 1972), when it comes from a powerful position in the relationship.

### **The Larger Context**

30 March, 2023 [WhatsApp]

*D: Contract signed!*

*L: Hurray!*

March 31, 2023

*D: Hi Prof, I was thinking from next week to start planning about scientific societies*

The exchange above brings us back to when Davide was appointed as researcher in Bicocca (April 1, 2023) with a 3 years' contract. Many of our conversations were and are devoted to knowing the system of research, a very complex arrangement of practices, structures, procedures, manifest and hidden rules. A main worry for early-career researchers is how to navigate the system in order to get a tenure; they need to quickly build a strong scientific reputation and construct a recognizable identity as a scholar. Recognizable to whom? Is it more rewarding cultivating a national profile, writing in Italian and participating in pedagogical societies and conferences, or building an international network of relationships, publishing in English, maybe with colleagues from other countries? In our conversations, we try to be reflexive and rational but also committed to a vision, a perspective that brings us to be curious and open rather than merely strategic. In this respect, our stories are very different. For Laura, at the beginning of her academic career there was a feeling of freedom and choice; she wandered between psychology, family therapy, systems' epistemology, organization studies, and education, traveling between Italy and Switzerland, between profession and research. Her PhD on autobiographical methods allowed her to stabilize her identity as a researcher in adult education, that is part of General and Social Pedagogy in the Italian academy. Milano Bicocca was recruiting hundreds of researchers between 1998-2000, so she was proposed to apply. Her contract had no time limit: she is expected to work in this institution until retirement.

For the younger generations it is very difficult to have a tenure. An early-career researcher must be focused on one objective and avoid dispersion; they are pressured to be

active, visible, publishing a lot, collaborating with journals and editorial series, receiving awards and funds for research. And yet, all of this is not enough without appropriate social capital. Full professors are career gatekeepers through their role in the evaluation of juniors in the recruitment processes and in scientific societies, journals, and departments. There is a tension here, between Davide's desire to learn from an experienced person, Laura's preference for peer-to-peer relationships (maybe entailing a denial of her own power), and the expectations of the larger context. It would be naïf to interpret the evolution of our relationship as only due to individual choices and biographies (microlevel), or to evolving conversations in time (mesolevel), without taking into account the macrosystem. Shared reflexivity is a way to see the entanglements of "doing identity" in a neoliberal and oppressive system. The biographical microlevel is still relevant, of course, in illuminating our perspectives of meaning as subjects who have been raised as "good students" within a system of premises that praised performance, success, and abstract thinking. 'I think therefore I am': the social construction of a "real intellectual" is itself generative of struggles. We are expected to belong to the academic community, but both of us are outsiders in some measure, as first generation students.

### **An Interesting Anomaly**

On 10/02/2019 Davide sends an email to Laura from the new institutional account @unimib.it. As a contracted tutor of Laura's course, he was given this "privilege" that grants access to (almost) all the online services and facilities. It also communicates belonging (although in a temporary way) and can be a signal of transition to a new identity. However, the student's account was still working since his PhD was not over yet. Despite having the new account, Davide used the old one for a long time, well after the end of his PhD, until he signed the new contract as an Assistant Professor on 04/01/2023. He was still using both accounts for a while, until Laura told him to stick to the new one and abandon the previous. This is part of "doing identity" within the academic institution, with relevant practical and symbolic implications: the people who receive your emails know immediately, from your email address, if you are a member of the university or "just a student". They will answer to you (or not) based on their interpretation of who you are. You are defined by the extension of your emails!

On Davide's side, communicating a new (but temporary) address to previous contacts was awkward, also considering that meanwhile he was appointed as a postdoctoral researcher at another university, with its own email account. We could study the complexities of becoming an academic and the fragmentation and uncertainty of academic careers by the number of different emails one has to juggle! Symbolically, Davide's upgrade was real, but holding onto the old email was an expression of the in-betweenness that he was living.

Headings are flush left and boldface. They are on a line by themselves and are not preceded by a blank line.

### **Ecosystemic and Critical Lenses**

Since 2019, we have started little by little to combine our frameworks in one overall approach. We began by co-designing and co-teaching Laura's course "Family Pedagogy" at Milano Bicocca University. Davide was expected to integrate Laura's established framework based on the systemic perspective and an active-ating transformative pedagogy (Formenti 2009, 2014, 2017, 2019, 2023) with his research work (Cino, 2020; 2021; 2022) that illuminates the processes of performing and learning parenthood through the critical exploration of media. The course promotes systemic reflexivity: a combination of collaboration, creativity, curiosity, and criticality. To become educators, and learn how to work safely in very uncertain spaces (Mason,

2015), students must develop their own authorship and authority, by taking a reflexive and critical stance (Daniel, 2012) towards the course subject matter (family, parenthood, media representations), challenging common sense discourses. In 2021 we started to implement more explicitly a research-based pedagogy to involve the students in positioning themselves as constructors of knowledge, and not only users. We asked them to form groups to do research on a topic of their choice. We offered scaffolding and tutoring, but the groups' autonomy was praised and encouraged. In 2023, this collaboration led to a book (Formenti & Cino, 2023) presenting the course experience, philosophy, and outcomes.

Writing together brought out our differences and commonalities. Meanwhile, we started other projects and publications, too many to be reported here. Through these projects, our relationship is evolving, but working together does not mean getting rid of power. So, we keep reflecting and searching for further ethnographic data to illuminate the process.

Teaching together was a very concrete way to compose our different lenses within a common ecosystemic-critical approach (Simon & Chard, 2014), using Bateson's logical levels of communication and learning and Mezirow's theory of transformative learning to challenge the students' and our 'problematic frames of reference' and 'sets of fixed assumptions' (Mezirow, 2003, p. 58). However, problematic frames and assumptions are not only individual. They belong to the system.

### **Conclusions**

This ongoing study is refining our capacity to interrogate and create spaces for social transformation. Universities appear as sites of social reproduction, but our students - future social educators - deserve to be trained to develop their curiosity and transformative capacity, to find their voices, self-authorship, and authority. To offer spaces for that, we must engage ourselves in a similar way.

Teaching and researching are inherently political: by bringing our life experience onto it, we make a choice and take a stand: the personal is pedagogical (Friselle, 2020). Academics can be bulwarks of normative power. As members of an institution, we must recognize our deontic power, but we can still negotiate shared authority, among many contradictions. Freire's conscientization is the capacity to read the context, name the contradictions, and take action. Doing research with the students has created a very unstable balance, a learning partnership where we share the same incertitude, the same longing for answers, and desire for knowledge.

Shared authority is a risky business requiring epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal transformations (Snipes & LePeau, 2017). As intellectuals, we are immersed in the system, "organic" to it (Gramsci, 1971); we try to learn how it works at the boundary between our bio-cultural ways of knowing and the values and practices of academia. Interpersonal transformation can sustain human learning, not as the individual competitive process of the dominant culture, but as the collective process of building shared humanity.

Our study is unfinished. New questions are emerging: How can we foster reflexivity in different conversations and media? How can we reveal the role of context and structures and cope with the tensions and dilemmas they produce?

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## **Transformative Learning within Cohort-Based Learning Programs: A Collaborative Inquiry of AEGIS XXVIII**

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**Abstract:** Using a qualitative approach, this case study seeks to understand the impact of cohort-based programs on transformative outcomes on the individuals within a cohort and as a collective body. Moreover, the inquiry team will explore the impact of racial and gender diversity on both climate and learning outcomes and how norms and other community structures can support rigorous learning among the group. Surveys, interviews, and data from Brookfield's Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ) were used to identify disorienting dilemmas that led to transformation within the cohort. The research reviews findings to enhance program experience and learning outcomes for future cohorts.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Cohort-based Learning, Collaborative Inquiry, Critical Incident Questionnaire, Diversity in Adult Education

### **Introduction**

The Adult Education Guided Intensive Study (AEGIS) program at Columbia University Teachers College was founded by Jack Mezirow in 1982 to foster lifelong learning among a highly diverse cohort of learners known as scholar-practitioners through their engagement in critical reflection and dialogic practice (Marsick & Finger, 1994). Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning (TL) informed the foundation of the content and methodologies of the program, including intended outcomes.

*Cohort-based learning* refers to individuals who enter a program, take classes, move through academic requirements, and complete the program as a group. A clearly defined membership, a shared goal, and structured meetings over time are essential in defining and forming cohorts (Saltiel & Russo, 2001). Scribner and Donaldson (2001) found that many models for evaluating cohort learning focused on the quality of experience of these programs rather than the type or impact of learning. They conducted a case study analysis using group dynamics and learning lenses to explain how learning can occur in a cohort. While reflective and transformational learning was possible, some learning outcomes could be overshadowed by the intensity of social relations and affective elements, reinforcing the need for faculty to carefully attend to the learning environment. Their study suggests the importance of group dynamics and cohesiveness and the need for students to be prepared for the intensity of experience that comes from learning with the same students over time.

Research on the AEGIS cohort is limited, though some have explored the impact of the cohort on individual and group learning. Wong and Faller (2014) found that formal time and

space for group reflection within the AEGIS cohort were necessary to support ongoing learning. Another study examined the impact of sharing life histories on group development and learning (Alhadeff-Jones, 2010). The author found a positive impact though argued that formal and informal interactions are essential for building solid bonds across cohorts to foster a sense of community.

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

Mezirow (2009) defined *TL* as “learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change” (p.22). Habermas (1971) categorizes these types of learning as the development of emancipatory knowledge, which frees us from constraints through critical reflection. Mezirow (1991, 2009) identified ten phases of *TL* initiated by the disorienting dilemma: significant experiences or crises that challenge existing assumptions. AEGIS cohort members completed surveys to identify and analyze these critical moments, experienced individually or collectively.

#### **Group Learning**

*TL* has come under criticism for being overly individualistic in its approach to learning and definition of outcomes. In their overview of unresolved issues in *TL*, Merriam and Bierema (2014) pose the outstanding question: “Can groups change?” (p. 99). Noting *TL*’s grounding in the psychological domains, Finnegan asserts that “while theory focuses on the individual, it is not irredeemably individualistic. The authors plan to draw on the social aspects of *TLT*, including Freire’s (2005) theory of social change, from which *TL* focuses on dialogue and Habermas’s grounding of the individual experience within the social dimension (Fleming, 2022).

Kasl and Elias (2000) saw group learning as critical to adult learning and posited that groups themselves can be seen as learning entities that have the capacity to learn. They found that concepts in individual transformation could apply to groups. Kasl and Elias found both *TL* and constructive-development theory to be useful lenses for understanding the evolution of consciousness in learning. Mezirow’s *TLT* focuses on transforming the content of consciousness, or the assumptions or premises that form a person’s frames of reference, meaning schemes, or meaning perspectives. *TL* occurs when we elaborate on existing frames of reference, learn new frames of reference, transform frames of reference, points of view, or habits of mind (Mezirow, 2000).

#### **The Role of Diversity**

In exploring empathy within diverse learning environments, Kasl and Yorks (2016) articulate the paradox of diversity, underscoring its dual potential to enrich and complicate learning. They argue that while diverse perspectives are crucial for challenging and expanding one’s worldview, significantly different views can lead to feelings of unsafety and disengagement. This paradox suggests that educational programs, especially cohort-based learning, must skillfully navigate these differences to foster an environment where empathic engagement and critical dialogue thrive. By creating empathic spaces that respect and integrate diverse experiences, educators can enhance the transformative potential of their programs, promoting both individual and collective growth.

### **Research Approach**

In collaborative inquiry, all participants are active in formulation of research questions, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Through critical examination, reflection and dialogue, researchers learn from each other’s experiences and insights to deepen their

understanding of the topic and work to identify solutions that benefit the group or community at the center of research (Creswell, 2018).

The research addressed the following questions through surveys and interviews:

- 1) How do individuals experience disorienting dilemmas within the cohort and what role do various social identities play?
- 2) To what extent have individuals experienced parts of the TL process through their experience in the cohort?
- 3) How has group identity (values, beliefs, ways of being) shifted from the start of the cohort process to the end?
- 4) How does individual TL contribute to or hinder group learning and performance?

This qualitative study used Brookfield's (1995) Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ) in surveys as well as semi-structured interviews to probe the learning experiences of cohort members. Qualitative analysis focused on identifying differences and similarities in how participants experience transformation informed by various identity dimensions within the cohort.

### **Core Findings**

The survey and interviews revealed a variety of experiences within the cohort at the individual and group level that participants characterized as disorienting or disruptive. Responses included instances of conflict between faculty and students, conflict between members of the cohort, a cohort member leaving the program, dissatisfaction with the content or teaching methodologies, and violations of perceived group norms.

Though all members shared that they had experienced moments of disorientation, few indicated that they had experienced individual transformations as a result of their membership within the cohort. Some participants mentioned smaller transformations that indicated transformed views of self or increased moments of agency consistent with Taylor's (1997) finding that learning transformations can result in increased confidence or adoption of new roles. Others shared the continuation of transformations already in progress further deepening articulations of assumptions revised through previous learning processes.

Cohort members interviewed shared a definitive shift in the dynamic of the group, though only some characterized this as a group transformation. Some members cited shifts in the cohort's stated goals, values, and ways of operating, while some members focused on the perceived closeness and connectedness over time. A common theme surfaced of the cohort shifting from a more unified, harmonious group at the beginning to one more fragmented and defined by smaller groups of relationships emerged, though members were split on whether or not that constituted an erosion of cohort connections or a natural and healthy course of action. The Holding Environment for Emotional Support was mentioned most frequently and was most likely to indicate a place where norms or values were breached. The Holding Environment for Perspective Building was mentioned only slightly less frequently, and in many cases was mentioned as an element that supported learning.

Although the cohort shared mixed opinions about the role of identity in their experience within the cohort, intercultural conflict was often mentioned as a source of both disorienting dilemmas and opportunities to understand the perspectives of others. BIPOC cohort members were more likely to mention racial or gender-based differences as a source of these conflicts, while White cohort members were more likely to identify personal attributes such as working

styles, age and generational differences, or professional background as the source of these conflicts.

Regardless of these differences in the assessment of which dimensions of diversity most contributed to cohort dynamics, interviewees widely agreed on the diversity of perspectives represented within the group and the challenges and opportunities those posed. Nearly all interviewees mentioned the challenge or importance of operating within multicultural environments and sustaining efforts through cultural conflict.

## **Discussion**

The findings from the study reveal key insights into the dynamics of cohort-based learning programs and their potential for fostering transformative learning. This discussion section synthesizes these findings, highlighting the impact of norms, diversity, and emotional support on the cohort's learning experiences and transformative outcomes.

### **The Role of Norms and Shared Values**

One of the critical themes that emerged from our study is the importance of establishing clear norms and shared values within the cohort. The group's inability to complete a formal process for naming and upholding norms contributed to varying expectations among cohort members regarding their roles and responsibilities within the group. This lack of shared understanding often led to dissatisfaction and fragmented experiences. Some participants noted conflicts arising from unaddressed differences in identity, such as race and gender, underscoring the need for explicit norms and values to manage interactions and expectations. The absence of shared values also led to feelings of exclusion in some group members.

### **Transformative Learning Experiences**

The study found that while TL experiences were prevalent, these did not always translate into group-level transformation. Disorienting dilemmas prompted many participants to engage in critical reflection, as well as articulate and revise their assumptions, however, the lack of consistent opportunities for structured collective reflection and dialogue limited the potential for these individual transformations to impact the group as a whole.

Participants reported a variety of transformative experiences. For example, several BIPOC participants highlighted how racial and gender differences led to significant disorienting dilemmas, prompting deep critical reflection and reassessment of their assumptions.

### **Processes for Critical Reflection**

Many participants reported dissatisfaction that the processes for critical reflection were not consistent. For example, one person recalled the reflection space was perceived as optional and did not yield learning. Additionally, many cohort members expressed confusion over their level of personal responsibility for facilitating these spaces. Overall, these findings indicate the absence of a structured space with clear roles and responsibilities for supporting growth negatively impacted the ability for conflicts to be resolved and for group transformation to occur.

### **Holding Environment for Emotional Support**

Another theme that surfaced in the study was the idea of the cohort as a holding environment for emotional support. One participant described this as "giving each other grace." They also added, as the cohort changed over time at both the individual and group levels, the sense of "idealism" was replaced by "authenticity." Interestingly, the newfound authenticity led to divergent feelings of emotional support, some positive and some negative. For more than one member, the authenticity negatively impacted their emotional safety in the group. Several of these individuals opted for "silence" in the group setting as it felt safer. In contrast, there were



participants who felt positive emotional support from the cohort experience. One member pointed out regardless of individual tensions, the group would always band together against external threats to the cohort's "flow."

### **Learning from Identity and Operating in Multicultural**

Diversity within the cohort played a significant role in shaping learning experiences. BIPOC cohort members were more likely to identify racial and gender differences as sources of conflict and disorientation. Multiple participants highlighted how issues of identity and multiculturalism impacted the cohort's dynamics and individual learning processes. The finding reinforces Kasl and Yorks' (2016) 'paradox of diversity' where diverse perspectives enriched learning but also led to feelings of unsafety and disengagement.

### **Implications**

The study reinforces the idea that the cohort can be a valuable container for TL. As a holding environment, the cohort served as a space for some individuals to experience significant personal and professional growth. To maximize this potential, several key strategies can be implemented:

#### **Establish and commit to clear norms and shared values**

Align and formalize the process of co-creating norms and values at the beginning of the program to help manage expectations, set achievable goals, and foster a supportive environment that ensures that all members feel included and valued. It is also important to regularly revisit these norms regularly.

#### **Establish roles and processes for mediating conflict**

Develop a clear framework for conflict resolution, which includes defined roles and processes internal and external to the cohort. Encouraging open and honest dialogue helps address ongoing conflicts before they escalate.

#### **Structure opportunities for reflection and dialogue**

Incorporate consistent, structured opportunities for collective reflection and dialogue to ensure individual transformative experiences contribute to group-level transformation. Keep space for reflective group practice sacred by sheltering it from administrative updates or times in the calendar when all group members may not be able to participate fully. Facilitated dialogue allows participants to openly discuss their experiences, challenges, and learning which may contribute to deeper group understanding and cohesion.

#### **Support inclusivity, diversity and create empathic spaces**

Develop strategies to create safe and inclusive spaces that respect diverse experiences. Direct instruction and facilitated discourse on individual identity and cultural competence can support this process. Additionally, empathy-building activities like storytelling and role-playing help participants understand and appreciate different perspectives and experiences.

### **Conclusion**

This study highlights the potential of cohort-based learning in fostering transformative learning experiences. The study is constrained in its reliance on one cohort's experience within one program which limits the generalizability of the findings. The study's reliance on self-reported data through surveys and interviews may introduce bias, as participants might have differing levels of self-awareness and willingness to disclose their true experiences. Additionally, the non-residential nature of the cohort limited opportunities for informal interactions and deeper connections, which could have enhanced the sense of community and collective learning.

In conclusion, the findings underscore the importance of establishing clear norms, supporting diversity learning, and creating empathic spaces to maximize the benefits of such programs.

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## ***Through the Glass Training* inspired by Pasolini's *Manifesto Theatre*: For a Transformative Performing Arts Education**

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**Abstract:** The primary objective of this research is to measure the impact of a training (*Through the Glass Training*) based on the *Manifesto Theatre* by Pier Paolo Pasolini (1968). 236 participants were involved (randomly divided into two experimental groups and a control group) during the empirical phase. Here are presented the results of the Repeated Measures ANOVA on the factor *Expertise* which brings together three outcomes regarding the ability to apply knowledge, skills, and methodologies of performative languages fostering the daily life coping strategy and promoting transformation.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Performing Arts Education, *Through the Glass Training*, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Repeated Measures ANOVA

### **Introduction**

In 1968 Pier Paolo Pasolini published the *Manifesto for a new theatre* a school of linguistic re-education dedicated to advanced intellectual groups. This educational project was for adult in Lifelong Learning (from student to worker) to provide tools and experimental spaces for critical reflection. We should consider that Pasolini imagines a transformative educational process anticipating the 10 phases of Mezirow (1978; 2000, p. 22): the tragedy become a “disorienting dilemma “ to start “a self-examination “ and “a critical assessment of assumptions “ to “relate one’s discontent to a current public issue “ and to “explore options for new ways of living “. So, we test a training (*Through the Glass Training*) to “acquire knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans “ and finally “reintegrate it into society on the basis of conditions dictated by the new perspective “ through performing arts. The training pushes participants to “build competence and self-confidence in new roles “ promoting a symmetrical dialogue practice. Pasolini, indeed, rethinks intellectual social role in a transformative perspective suggesting the educator to reflect on their professional practice co-creating the learning process with students as Alexis Kokkos indicates (2019, p. 60): it is a contemporary post-qualitative issue (Fabbri et al., 2021; Nicolaidis & Marsick, 2017; St. Pierre, 2011). *Through the Glass Training* involves a critical reflection method and an art-based learning through experiential activities (Kokkos, 2019, p. 64).

### **Methodology**

A *Mixed Method Sequential Exploratory design* was selected: after the qualitative study, information was collected during the empirical phase. So, the qualitative phase was structured with three pilot workshops (Gianceselli, 2023), one focus group with students and interviews with five experts (Bosco, 2003 p. 54; Lawshe, 1975). The observed variables are included into two hierarchical supraordinate factors: *Expertise* and *Metacognition*. Then statistical units (cluster aged 15-21) have been selected with a *Sequential Mixed Random Sampling* (Teddlie & Yu, 2007)

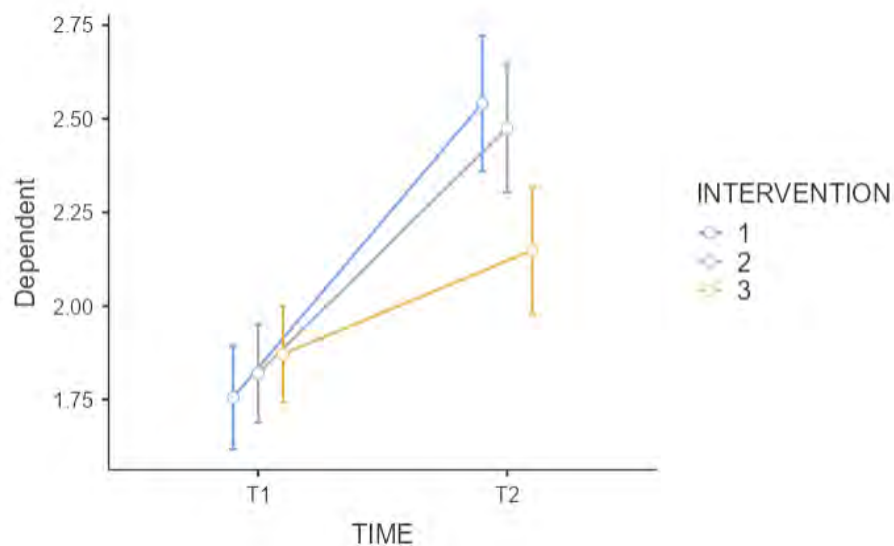
to optimize the external validity of research. *Through the Glass Training* has been tested with Italian students from secondary school in November 2023, respondents involved were 236. A structured questionnaire (Likert Scale, 3 as average value) was used to collect the outcomes measured at baseline (T1) and after intervention (T2) in three randomized group for each school here named *Intervention*: two experimental group, one control group (this has been stimulated without the training interaction). Here are presented the results of the Repeated Measures ANOVA on the factor *Expertise* which brings together three outcomes regarding the ability to apply knowledge, skills, and methodologies of performative languages (Theatre, Cinema and Pasolini's *opera omnia*) fostering the daily life coping strategy. During the training the *Expertise* relates to the critical reflective practice on personal and social assumptions while the participant learns to solve relational problems not only instrumentally but also through communicative learning (Mezirow, 1997, p. 7).

### Results

Jamovi 2.3 (2022) software was used to analyse the data after the evaluation of the questionnaires: there were no records with missing data. The covariate *Age* does not influence the outcomes, moreover there is no main effect due to the manipulations. Instead, there is a significant interaction between *Time* and *Intervention* although the effect size is weak. The graph of *Estimated Marginal Means* of interaction *Time\*Intervention* [Figure 1] suggests that the starting averages of the three *Interventions* at T1 are congruent. *Intervention 1* and 2 produce an improvement on the outcome (factor *Expertise*) compared to *Intervention 3*.

**Figure 1**

*ANOVA Estimated Marginal Means Time\*Intervention (Expertise variable label)*

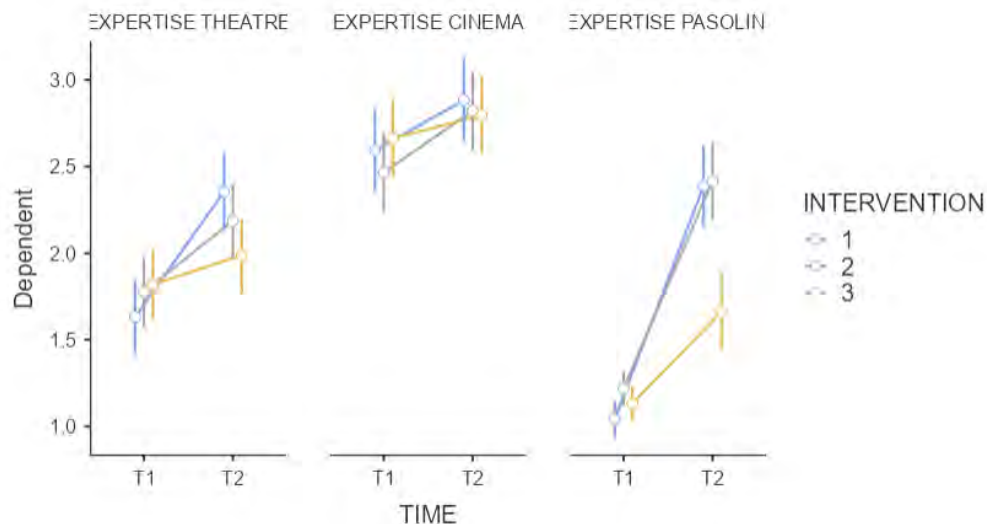


The interaction *Time\*Intervention\*Expertise* [Figure 2] shows that the highest starting average is recorded for *Expertise Cinema*, the lowest for *Expertise Pasolini* while *Expertise Theatre* is in the midst. Manipulation between T1 and T2 has a much greater impact for *Expertise Pasolini* than *Expertise Cinema* and *Theatre*. It is useful to consider that participants involved in *Intervention 3* (control group) are not stimulated by *Through the Glass Training* and the performative languages proposed during the workshop are not related to Pier Paolo Pasolini. So,

the slight increase at T2 for *Expertise Pasolini* in *Intervention 3* can be explained as an effect of complacency. Therefore, the manipulations increase the participants' perception of competence regarding the variables *Theatre*, *Cinema* and *Pasolini*. This is marked for the variable *Expertise Pasolini* because all the starting averages are lower regardless as the proposed topic is almost or completely new for the participants.

**Figure 2**

*ANOVA Estimated Marginal Means Time\*Intervention\*Expertise*



### Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to measure the impact of the *Through the Glass Training* inspired by the Pasolini's *Manifesto Theatre*. All the participants completed the six-hour training for each group by responding to pre-intervention (T1) and post-intervention (T2) questionnaires. Also, an attempt to identify the socio-demographic and behavioral variables to associate with the perception of competence (primary outcome) at T1 and at T2 was made, there is no effect thanks to randomized trial. The perception of competence changes markedly in the two experimental groups (*Intervention 1* and *2*) compared to the control group (*Intervention 3*). The factor *Expertise*, consisting of three variable levels (*Expertise Theatre*, *Expertise Cinema*, *Expertise Pasolini*), shows an increase relating to the variable that measures the competence perceived by respondents after intervention especially for *Expertise Pasolini*. This factor, indeed, should be considered as a main outcome to estimate the transformative process. *Through the Glass Training* is structured to suggest responders to apply the renewed or newly acquired skills to overcome conflicts, bias in their daily lives: the aim is developing self-critical skills for autonomous and full citizenship as Mezirow suggests (1997, p. 8). So, this training through Performing Arts Education may be used to improve the analysis of personal instances rather than acting directly on the others' purposes, beliefs, judgments, and feelings (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5).

### Conclusion

According to these results, *Through the Glass Training* seems to allow the involved participants to adopt new perspectives and behaviors from the analysis of performative discourses in community. This should be a transformation: watching and acting relationship with

self and others through freedom, intersubjectivity and recognition for these are necessary preconditions for critical reflection, democracy, and transformative learning itself (Fleming, 2018; Honneth 1995, 2004) as Pasolini guessed anticipating Mezirow's educational proposal in 1968 with his *Manifesto Theatre*.

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## **Developing Inclusive Practices to Galvanize Retention of Diverse Physician Trainees and Junior Faculty**

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**Key Words:** Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), Academic Medicine, Mentoring, Minority Tax, Faculty Retention

### **The Problem**

To combat well-documented disparities in morbidity, mortality and quality of life, it is imperative that our academic physician workforce reflect the population. Nonwhite physicians are more likely to care for the underserved, thereby reducing patient disparities. We have improved our efforts at enhancing the pipeline for underrepresented in medicine (URiM) students, yet *retaining* those learners in residency and faculty pools is challenging.<sup>1,2</sup> The path from medical school to a junior faculty position takes less than a decade. Why, then, are we not seeing the appearance of URiM trainees in faculty positions at the rate that they are entering medical school? The answer *must* be a retention problem.

As recruitment efforts have been ramped up to recruit URiM residents, efforts to support these trainees must be implemented.<sup>1</sup> Eliciting what residents need via both formal and informal discussion and honoring requests in alignment with ACGME guidelines can both demonstrate that they are valued and help augment morale and a sense of belonging. Strategies for retention must demonstrate a commitment to creating an environment with several key features: dialogue and reflection that considers adult learning theory (specifically, transformative learning) and facilitates belonging, mentorship opportunities, and avoidance of roadblocks to URiM retention.

### **Solutions**

Passive learning and required assessments rarely lead to changed behavior, but meaningful experiences do.<sup>3</sup> Adults have the capacity to change their perceptions and behaviors based on absorbing new information, reflecting on their experiences and taking action based on critical reflection. Honoring various perspectives moves the idea of inclusivity and belonging from just a tactical solution to one inspiring meaningful change. While residents with different demographic and lived experiences may match into the same program, they won't necessarily spend meaningful time together. A diversity curriculum grounded in transformative learning theories can drive change. Transformative learning theory, developed by Jack Mezirow, refers to the concept that adult learners can adjust their thinking based on new information, often achieved through dialogue, reflection and action.

#### **Dialogue and Reflection**

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) training based on this adult learning theory can provide trainees and faculty the opportunities to learn about each other's identities and intersectionalities within facilitated, curated spaces, especially when implemented jointly across



several departments. Like any other skill, these strategies require practice and are not inherent. Standard unconscious bias or upstander training often requires volunteering or an institutional mandate. This is often met with resistance. Having colleagues share personal stories based on experiences is significantly more powerful, especially if followed by facilitated dialogue. One powerful example includes the UCSF Unconscious Bias and Microaggression workshop for perioperative trainees. The workshop teaches strategies for mitigating the negative impact of unconscious bias on patients and colleagues, as well as how to be an upstander when faced with microaggressions. At Weill Cornell, profiles of faculty and staff that align with the monthly heritage calendar are disseminated amongst staff. This allows the full hierarchy to learn about their colleagues on a human level. The heritage calendar could also be used to avoid scheduling of events and meetings during important holidays. Department-sanctioned social bonding activities targeted to URiM and LGBTQIA residents are another way to develop a sense of community.

### **Opening Hidden Doors Via Mentorship**

Becoming a physician is a long journey, and the learning never ends. Every institution has a hidden curriculum of unspoken values, traditions, and opportunities.<sup>4</sup> But to access this knowledge, you have to be ‘in the know’ or close to those who are willing to share this information. This is most effectively done with mentors and sponsors. Creating organic opportunities where people can meet and network can lead to fruitful mentoring relationships. Once these teams of mentors are formed, mentor training should be developed to help the mentors best guide their mentee. This could help shift mentors from offering advice based on anecdotal experiences to focusing on the science of mentoring and benchmarking best practices.

While race and gender concordant mentorship pairing offers empathy based on shared experiences, these relationships alone may not be sufficient for guidance to a successful academic career, since there is very little URiM representation in upper academic leadership. Non-concordant mentor-mentee dyads are mutually beneficial, offering each partner broader experiences and perspectives, and expanding networks for the mentee. Reaping these benefits, however, requires the careful establishment of trust so that there can be open dialogue about life experience, challenges, and inequality.

Proper mentoring takes time, and institutions can show that they value the effort by formally recognizing it in promotions and awards consideration. Funding for mentor development is another opportunity for institutional buy-in. Further, junior faculty should be sponsored to join external professional societies and committees where there are opportunities for career advancement. Getting an opportunity is a first step. Knowing what to do once you get it, requires mentorship, in a mentor-sponsor-mentor continuum.<sup>5</sup>

### **Minority Tax: A Roadblock to Retention**

As institutions aim to actively recruit URiM faculty members, it is important to reduce the minority tax these physicians face. The burdens of recruiting URiM physicians and implementing DEI initiatives cannot fall on one person who already has clinical responsibilities. As with mentorship, recognizing these efforts during the promotion process, eligibility for national awards, academic time, and administrative support incentivizes all faculty to do this important work. Moreover, funded leadership roles can provide dedication to initiatives to promote inclusivity and retention of diverse qualified residents and faculty.

## Conclusion

That there is a problem with URiM trainee retention in academic institutions is urgently clear. Trust in physicians and patient satisfaction are essential elements to progress in reducing glaring racial and ethnic disparities. Retention may be a long-term goal, but there are immediate actions institutions can take to get the ball rolling and transformative learning can be leveraged to move the needle. Diffusing the responsibility of URiM recruitment to avoid burdening a select few with the minority tax is a starting point. Creating strong mentorship dyads and teams (both racially concordant and non-concordant) armed with mentorship training will smooth the path to long-term career success by making the steps more granular. Supporting mentors by recognizing the value of this work in promotion consideration creates buy-in from senior faculty members. Finally, community-building by ensuring that all demographics are visible within the department promotes a sense of belonging, which could help mitigate the impostor syndrome that many trainees feel. Many of these actionable items are low-cost and have the potential to catapult institutions to the next level of responsible patient care.

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## **Blind Box: What is Reflection and Transformative Learning During 14-day Forced Isolation?**

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**Key Words:** Isolation, Reflection, Transformation, Uncertainty, Critical Life Incident

### **Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped our world in numerous ways. One significant strategy employed by several countries, including China, was the enforcement of forced hotel isolation. Forced hotel isolation involves the compulsory confinement of individuals, whether they have been exposed to COVID-19 or not, in hotel rooms for a specific period (typically 14 days) to monitor their health. While individuals are allowed to connect to the “outside” world via digital social platforms, forced hotel isolation creates a dedicated period and space for individuals to experience ‘aloneness,’ reflection, and transformation during uncertain times. Under this uncertain context, questions regarding the potential consequences of such turbulent times on individuals’ capacity for learning and reflection are raised. This qualitative research investigates how uncertainty, particularly in the context of forced hotel isolation in China, impacts individuals’ willingness and capacity to learn and reflect. It aims to explore how transformative learning unfolds in constantly changing and uncertain situations.

### **Theoretical Conceptualization**

Kegan and Lahey (2009) understand learning needs as located in a context of increasing complexity both in terms of what we know and the mental systems required to deal with more complex knowledge. Learning goes beyond acquiring new information, leading to profound changes in how individuals perceive themselves, others, and the world, thus encompassing developmental and transformative processes.

Transformative learning (TL) involves a fundamental shift in an individual’s perspective, beliefs, and assumptions, often triggered by challenging and disorienting experiences. Central to this process is the occurrence of a disorienting dilemma or critical life events. Experiencing uncertainty or trying to navigate the tension between social cohesion and physical isolation creates disruptions that align with the definition of disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 1991).

TL is a process that can be individually and socially situated. For Mezirow, reflection is a crucial component of transformative learning. It involves careful consideration of one’s beliefs and knowledge, often prompted by experiences that challenge existing assumptions. Reflection can occur during an experience (reflection in action) and afterward (reflection on action) (Schön, 1987). It is vital for individuals to make meaning of ongoing and uncertain events, enabling them to reassess and potentially reshape their cognitive frameworks and behaviors. TL ultimately leads to changes in people’s behavior and results with a more open-minded and adaptable approach to complex issues (Mezirow, 2006). Thus, people have the capacity to transform what is madness for them into internal peace.

## **Research Questions**

In this study, we aim to address the following research questions:

- 1) How does physical isolation impact individuals' capacity to engage in reflection and learning?
  - How do individuals reflect during forced hotel isolation?
  - When and for what purposes do individuals engage in reflection during isolation?
- 2) How can experiences outside an individual's control trigger transformative learning by challenging assumptions, values, or beliefs?
  - In what ways do individuals' reflections offer insights into socio-cultural values, heritage, norms, or other subconscious influences on their thinking?

## **Methodology**

To address these research questions, we employed a qualitative research design. Qualitative research allows us to explore the nuanced experiences of individuals during forced hotel isolation and the impact on their learning and reflection. Participants were adults who had completed a 14-day forced hotel isolation in China. Our aim was to obtain a group of people with diverse backgrounds. We used both convenience and snowball sampling to recruit participants. Three pilot interviews were conducted to test and modify our demographic questionnaire and interview protocol, so they were not included in our data analysis. Participants were asked to provide informed consent and complete a demographic questionnaire before participating in a one-on-one, 45-minute interview via Zoom. Among the twenty three interviews, three of them didn't fall into our criteria, so they were excluded from our data analysis. Thus, twenty interviews were conducted. Interviews were collected from April to November 2022. Data were analyzed by applying the Framework Approach (Smith & Firth, 2011) to identify patterns, themes, and insights. We organized codes into categories, then themes related to the impact of forced isolation and constant uncertainty on reflection and transformative learning.

## **Findings**

First, our data shows that forced isolation stimulates individuals' thinking, reflection and facilitates transformative learning by having participants constantly experiencing uncertainty and contemplating the reasonableness of isolation policies. Some participants engaged in communications and observations as a way to acquire knowledge and information. During isolation, often on the third day, individuals initiated self-dialogue and journaling to reflect on past experiences, personal life, relationships, and societal policies, after encountering unexpected incidents. As a result, they found their behavior, perception and interpretation of the situation changed and some have critically transformed their epistemological assumptions, self-perception, and societal views. Upon reflecting, participants described the experience in various ways depending on their level of reflection, such as Staycation, Unreasonable Madness, An Enlightening Journey, Romance with the self, Self-Development, Schrodinger's Cat, Doing nothing, and Living in Stranded Island, etc. Our interviews played a significant role in facilitating participants' reflection on their experiences by aiding them in recalling pivotal moments and recognizing hidden assumptions and aspects they may have overlooked or forgotten, thus enabling them to perceive the experience as a cohesive whole.

### **Implication and Future Research**

The implications of this research are twofold. First, it sheds light on the potential benefits of forced isolation, where individuals have the opportunity for profound self-dialogue and the potential for engaging in transformative learning. Second, the findings encourage individuals to consider engaging in intentional self-dialogue, creativity, and personal growth. Researchers and practitioners of transformative learning can further explore the following areas:

- 1) The effectiveness of guided facilitation for individuals who do not engage in reflection.
- 2) Determining the threshold for the number of days required to trigger reflection during prolonged uncertainty.
- 3) Comparative studies between different types of reflection experiences, such as those occurring in other countries and those due to unexpected and prolonged uncertainties.

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## Co-holding And Co-navigating Collective Liminal Spaces for Transformative Learning Outside Educational Contexts

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**Abstract:** Transformative learning (TL) has evolved beyond its educational roots to address contemporary societal challenges. Now applied beyond formal education, TL emerges from societal dialogue amid current crises. This paper advocates for a transdisciplinary approach to TL, emphasizing the importance of co-holding and co-navigating collective liminal spaces. It calls for an onto-epistemological shift among practitioners to facilitate paradigm change. The paper, drawing on the case of the WorldEthicForum, applies a Critical Incident approach and explores prerequisites for navigating collective TL spaces, emphasizing the importance of creating safe enough environments for transformative experiences. Emotions such as fear and awe can initiate liminal spaces that require attentive process stewardship and inclusive leadership. Nurturing environments that encourage courageous participation and holding uncertainty can catalyze a profound shift in a group towards becoming a collective body, preparing the ground for larger shifts and societal transformation.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Liminal Space, Collective Body

### Introduction

Transformative learning (TL), a field of research since Mezirow coined the term in 1978 (1991), now extends its importance beyond educational contexts, as evidenced by the work of Hoggan and Finnegan (2023). An onto-epistemological shift is crucial to addressing the polycrisis (Miller & Heinberg, 2023) and forging viable socio-ecological pathways. To foster this shift towards the embodiment of an ecocentric ontology (Weber, 2019), we argue that transforming our perspectives, relatedness and interactions with the world are essential. Within the realm of societal transformations, there is an increasing interest in exploring how the theory of TL can be applied not only to individuals but also to group bodies and beyond formal learning environments (Singer-Brodowski, 2022).

The transformative intent (Romm, 2018) is addressed through a transdisciplinary approach (see Max-Neef, 2005, integrating earlier contributions by Jantsch and Schultz as highlighted in Mitchell, 2023). This approach allows for pluriversal practices (Escobar, 2018), extending to encompass awareness-based reflection and aligned action on values, ethics, creativity, imagination, and cross-sector and transboundary engagement. Building on the analysis by Hansmeier et al. (2021), there is a need for an onto-epistemological shift, also among collaborative researchers and reflective practitioners. A reflective practitioner approach, integrating a collective adoption of TL, enables societal transformation and paradigm shifts.

The paper investigates the prerequisites and capacities to open, co-hold, and co-navigate these collective TL spaces, focusing on the importance of liminality in transformative processes.

Liminality invites a breaking open and breaking through of ingrained thoughts and behaviors. Navigating transdisciplinary groups requires addressing collective tension lines like power dynamics and biases. Process stewardship and group practices are essential (Ritter et al., 2024). The willingness to stay with trouble and collectively hold uncertainties whilst navigating with care and presence is critical for being in a liminal space leading to TL as a pathway of the above-mentioned onto-epistemological shift. This quality of being with what is, the importance of deep listening and creating spaces that allow emergence over time, is highlighted, and the importance of relating to complexity is underlined.

### **Theoretical Grounding**

Our understanding of TL processes is based on Förster et al. (2019), who describe TL as a process in which being in the liminal space is critical. Whilst their work builds on individual TL processes in groups, we investigate the effect on and with the group becoming a collective body through applying collective practices. With the term ‘collective body’, we refer to the experience of groups that dare to go to the edge of their – shared – comfort zone, tending to all individuals involved, navigating the liminal space consciously together and experiencing their intracconnectedness (Siegel, 2022), a group body that perceives itself as a larger whole.

We furthermore build on the (compatible) model of TL proposed by Grund et al. (2023), which is based on analysis of the role of different emotions throughout a TL journey and proposes a simplified phase model of TL alongside typical emotions and dynamics. It encompasses 1) Novel Experience (pleasant or unpleasant emotions), 2) Reflection accompanying activity rather than a particular phase), 3) Social Exchange (mostly pleasant emotions), 4) Shift of Action (mostly pleasant emotions, e.g., ‘reciprocating nature’s generosity’, 5) Shift of Meaning (mostly pleasant emotions, sometimes shame towards old self).

Förster et al. (2019) describe TL as a process in which passing through a liminal space is key. In the aforementioned model, this is situated between 1) ‘Novel experience’ and 2) ‘Reflection’ (Grund et al., 2023). The liminal space opens during moments of experiencing differences, crises, or disorienting dilemmas, including a quality of suspension.

As reflective practitioners, we build on our own experience in co-holding spaces for TL, where ‘edge emotions’ (Mälkki, 2019) are often a portal to enter a liminal space. Liminal spaces are places of being with not knowing, disorientation, and uncertainty. They are places where previous perspectives of meaning are no longer meaningful reference points, and new ones have not yet (fully) formed (see also Singer-Brodowski et al., 2022; Land et al., 2014; Förster et al., 2019). These liminal spaces are in-between spaces where what was previously stable becomes fluid (Mälkki & Green, 2014, p. 8 in Singer-Brodowski et al., 2022).

In this liminal space, there is room for emergence, and our senses widen to welcome unfamiliar or even unknown experiences, sensations, and thoughts. Liminal Spaces hold a delicate balance between vulnerability and potential. They require a gentle touch, as the fragility of emerging ideas and identities demands careful nurturing, support, or being with. Here, individuals and the group may feel raw, exposed, uncertain, or disoriented as they navigate the unknown terrain together. This texture makes it essential to have some prerequisites such as curiosity for the unknown, commitment to stay present and in connection with each other in place, some common and explicit ground, and an atmosphere of empathy and understanding. These spaces need to be ‘safe enough’; otherwise, the human nervous system responds with automated stress reactions (Singer-Brodowski et al., 2022).

Kegan's insights (1982, in Mälkki & Green, 2014) suggest that TL is not a linear process; rather, groups or communities may experience temporary stabilities or 'evolutionary truces' that shape their understanding and interactions within their environment. Similarly, edge emotions arise when collective assumptions are questioned, indicating disorienting dilemmas within the group body. These edge emotions serve as signposts that, if followed, can lead to re-examination. The group may respond to discomfort with the inclination to avoid it and maintain the status quo, or it may embrace discomfort as an opportunity to explore and challenge assumptions. This can result in an oscillation between sinking deeper and seeking to get out.

In the following, drawing on the case of the WorldEthicForum (WEFo), we explore, as reflective practitioners, how, in a transdisciplinary and transcultural setting, the group body can embark on a TL journey by giving room for edge emotions to show up, collectively going through and holding the liminal space, and processing the happening leading towards a collective body.

### **Method**

This study adopts a Reflective Practitioner approach, informed by Participatory Action Research (PAR) for Societal Transformation (Bradbury, 2022). It integrates Critical Incident Technique (CIT) (Flanagan, 1954; Finnestrand et al., 2023).

By engaging in reflective practice and analyzing a specific series of events, the researchers aim to actively examine, learn from and articulate their experiences, facilitating transformative processes within a transdisciplinary setting. Focusing on the WEFo, we explore how group bodies navigate edge emotions and liminal spaces. Utilizing CIT, it analyses key moments of transformation or disruption, complementing broader explorations of emotional dynamics and facilitation strategies.

Data collection methods include participant observation, audio recording, reflective journaling, Generative Scribing (GS) (Bird, 2018), and document analysis, with a specific focus on critical incidents. Ethical considerations encompassed obtaining consent for recording sessions and documenting them, anonymizing people in our writing, and upholding respect, especially when analyzing sensitive incidents.

### **Case**

The WEFo, serving as our case, curates a group of 50-60 selected activists, artists and thinkers from different parts of the world across multiple epistemologies in what is called the Firekeeper Circle (FC) to explore and work on prerequisites for an onto-epistemological shift collectively (Ritter et al., 2024) over several years. The FC convenes on a relational ontology, a *radicallysharedaliveness* coined by Andreas Weber (2019) in 2021 embracing an ecocentric worldview. This emphasizes our intracconnectedness and views all life forms and the natural world as deeply relational. Rather than isolating entities, relational ontology highlights the intricate web of connections shaping existence.

Through dialogues, embodied practices, and reflexive engagement, WEFo aims to deepen understanding and foster collaborative learning and actions. In its endeavor, a triangle of 3 German terms entailing the same root serves as orientation *Mut* (courage, bravery), *Demut* (humility, surrender), and *Vermutung* (intuition, speculation). On these grounds, we cultivate skills, knowledge, and attitudes to empower collective shifts, new ways of being, and meaningful change. The way we enact these different layers yields visible outcomes, including engagement in facilitation practices and applied research results.



The WEFo creates, among other things, a yearly in-person FC gathering conducted over three days in Pontresina, Switzerland. The researchers are co-facilitators of the FC process and are engaged in PAR. At the heart of the PAR at the WEFo lies an exploration of the prerequisites and capacities essential for creating, co-holding, and co-navigating collective transformative spaces. Acknowledging structural vulnerabilities, cultural differences, and neurobiological responses plays a crucial role in signaling the safety and openness necessary for individuals to let themselves drop into a deeper level of trust within the group body. Whether through shared storytelling, reflective dialogue, or inquiry-based thematic explorations, these collective practices cultivate an environment where individual and structural vulnerabilities are acknowledged and honored.

The Firekeepers co-weave a relational fabric that embraces the coexistence and learning from and with each other, welcoming – sometimes sudden – diverse expressions, e.g. chanting, poems, dances, or impro theatre. After the annual Firekeeper gathering 2023, the PAR team sought to identify critical incidents for collective TL and identified two instances which demonstrated some of these sudden expressions. One of these was then selected for analysis and reflection in a consent-based decision-making process. Hereafter follows a description of the unfolding of this incident, referred to as ‘Grief’.

On the second day of the Firekeeper Gathering 2023, after silently checking in with a gesture, Firekeepers shared what they learned from their time together on day one. In the course of this sharing, Person A expressed strong anger: «[...] Talking about the economy does something to you [...]». This sharing was an early moment where intense and uncomfortable emotions were explicitly shared in the collective space. Later on, Person B added: «[...] the collective body of truth, of witnessing, of transforming through moving through skins, through time, through place, through space. To get to emptiness, we become everything. We allow ourselves to bear witness, to feel, to receive, to process, to become alive again in a radically shared way. To deepen the belly of compassion into action, into collective action that moves us forward beyond dialogue into streams of wildflowers. And a confluence of rivers beginning in the deepest aspect of the shadow. [...]»

After more voices were heard, Person C shared a story in which he, being a singer-songwriter visiting the oncology station of a children’s hospital, was asked by a girl to write a song for her. Person C responded that he did not know if she would still be in the hospital upon his return with a song. She simply said: ‘Then I will wait.’ Person C shared that writing a song for her felt like a precious gift. A couple of weeks later, he revisited her and sang the song: she was a cancer survivor. After telling the story, Person C invited the group to sing it together.

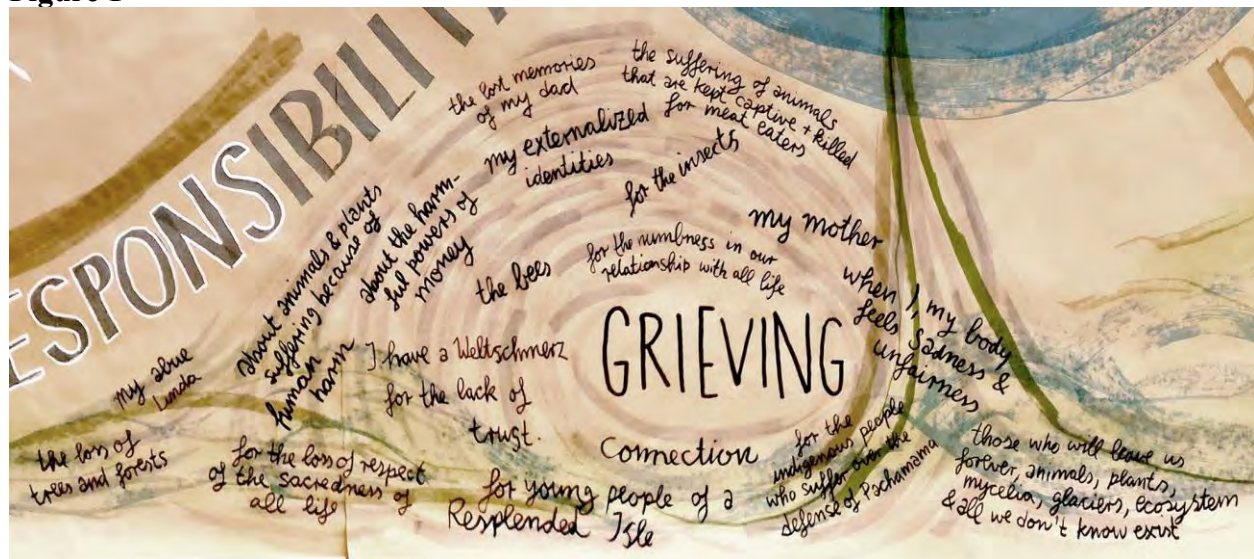
Immediately after singing the song, Person D spoke up and, referring to the story Person C had shared, said, «[...] Now it has a happy ending, but what if, just as a consideration, the whole thing that we share is also the moment of death? [...] I wonder if we already asked the right questions [...]». Following this, person D shared their grief in all its intensity, including tears and sobbing about their dying mother and the acknowledgement that not everything will have a happy ending, that not everything is going to be ok. This moment became a threshold for collective grief. At first, no word was spoken. Something unusual happened to people who were co-holding space. Then, a handful of people went closer to Person D, breathing together for the grieving person to give them the experience that they were held and not alone in their intense emotions. After a few more minutes, Person C tuned into a song, and everybody chimed in.

After this, the FC tried to find a gentle way to be with this intensity while wondering how to continue in small groups. After suggestions from different people on what to give space to and

how to proceed, people stood up and formed a standing circle. Everyone stood closer, respecting different comfort levels, including shoulder-to-shoulder, embracing one another or simply making eye contact. Here, the grief for refugees inflicted by the climate crisis and the behavior of the Global North was named in an emotional outburst by Person E. Other people in the circle contributed to this moment in different and personal ways: for example, being silently present with oneself or others, co-holding space or allowing tears to flow.

Later that day, the scribe – the person who practiced GS and accompanied the entire gathering – offered that everybody could anonymously write what they were grieving for on a piece of paper and that these words would be included in the GS. What was shared is visible in Fig. 1.

**Figure 1**



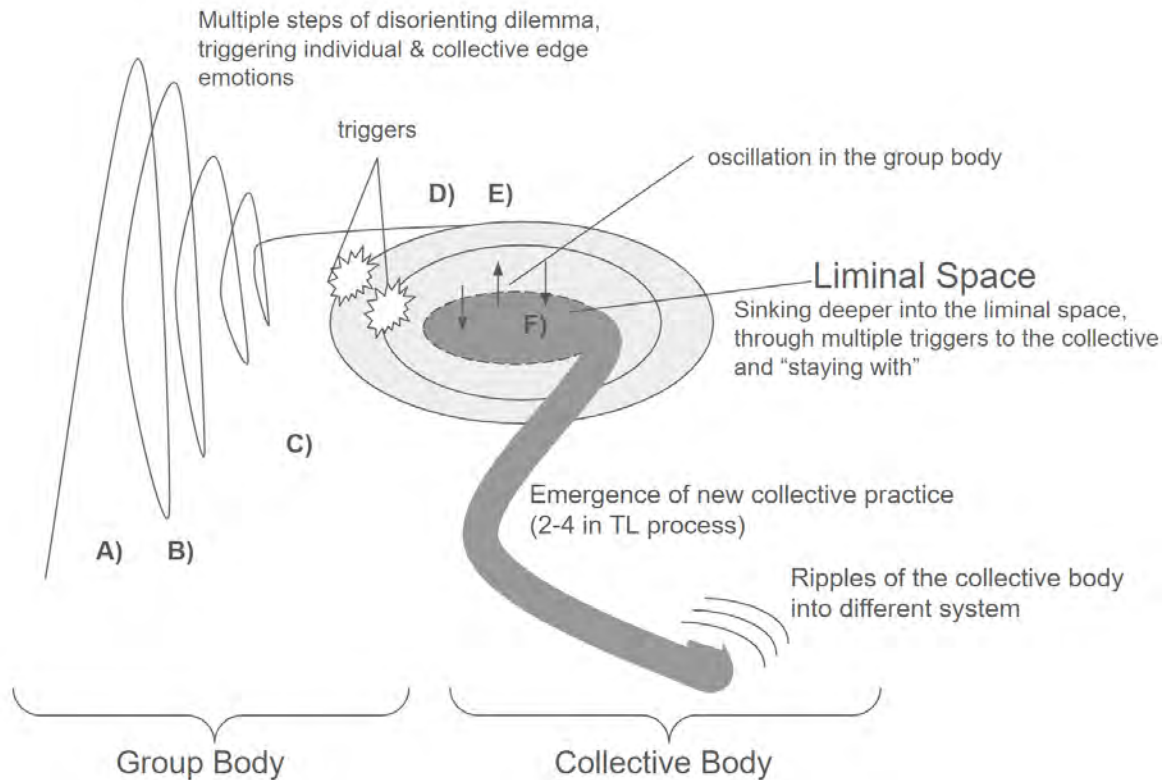
Note: Excerpt of GS with individual contributions on grief. © Marie-Pascale Gafinen (see also Ritter et al. 2023).

Referring back to the TL model proposed by Grund et al. (2023), we described the first two phases of TL, specifically the phase of the liminal space starting at Phase 1.

### Discussion

In the aforescribed case, several incidents of sharing acted as an impetus to a liminal space of TL for the entire group. They invited the group to sink deeper into it and practice being with, co-holding, and co-navigating. Every narrative, whether Person C's tale or Person A's outcry, expressed edge emotions of individuals and served as a disorienting dilemma for the collective guiding us in the liminal space (see Figure 2). The liminal space emerged as a communal state oscillating between suspension and discomfort.

**Figure 2**



*Note:* Getting and sinking into co-held liminal space.

Each participant contributed to the collective staying within the liminal space. This transformative journey facilitated the transcendence of individual perspectives, fostering a heightened sensitivity to the subtle dynamics permeating the collective body and guiding participants towards novel insights and possibilities.

Central to the facilitation of this liminal space were several factors situated on different levels, of which we highlight the following:

- A) acceptance of extended epistemology, different ways of generating knowledge,
- B) previous cultivation of common ground, acknowledgement of the ongoing process of personal and collective evolution, and trust in the inherent capacity of the process despite uncertainties.
- C) willingness to relinquish preconceived plans in favor of embracing disruptions as potential avenues for divergent pathways
- D) embracing the concept of Kairos, embodying a trust in aligned timing coupled with a sense of spaciousness.
- E) ability to navigate silence, discern opportune moments for individual contribution, and engage with fellow participants on a human-to-human level, transcending professional roles.
- F) presence of co-facilitators, operating from various positionalities and capacities, facilitating and co-holding essential moments of co-regulation and self-regulation with the group body.

## Conclusion And Recommendations

The Firekeeper Gathering in Pontresina 2023 exemplifies transformative learning potential expressed through experiences of liminality in the group body, leading to becoming a collective body. As individuals navigated these thresholds of awareness, they engaged in co-holding and co-navigating, facilitating transformative learning experiences beyond traditional educational contexts. Through collective reflection and meaning-making, participants delved into unfamiliar terrain, transcending individual perspectives and fostering a heightened sense of coherence, allowing the sense of being a collective body to emerge.

While the incident description and discussion focused on Phases 1 and 2 of the TL process and, more specifically, on the liminality, it would also warrant an analysis and discussion of new meaning perspectives emerging in the longer term, leading to a shift in individual and collective practices. However, after the in-person gathering, we observed an expanded acceptance of grief in the monthly online FC meetings.

Additional investigation into the collective body as a reflection of the broader system and the underlying dynamics and patterns originating from societal narratives is warranted. Further inquiry lies in how we can steward the transformation of such deeply ingrained elements, enabling a higher level of coherence and a shift in the social field (Pomeroy & Hermann, 2023), recognizing the interconnectedness between intrapersonal and ecosystem levels. Notably, collective shifts hold the promise to have ripple effects on the entire social field.

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# **Coaching Practices for Facilitating Reflection Toward Transformative Insight: A Constructive-Developmental Perspective**

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**Key Words:** transformative learning, levels of reflection, critical reflection, constructive-developmental theory, form of mind

## **Extended Abstract**

Scholars in the fields of adult learning and adult development, including those working in executive coaching, have long recognized the particular demands that VUCA, post-truth environments place on the developmental capacities leaders need to navigate their roles (e.g., Berger, 2012; Kegan, 1994). While there is an increase in studies exploring the practices for fostering transformative learning, the kind of learning that targets growth in capacity, these studies are almost exclusively conducted within the context of formal higher education (Taylor, 2007), are often theoretical, and lack a clear methodological and prescriptive focus that would help coaches apply them in their practice.

The purpose of this study was to identify coaching practices for facilitating growth in leaders' developmental capacity. Specifically, through the lenses of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1978, 1991, 2000) and constructive-developmental theory (Kegan, 1982, 1994), it aimed to identify and understand coaching practices for facilitating reflection (at content, process, and premise levels) toward transformative insight. Drawing on the synergies of these two theoretical lenses, transformative insight is conceptualized as those moments in coaching when the client experiences a "turning point" and has a profound change in understanding of how they view themselves, their relationships with others, or the world around them, thereby changing deeply held beliefs.

Additionally, and in response to the literature gap regarding the influence of coaches' own developmental capacities on the facilitation of the coaching process, using constructive-developmental theory, this study explored how a select sample of executive coaches with various developmental capacities or forms of mind differed in their understanding of these practices for transformative insight.

## **Method**

The experiences of 21 executive coaches were investigated using an exploratory multiple-person case study design. Semi-structured interviews were used to capture the reflective coaching practices coaches deemed helpful for facilitating transformative insight. The interviews were anchored in critical incidents addressing an actual coaching case where, from the coach's perspective, the client experienced transformative insight. Subject-Object Interviews (Lahey et al., 1988) were conducted to identify the participants' forms of mind.

## **Findings and Discussion**

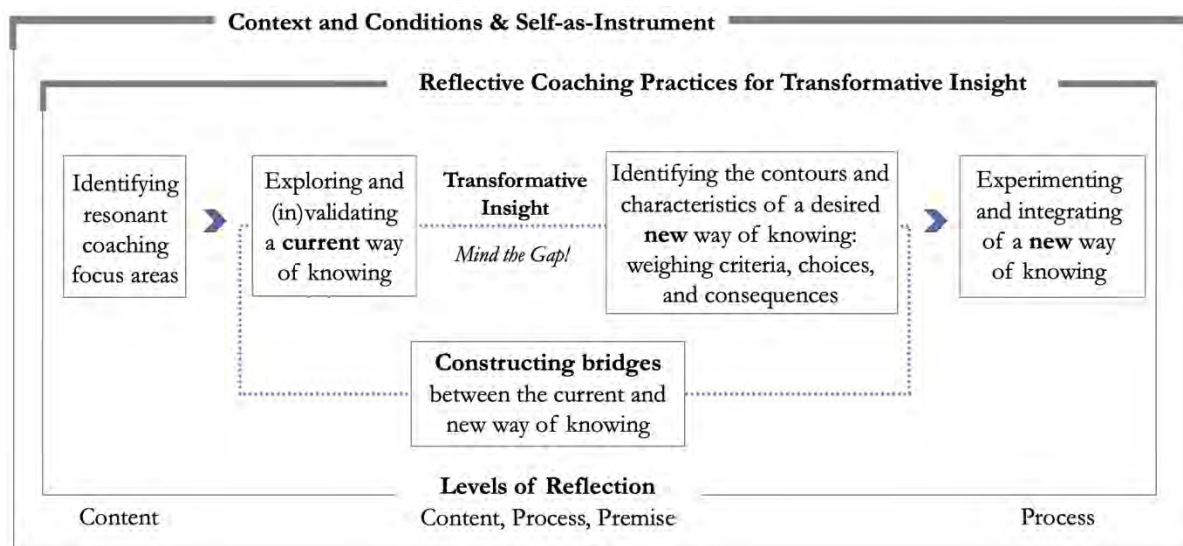
### **Coaching Practices for Facilitating Transformative Insight**

A thematic data analysis of 410 reflective coaching practices revealed 16 practice themes across all three levels of reflection (content, process, and premise). Building on these practice themes, an overarching coaching process-and-practices model for facilitating transformative

insight emerged (Figure 1), describing the client’s movement from their *current* way of knowing (experienced as limiting) to a *new* way of knowing (seen as more desirable and effective). Theoretically speaking, the model represents a pathway for expanding the learner’s perspective, which relates to Mezirow’s (1991) perspective transformation and Kegan’s (1982, 1994) subject-object move.

Within that facilitative system, coaches also focused on creating a supportive learning environment through *client-focused, non-reflective* “context and conditions “ as well as *coach-focused, self-as-instrument* “ practices. Separate from and yet interconnected with *client-focused, reflective* practices at the content, process, and premise levels, these coaching practices act in service of the learner’s autonomy, safety, and resonance needed for facilitating transformative insight. This system supports and challenges the learner to not only move beyond their current way of knowing but to transcend and include it. As learners slowly cross this bridge, they move into a space of a new and expanded way of knowing, more truly representing who they are and how they see and engage with themselves, others, and the world around them. In other words, Mezirow’s (1991) perspective transformation and Kegan’s (1982, 1994) subject-object move.

**Figure 1**  
*Coaching Process-and-Practices Model for Facilitating Transformative Insight*



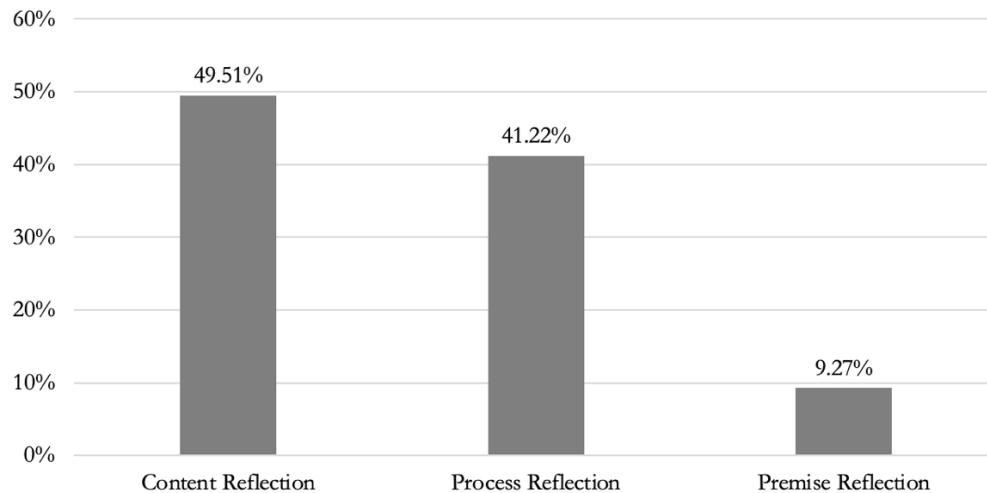
Only 9.27% of all reflective coaching practices belonged to premise reflection (Figure 2). Given the centrality that premise (or critical) reflection has in the process of perspective transformation described by the transformative learning process (Cranton, 2016; Mezirow, 1991), as well as the potential it holds for facilitating a major change in the learner’s assumptive system (i.e., subject-object move), and as such, for transformative insight, the extent to which premise reflection practices were underrepresented in this study was surprising.

This finding also accentuates how content and process levels of reflection and related practices should not be underestimated for the power they hold in their own right and the interplay they have with premise reflection in the process of facilitating transformative insight. Even though these two levels of reflection affect change at a specific belief-level (vs. system-level beliefs, as related to premise reflection), content and process reflection still play important

roles, which can, incrementally and over time, lead to system-level (or meaning perspective) changes—an incremental process that both Cranton (2016) and Mezirow (2000) have recognized as the most common way of accommodating a new way of knowing.

**Figure 2**

*Distribution of Reflective Coaching Practices (N = 410)*



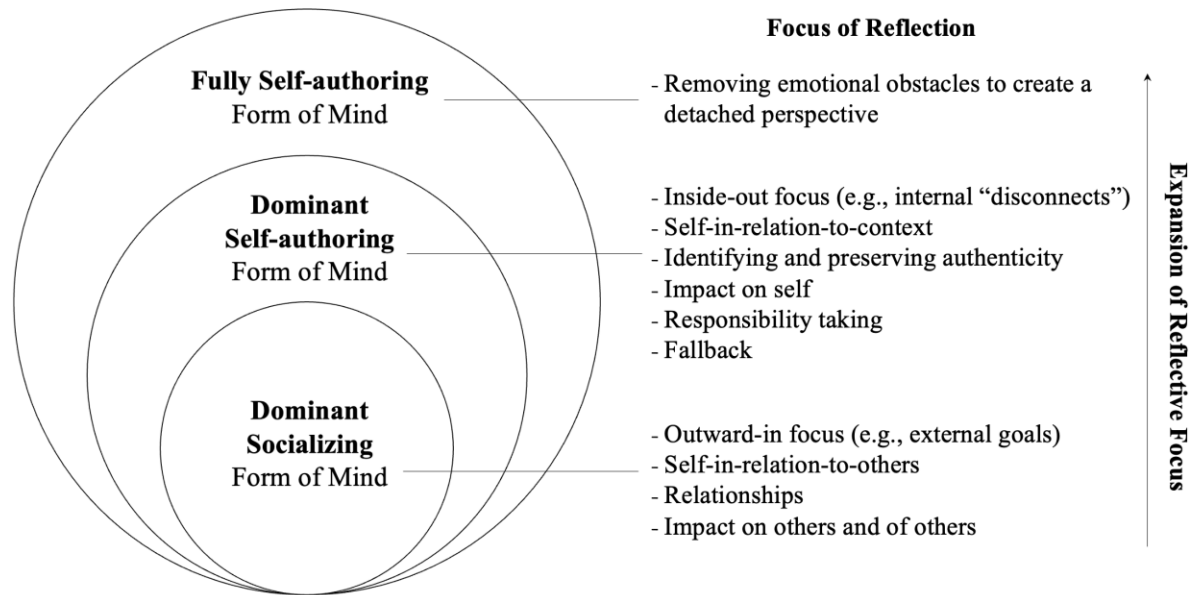
### **The Influence of Coaches' Forms of Mind on the Facilitation of Reflective Coaching Practices for Transformative Insight**

A comparative developmental analysis revealed that coaches with different forms of mind used reflective practices (from all themes and levels of reflection) to a similar extent and with similar *intent*. However, the qualitative differences in their approaches to meeting that *intent* emerged, following the “transcend and include “ principle. That is, coaches with each subsequent (and more complex) form of mind expanded upon the ways in which these practices were used by coaches with a less complex form of mind (see Figure 3 for an example).



**Figure 3**

*Transcend and Include Representation of Coaching Practices' Reflective Focus Across Forms of Mind*



Altogether, this study’s findings expand upon and integrate perspectives on coaching processes and practices related to transformative learning and constructive-developmental literature, calling increased attention to a number of areas for future research and implications in practice. The findings also raise questions about how we as a community can better and additionally serve a client’s real-time, practical needs to resolve individual dilemmas and, more generally, achieve transformative learning-driven adult development outcomes.

First, given the low prevalence of premise reflection coaching practices found in this study, we are called to revisit the roles that content, process, and premise levels of reflection play in the process of transformative learning. It is equally crucial to further explore the reasons *why* premise reflection practices could be out of reach for coaches. We might consider, for example, a lack of methodological clarity about how to put them to use, or the responses these practices may evoke through the (felt) sense of discomfort and unease, and therefore constraints, that the learner and facilitator can experience during this reflective process. Second, the study’s developmental (i.e., form of mind) findings emphasize the need to consider, more explicitly, the development of not only learners but also the developmental capacity of their facilitators of learning. Finally, this study calls for increased attention to the synergistic yet unique perspectives that transformative learning and constructive-developmental theories bring to the understanding of the process of perspective transformation and what that might mean for the facilitation of transformative learning practices with developmental impact.

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# A Radical Enactive Perspective on Transformative Learning: Implications of the Agent-Environment Unity

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**Abstract:** We propose to advance theoretical understanding of transformative learning (TL) by drawing on more recent developments in cognitive science and adopting a radical enactive view of cognition. In particular, we focus on the radical enactivism's agent-environment relationship as a descriptive and explanatory unit and on its implications for understanding TL. Radical enactivism focuses on basic (i.e., prelinguistic) cognition that emerges from the bodily interactions between an agent and its socio-material environment. Furthermore, an agent and its environment co-emerge and co-develop through continuous and circular processes of interaction. This historical development both grounds and explains an agent's knowledge, behaviors, and skills. We will elucidate how a radical enactive view of cognition turns Mezirow's conception of perspective transformation on its head by focusing on non-linguistic, embodied agent-environment interaction and extra-rational factors. Moreover, we will discuss how our proposal can complement Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation by preparing the ground for critical reflection and discourse from the bottom up. This is particularly relevant in situations where learners' diverse values impose significant limitations on rational discourse.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Radical Enactivism, Agent-Environment Relationship, Perspective Transformation

Transformative learning (TL) has been a vibrant field of research for more than four decades. In contrast to the increasing number of different perspectives on transformation and TL (cf. Nicolaides et al., 2022), the development of solid theoretical foundations is sparse. Stagnation of theoretical development in the field was already noticed a decade ago (Cranton & Taylor, 2013). More recently, Hoggan and Finnegan (2023) addressed this issue head-on by pointing out that many established approaches to TL account only for some of its aspects but fail to provide full-fledged theories. In addition to Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation (1991), Hoggan and Higgins (2023) only cite Boyd & Myers' Jungian theory of transformative education (1988), Kegan's subject-object theory (2000), and Illeris' comprehensive learning theory (2004) as proper theories of TL in their review. Hence, critically synthesizing diverse insights across the TL landscape holds promise (Hoggan & Finnegan, 2023).

We propose to advance theoretical understanding of TL by grounding it in *enactive cognitive science* (e.g., Gallagher, 2023). Surprisingly, TL theory has not been influenced by developments in cognitive science over the past 25 years. These more recent developments – referred to as E-Turn or 4E cognition – are in opposition to cognitivism, where cognition is conceived as information processing in the brain (Newen et al., 2018). In the 4E approach to cognition, cognitivism's *cognition-in-the-head* assumption is replaced by the *cognition-in-the-world* assumption (Gallagher, 2017). According to the four "Es", cognitive phenomena (such as learning) can only be adequately understood by considering an agent's body (Embodied), its

environment (Embedded) including the socio-material properties that enable new forms of cognition (Extended), and its interactions therein (Enacted). Enactivism is probably the most rigorous research program that integrates the embodied, embedded, extended, and enactive aspects of cognition in a unified way (de Haan, 2020). Maiese (2017) made first steps in underpinning TL theory by elaborating the affective dimension of transformation from a phenomenological-oriented enactive perspective. More recently, Sim and Nicolaides (2024) reinterpreted Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation to embed it into an enactivist worldview and disclose its potential for social change. We will complement these efforts by approaching TL from a *radical enactive view of cognition* (Hutto & Myin, 2013, 2017).

In this paper, the focus is on the *agent-environment relationship* as a descriptive and explanatory unit and on its implications for understanding TL as cognitive phenomenon. Radical Enactivism focuses on *basic (i.e., prelinguistic, preconceptual, nonrepresentational) cognition* and proceeds from two theses (Hutto & Myin, 2013): *First*, cognitive phenomena emerge from an agent's embodied interactions with its (socio-material) environment. Just as the liquidness of water is an emergent property of the interaction of H<sub>2</sub>O molecules – none of which is itself liquid –, cognitive phenomena are emergent properties of the dynamic interactions between brain, body, and environment rather than a brain itself. Taken together, the agent and its environment form a complex dynamic system. Although the brain plays an important role in this system, and it is legit to attribute cognitive capacities to agents (Glock, 2020), it is the *situational patterns of interaction* between an agent and its environment that constitute concrete cognitive phenomena. *Second*, an agent's knowledge, behaviors, and skills are grounded and thus explained solely by the historical development of the agent-environment system. Cognition is basically a living being's response to the problem of maintaining its organismic integrity and staying alive under precarious conditions (Di Paolo, 2018). Therefore, agents actively engage with those aspects of their environments that are relevant for their survival. In this process, agents and their environments shape each other. They co-emerge and co-develop – co-become (UNESCO, 2020) – through continuous and circular processes of interaction at multiple spatial and temporal scales.

The radical enactive view of cognition has immediate implications for understanding and facilitating TL, which we highlight in contrast to Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation. Mezirow (1997) focuses on *frames of reference* as the theoretical entities that transform through critical reflection on basic assumptions. Rational discourse plays a central role for assessing reasons and judgments regarding competing interpretations that are intended to guide future actions (Mezirow, 1997). The radical enactive view turns Mezirow's conception on its head by giving priority to *nonlinguistic, embodied agent-environment interaction*. To facilitate TL, the radical enactivist asks: How can we intervene in the agent-environment system on a pre-linguistic level to disrupt familiar interaction patterns? Both the agent and the environment are equally valid targets for intervention to modulate their relationship. These interventions promote extra-rational factors such as body sensations, emotions, intuitions, and imaginations. By fostering *reflection in and through action* new ways of interacting and thus new interpretations are disclosed. The facilitator must understand the learner as an actor-environment system in order to develop systemic intervention strategies and guide the emergence of new interaction patterns.

We will discuss how this radical enactive proposal can complement Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation by preparing the ground for critical reflection and discourse from the

bottom up. This is especially pertinent in scenarios where the diverse values of learners place significant constraints on rational discourse.

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# Epistemologies of Transformative Learning

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## Extended Abstract

Theories of transformative learning (TL) have embedded in them different epistemologies. For any given theory, an important question is: When people engage in transformative processes, what criteria guide (or *should* guide) their decisions about what to believe and how to exist and act in the world. This is a question of epistemology, an essential inquiry that needs to be asked of any theory of TL. The role of epistemology in TL needs further investigation and elaboration, particularly concerning the implicit assumptions about the source of knowledge relied upon to guide the TL process. This presentation explores four different epistemologies that can be seen in the TL literature: rational thinking, subconscious expressions, un-conceptualized “felt” experience, and functionality. For each, it highlights the benefits, as well as the lacunae, dangers, and limitations. These examples highlight the differences in assumptions behind any given theory and guide our discussion about the role of epistemology in TL.

### Rational Thinking

Most famously, Mezirow’s theory of perspective transformation positions rational dialogue and critical self-reflection as the key drivers of change. After being exposed to alternative perspectives, critiques, and ideas, “adults reason for themselves—advance and assess reasons for making a judgment—rather than act on the assimilated beliefs, values, feelings, and judgments of others” (2009, p. 22). We think it is safe to say that Mezirow would not “trust his gut” when evaluating his frames of reference, as one’s *gut feelings* might have been shaped by the idiosyncrasies of one’s culture. Rather, one should critically assess the issue at hand, as well as one’s *gut feelings*, to uncover and evaluate the underlying assumptions and implicit biases, and, when necessary, to change them. In short, one’s rational capacities—in dialogue with others—are, for Mezirow, the best source of determining how we should think, feel, and act.

### Subconscious Expressions

Boyd and Myers’ (1988) famous critique of perspective transformation argues that transformative learning can also involve “psychic integration and active realization of (one’s) true being” (p. 262). The process leading to this type of transformation, they argue, involves being receptive to expressions from one’s subconscious psychic entities.

From the sifting through of information stemming from the shadow, anima, animus, the persona and other archetypal figures and forces, a person comes into an expanded consciousness that illuminates directions for actions which best fit the person’s deepest yearnings and felt beliefs. The exercise of discernment leads to new configurations of meaning which generate in the person an enthusiasm for new choices and even the courage to pursue them. (p. 276)

Here, the trusted source of knowledge are the messages arising from the subconscious, which take the form of emotions, fantasies, and spontaneous images. Paying attention to these expressions “brings to awareness information incompatible with previously held attitudes and assumptions about one’s self” (Boyd & Myers, 1988, p. 275).

## Un-conceptualized “Felt” Experience

Several authors draw from other models of the psyche, such as that of John Heron, and advocate for the learner’s experience as the primary source of knowledge (Yorks & Kasl, 2002; Perry, 2021; Nicolaidis, 2022). In this view, it is not just any remembered experience, but rather “sudden receptivity, ... inward stirrings, and moments of felt-sense” (Nicolaidis, 2022, p. xxvi) that communicate from “beneath the experience of the experience” (p. 4). It is the “always-present-but-observed felt sense” (Perry, 2021, p. 7) of the “dynamic intersubjective relations *between* persons and other persons and objects in their environment” (p. 6).

To access this source of knowledge requires a form of reflection, but one that explicitly strives *not* to apply any pre-existing understandings or mental schemas to the understanding or interpretation of that experience. It is an attempt to grasp the world in more of its fullness and complexity by not imposing the limitations of human-made frameworks of structured understandings and categorizations. Such connections with the felt sense of experience, it is argued by these theorists, can result in dramatic restructuring of one’s perception and/or fundamentally different ways of relating to others and the world.

## Functionality

A fourth example of an epistemological basis is the functionality of new premises and perspectives. From this view, transformation is a process that begins when one is “faced by a situation or challenge exceeding what one can manage on one’s existing personal basis, but which one unavoidably must win over in order to get further” (Illeris, 2007, p. 45). As theorized by Green (2022), process of transformation involves detachment from one’s “existing premises and available scripts” (p. 107) and the search for more adequate ones. “Out of the evidence accumulated over numerous concrete encounters with the here and now, over multiple contexts, the impersonal consciousness begins to construct more effective premises” (p. 115).

From this perspective, the validity of new premises and scripts, new ways of thinking and being in the world, is based—not on being more true or justifiable, *per se*—but rather on their helpfulness in “alleviating acute discomfort” and allowing them to be able to function in their current circumstances (Hoggan, 2014, p. 202). Learners must “tolerate the profound ambiguity of groundlessness in order to collect concrete experiences from which to generate hypothesis and premises that might adequately account for their experiences. Once achieved, those premises can then become assumptions that operate pre-reflectively—and the agent will be, once again, at home in the world” (Green, 2022, p. 116).

## Discussion

For each of the four epistemologies described above, a simplistic reliance on any of them is easily seen to be problematic. Rationality is a tool that can be, and often has been, used to justify perspectives and actions that are flawed or harmful. The same can be said for Subconscious Expressions and Un-conceptualized “Felt” Experience, as deeply engrained biases can cause racism, sexism, homophobia, and other demonstrably unjustifiable prejudices to manifest in these ways. And, the Functionality of new premises and scripts is also no foolproof guarantor of truth, as converts to fundamentalist ideologies demonstrate how a yearning for “absolutist values where, through intensity of focus, all ambivalences will be magically resolved” is chosen rather than the striving necessary for “a complex, nuanced, and ambiguous world view” (Green, 2023, p. 201). Any source of knowledge will have lacunae, dangers, and limitations, which should be addressed in their respective theories of transformative learning.



Rather than an uncritical acceptance of a given epistemology, there needs to be greater attention to the implicit assumptions about epistemology embedded in TL theories. Although any theory of learning will need to have some kind of epistemology driving the knowledge-creation process, we can be more explicit about those epistemologies. There is not necessarily a need for epistemological relativism, as any given theory of learning may rightly rely on one epistemological basis more than the others. Nevertheless, a fruitful path forward may be the inclusion of multiple epistemologies, in a sort of triangulation, acknowledging the limitations of each.

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# Conceptualizing Transformative Learning through Lenses of Vulnerability and Leadership

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**Key Words:** Vulnerability, Leadership, Transformative Learning, Personal Transformation

In this presentation titled *Conceptualizing Transformative Learning through Lenses of Vulnerability and Leadership*, the author will discuss how transformative learning will occur through the process of leadership development and self-reflection on vulnerability for college students. This presentation is specifically responding to two of the questions raised in the call for proposal for 2024 ITLC conference: 1) *how do we want to reimagine what it means to transform and to learn transformatively?* and 2) *how can we radically question our own self understanding of what it means to transform ourselves?*

Since 2019, the author has designed and taught a general education course titled Arts and Leadership at a regional comprehensive university in central Wisconsin, USA. This course focuses on the interconnection of arts and leadership by creating artistic expression for personal strengths and leadership qualities; the goal of this course is to develop students' abilities to transform their personal life and professional career. In this presentation, the author will share a collection of students' artworks as evidence of transformative learning and discuss instructional methods that effectively lead to students' authentic reflective practice on their personal transformational journeys. In this course, students are engaged in many rounds of self-reflective practices and through the process of self-discovery, students dive deep into their values and vulnerabilities which are important factors to guide their behaviors. The author encourages students to reflect on the relevance and connection between their value/vulnerability and behavioral tendencies.

During this reflection, students synthesize 5 major values and 5 areas of vulnerabilities to create a piece of artwork with a visual theme of their choice. Students' project examples will be shared in this presentation at 2024 ITLC conference. This project demands not only self-awareness but also courage to be willing to go through these genuine, yet not-so-easy self-dialogues to identify how vulnerabilities, just as their values, can strongly influence their everyday behaviors and decision-making processes. This project also challenges students to ask difficult questions about their more significant vulnerabilities because the author considers such awareness critically important to shape individuals' ongoing growth.

After completing the value/vulnerability project, students become more comfortable and capable diving into self-dialogues and reflecting on their personal experience at an in-depth level. The final project of this course focuses on students' transformational growth. Each student identifies multiple phases they have gone through to improve their capacity for one skillset/coping system and parallels their transformational journey with a visual metaphor or an actual experience relating to the phases of overcoming their difficulties. For example, one student unpacks how she has grown from isolating anxious and depressing herself to embracing her anxiety and depression as she copes and steps into the external world. Another student parallels climbing mountains as her journey to cope with ADHD and not to be ashamed with her true self. Students' project examples will be shared in this presentation at 2024 ITLC conference. The process for students to understand that they were able to generate internal strengths to

overcome difficulties in the past is important, for they now gain confidence for the future challenges.

The two projects discussed above provide examples of how transformative learning occurs in this course for college freshmen across departments. The author considers such impact particularly relevant and important for freshmen as they begin to navigate campus life and make critical choices for their academic pursuits. The evidence of transformative learning presented in this course helps the author frame the response to the following two questions: *how do we want to reimagine what it means to transform and to learn transformatively?* and 2) *how can we radically question our own self understanding of what it means to transform ourselves?*

As one of the major threads in this course being leadership development, students develop abilities to identify personal leadership qualities so that they can lead their own and others' growth. This course fosters the courage to examine one's own vulnerabilities, which creates opportunities for individuals to both articulate their struggles and identify how their transformational growth is driven by their personal strengths and perseverance. Embracing vulnerabilities helps us reimagine how to learn transformatively. Moreover, it encourages individuals to recognize the value of difficult experiences as this process requires the practice of honesty and authenticity, which results in transformation of ourselves and fosters life-long learning.

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# **Social-ecological Participatory Observatories: Co-creating Transformative Learning Environments to Achieve Drylands Stewardship and Sustainability: A Mexican Case Study**

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**Abstract:** Social-ecological Participatory Observatories (OPSE in Spanish) create novel transformative learning environments (TLE) to collectively compile, produce, and exchange knowledge of diverse stakeholders of social-ecological systems. Stakeholder participation during the design, planning, implementation, and evaluation of these TLE has been essential for integrating their diverse needs, interests, values, knowledge systems, decision-making practices and rules. In Mexico, we co-designed five OPSEs as pilot TLE and open social innovation. OPSEs satisfy social needs and public services, while providing effective, efficient, sustainable, and fair solutions to socio-environmental problems. They

generate novel collective spaces for community learning and the development of new services and partnerships intended to profoundly transform collective action and improve welfare. They envision the democratization of technology, where all society members have access to and participate in collaborative projects co-designed, implemented and self-managed by communities in novel ways. Finally, they are data driven and supported by an easy-access digital data repository to store, co-produce and share knowledge. We present the TLE of the Mapimí-Biosphere-Reserve, where we wove local and scientific knowledge to promote sustainable agroecosystems through participatory monitoring and evaluation. This approach promotes novel transformative learning communities who jointly develop sustainable technologies to ultimately support innovative and transformative local decision-making.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Transformative Action, Community of Practice, Participatory Governance

### **Introduction**

To combat desertification at the global scale and to effectively restore drylands to contribute to a land degradation-neutral world is a key target of the Sustainable Development Goal 15, Life on Land (UNGA, 2015). Efforts to achieve this are highly complex and likely keep failing if they continue to be tackled by individual ministries, institutions, or sectors of the society in a top-down approach (Stafford Smith, 2016, Mirzabaev, et al. 2019). The third edition of the World Atlas of Desertification stresses that complex human-environment interactions associated with desertification are highly idiosyncratic and need to be addressed at the local and regional scales (Cherlet, et al. 2018). Hence, bottom-up governance and management approaches are required to achieve adaptive livelihoods that built on strong social, human, and natural capital as the essential pillars of sustainable dryland life-support systems (Reynolds, et al. 2007, Chapin, et al. 2009). Acknowledging the local bottom-up focus on land degradation by itself is no guarantee for it to reverse or to be avoided on the long-term (Cowie, et al. 2018). What kind of shifts in social-environmental, socio-economic or socio-political conditions may trigger individuals, communities, societies, organizations, institutions to actively search for a change and induce transformation? While the pace of change in our environment and society is accelerating, the need for transformation may be blurred by the emerging shifting baseline syndrome (Soga and Gaston, 2018), where new generations (e.g. currently the Millennials) redefine a “new normal” of the condition they experience of a certain social-ecological system stage and thereby accept the current situation as normal with no need for a change. When active transformation of a social-ecological system towards ecosystem stewardship is intended (Chapin, et al. 2009), the transformative capacity of communities, institutions, and organizations needs to be strengthened by focusing on social innovation, agency, diversity, and effective collaboration (Olsson, et al. 2009).

The global human-caused land degradation and desertification process has not been able to be stopped or reversed through national or international policies or large-scale restoration campaigns. Hence, we hypothesize a profound shift in stakeholder perspective needs to be implemented to help transform lingering problems such as land degradation into opportunities of action. A novel learning environment may generate this shift in engrained mental models and foster transformative learning by individuals and collectives (Mezirov, 1997) with equal multi-

stakeholder participation in formal or informal partnerships (Stibbe, et al. 2019). We took action and co-created a new opportunity for collective transformative learning. By tapping into and sharing the plurality of knowledge systems and realities represented by different stakeholders, we hoped to achieve a joint reframing of reference, particularly by considering their diversity of points of view (beliefs, judgement, attitude) and habits of minds (patterns of thinking, values, feelings and action) (Mezirov, 1997, 2001).

### **International Network for Drylands Sustainability**

In 2017, a multisectoral group interested in dryland stewardship founded the ‘International Network for Drylands Sustainability (with the Spanish acronym ‘RISZA). The main objective of RISZA is to generate novel transformative learning environments, where local, and regional transdisciplinary formal and informal research partnerships, including academics, government representatives, civil society members, NGOs, and indigenous groups co-generate useful knowledge for integrated drylands assessments, social-ecological conservation, restoration, management and development projects, and for guiding adaptive management and policy development (Huber-Sannwald, et al. 2020). RISZA’s operational framework was co-designed by over 80 network members. It consists of four principal dimensions: Transdisciplinarity, Social-ecological System (SES), Interculturality and Governance.

### **Social-ecological Participatory Observatories**

One project of RISZA that emanated from this operational framework is the network of ‘Social-ecological Participatory Observatories’ (OPSE, in Spanish). They are novel spaces to collectively produce, compile and exchange knowledge, bringing together interested stakeholders of a particular SES to jointly understand how to put resilience, adaptation and transformative learning into practice in project co-design and co-development, and in participatory policy making to achieve drylands sustainability.

### **Objective**

The OPSEs are tools for co-creating novel transformative learning environments, spaces for multi-stakeholder decision-making and joint policy development. We present the OPSE network established in the drylands of Mexico (Lauterio Martínez, et al. 2021). We approached this by first “disentangling” (Oakeshott 1989) stakeholder-specific perspectives (Lauterio Martínez, et al. 2021) and then by jointly weaving local, scientific and technical knowledge systems (Tengö, et al. 2014) as a basis for the establishment of new learning communities. We suggest this path leads towards dryland stewardship, as it fosters both transformative learning and transformative action.

### **Methodology**

A detailed handbook permits the systematic installation of OPSEs (Martínez-Tagüeña, et al. 2024). For the creation of OPSEs we applied various participatory tools, like ‘rivers of life’ to identify key historic events and facts relevant to the various participants, and ‘cognitive maps’ to mutually learn the different society’s sectors perspective on a given problem and the causes and effects of shared problems decisions making (Lauterio Martínez, et al. 2022). The next phase considered field work to identify research needs and project topics and their associated groups of actors; each group jointly formed learning communities. With semi-structures interviews, focus groups and participatory mapping we conducted placed-based research with the various actors of the selected SES. In this phase, learning communities defined their data needs (type, monitoring frequency, and privacy restrictions) and indicators of their production systems. A social-ecological and multi-stakeholder approach was employed to create complete and comparable

data sets. Stage 1 concluded with monitoring using the mobile application and a participatory activity with focus groups to better understand the decision-making processes at various scales. We concluded with a virtual international event to share experiences, develop an evaluation mechanism to assess effectiveness and efficiency of the novel learning process, and planned Stage 2 of this project.

During Stage 2, the established learning communities continued monitoring efforts and data-set development. Alongside, a series of participatory mapping workshops were conducted to identify meaningful places in the SES for the different collaborating actors. This activity together with a series of multistakeholder workshops to identify priorities of ecosystem benefits and their contributions to stakeholder-specific aspects of well-being allowed the formation of a joint bundle of ecosystem services and associated set of preferences for human well-being. These boundary objects served to consolidate the transformative learning environment and as pathway towards to establishment of multi-stakeholder partnerships.

## **Results**

Stage 1 achieved the following goals: describe the SES; identify key actors and stakeholders; establish problems, needs and interests; co-produce socio-environmental histories; understand the decision-making processes of diverse sectors; identify priority zones in each territory; prioritize the ecosystem services for human wellbeing; co-design long-term monitoring systems; reconcile science and art to promote social innovation and technology adoption (Lauterio Martinez et al. 2021). We consolidated ‘placed-based learning communities’ formed by multisector actors. For example, ranchers and pastoralists expressed what data they needed and how they wanted to monitor their productive activity, emphasizing not only the type of data, but the frequency of monitoring and data evaluation and their privacy restrictions. They stressed the importance of collaborating with the younger members of their families to be able to understand and adopt the Information Communication Technologies (ICT). They were also interested in the various approaches used by researchers and technicians from civil associations and federal agencies to monitor ‘rangeland health’, which were reconciled and standardized for future comparisons. Alongside this effort, they participated in the development of a Local Knowledge Index for Rangeland Health (Mata Páez 2019).

### **Significance for Policy and Practice**

Generating novel transformative learning environments promotes mutual understanding on historical, socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-political contexts of diverse OPSEs, which will allow interregional, intercultural, inter-policy comparisons among similar dryland SES and their divergent responses to global environmental change drivers. We believe these open social innovation projects will foster transformation and can endure in the long-term provided multi-stakeholder participation emanates from the peoples’ needs and interests. Local community members are and will be the key players and decision-makers at the local scale; their needs, values, and knowledge are fundamental for regional, national and international policy-making towards drylands stewardship and sustainable development.

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## Shame as a Catalyst for Transformative Change in Men: Group Learning in Addictions Recovery

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**Abstract:** In the proposed paper presentation, we examine the role of shame as a catalyst for transformative change in men in group learning settings. We draw on existing literature and our research to highlight the possibilities of organised peer groups, including all-male peer groups, to support transformative learning focusing on addictions recovery. We begin with an examination of the unique features of men in their experience of shame, paying particular attention to masculine norms—of being independent, in control, productive, and strong—and with two common responses when men fail to live up to these standards: aggressive behaviour (e.g., anger, violence, or risk-taking) and social withdrawal. We then explore how the two main tenets of transformative learning—self-reflection and critical discourse—can come together in varied group learning settings of addictions recovery where shame can be unearthed, explored, and propel transformation. In drawing on findings from the first author’s previous study, we highlight the importance of gender-specific groups and other means of facilitating a sense of safety, encouraging learners to open up and be vulnerable with their peers. The presentation concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings for transformative learning research.

**Key Words:** Men, Shame, Addictions Recovery, Transformative Learning

Shame is typically considered a negative emotion but it can also be a resource, offering the possibility for course correction. As Martha Nussbaum wrote “[Shame] often tells the truth: certain goals are valuable and we have failed to live up to them. And it often expresses a desire to be a type of being that one can be: a good human being doing fine things” (2004, pp. 206-207). Shame can be a wake-up call to act and be different. We can understand our shame as pedagogical, teaching us how we fall short or signalling the trauma that we have experienced (see also Walker, 2017). Indeed, in his 10-phase process of transformation, Mezirow (e.g., 1991) posited that painful feelings like shame are crucial for propelling both self-reflection and connection with others who have forged a similar journey to then be able to map a course of action.

While mentioned by Mezirow, and previously explored by us (Walker, 2017; Jordan & Walker, in press) and a handful of others (e.g., Modenos, 2023; Nash, 2017), the connection between shame and transformative learning remains to be explored. One useful dimension to look at for understanding the relationship between shame and personal transformation is gender. Although a universal experience, shame tends to arise for different reasons, and to manifest differently, in men (than in women). Not meeting enduring norms of masculinity can drive shame in men, i.e., shame arises from being perceived as dependent, weak, incompetent, not in control, or unproductive (see, e.g., Connor, 2001; Rosette et al., 2015). Men continue to hear the message that they should have stable employment and start a family, even though doing so is becoming increasingly challenging (Reeves, 2022; Charles et al., 2018; Mayer & Vanderheiden,

2021). Displacement, dislocation, and unwanted singledom (seen, e.g., in the incel movement) can provoke beliefs of personal failure and associated feelings of shame (see also Alexander, 2008).

In response to feeling shame, men often choose socialized norms of masculinity (e.g., anger, violence, or risk-taking behaviour) or social withdrawal over being vulnerable with others, resulting in poorer relationships and higher levels of substance abuse (Courtenay, 2000). Such responses tend to have a cyclical relationship with shame: e.g., withdrawing or lashing out can result from feeling shame and are attempts to mitigate against feeling more shame; at the same time, such responses can induce further feelings of shame.

In these responses, shame can inhibit learning and transformation. Yet the shame that arises through a disorienting dilemma can alternatively spur self-reflection and lead someone to engage in critical discourse. Given that shame is a social emotion, it appears that the key to making shame a catalyst for transformative change is to undergo the process of self-reflection within a group of people that not only encourage it but share in its experience at a deep level. Organised sharing groups, that foster critical discourse and self-reflection, may be more important for men, who tend to be less socially connected than women (Cox, 2021) and experience greater barriers to expressing their vulnerabilities (Nussbaum, 2004).

In our paper, we focus on the realm of addictions recovery in men and the role of group settings that can support transformative learning and help address shame head-on. Both the ten phases of transformative learning and the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) centre on speaking with and listening to others who are on a similar path, helping them drag their shame into the light of day. We examine transformative learning research on AA and residential treatment, as well as research on group therapy that has found it to be an effective treatment modality for addressing shame (e.g., Alonso & Rutan, 1988). Group disclosure helps free ourselves from a shame identity (Kaufman, 1985).

The proposed presentation will also highlight five examples from the first author's research which demonstrate the power of shame and of the peer group environment (men in residential addiction treatment) that supported the transformation of these men in allowing them to see a new way, and to experience themselves as not being alone (and knowing, in a deep sense, that they share similar struggles and life experiences). Our paper presentation has several important implications for transformative learning theory research, including the role of emotions (e.g., Dirx, 2006), gender-related learning patterns (e.g., Mezirow, 1978), and gender-specific learning settings (e.g., Baumgartner & Sandoval, 2018).

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## **Building Resilience to Hate in Classrooms with Transformative Learning: Innovation in Practice and Pedagogy to Prevent Extremism and Violence in U.S. Schools**

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**Abstract:** Reimagine Resilience (2024), designed and established at Teachers College, Columbia University, is an innovative program that builds awareness and understanding among educators and educational personnel in the U.S. regarding the precursors and causes of Educational Displacement in students, supporting educators in promoting belonging, connectedness, and resilience to prevent Educational Displacement, extremism, and radicalization among students in their schools and classrooms. The study demonstrates the effectiveness of the Reimagine Resilience Program in producing attitudinal shifts and positive transformative learning experiences in participating education personnel as they cultivate an awareness of their own biased speech and conduct; identifying ways to actively prevent educational displacement as educators gain new knowledge of protective and risk factors for radicalization and targeted violence. This study underscores the importance of innovation in pedagogy, practice, assessment, and professional training for educators and educational staff to effectively engage educators in extremism and violence prevention.

**Key Words:** Educational Displacement, Resilience, Radicalization, Violence Prevention

### **Overview of Reimagine Resilience**

Reimagine Resilience is an innovative online training program designed for educators and education professionals to nurture resilience as an integral capacity in their students (Sabic-El-Rayess et al., 2024a). This professional development program draws from Sabic-El-Rayess' (2021) ground-breaking Educational Displacement Theory. This novel theory illustrates the ten phases that a student experiences on a pathway to violent expression. The program builds resilience in educators by offering a multimodal training that amplifies protective factors – such as social connectedness, non-violent problem solving, and forming cultures of prevention (Sabic-El-Rayess et al., 2024b).

When a student experiences Educational Displacement, they seek out alternative spaces and mentors to replace schools and educators. Emerging from the pandemic, we recognize that such alternative spaces have existed in unmonitored and expanding forums online where students have increasingly been exposed to manipulative content (Joshi & Sabic-El-Rayess, 2023). Educational Displacement involves displacement from the school environment that is not always physical yet translates into the feeling of invisibility when a student's voice and story remain unrecognized in the physical or virtual classroom. This displacement can leave a permanent imprint on those affected (Sabic-El-Rayess, 2021).

Considering this, educators and education professionals have a vital role to play in creating connected and cohesive classrooms. During the Reimagine Resilience Program, educators and educational staff will learn to integrate transformative practices and resilience-enhancing tools into their practice. They will be equipped with preventative practices, powerful stories of resilience, and community-building approaches to enrich their lessons (Sabic-El-Rayess et al., 2024a).

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# **Transformations of Racialized Women Internationally Educated English Professors in Canadian Higher Education and Transformative Learning Theory**

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**Abstract:** This arts-informed multiple case study research investigated English teacher learning and transformations in the workplace, precisely in Canadian higher education institutions in Ontario. Five racialized women English professors and instructors participated in the study as internationally educated and highly experienced teachers in the post-secondary teaching context. The researcher designed the study, informed by Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1978, 2000, 2003, 2009). She incorporated plenty of opportunities for critical reflection and critical discourses. Participants generated the data by participating in initial individual interviews, creating artworks reflecting on their working experiences as new members, and collaboratively creating critical discourses about workplace learning, support, and transformative learning experiences at four Professional Development (PD) Workshops. The study uncovered that transformative learning in the workplace occurred as a gradual learning process rather than by a critical learning moment, such as one or two critical incidents. Participants manifested their experiences of disorienting dilemmas at the beginning of their adjustment. Then, their learning and adjustment journey diversified for the first five years, driven by their different needs and professional goals. Not all participants demonstrated transformative learning. Three participants' transformations had a close relationship with learner autonomy, which requires the theory to consider and incorporate it.

**Key Words:** Transformation, Internationally Educated English Teachers, Critical Reflection, Critical Discourse, Learner Autonomy

## **Purpose of the Research**

Racialized women internationally educated English professors and instructors are minority language teaching professionals in the Canadian higher education teaching context. They have been an underrepresented and underresearched group of teachers in the English teaching field in Ontario Canada. Moreover, their working and learning experiences in Ontario higher education institutions have been understudied. This inquiry started questioning the Canadian workplace culture because the researcher's professional experience as an English teacher educator and supporter of internationally educated English instructors in Ontario revealed that the standard working practices among colleagues varied depending on an institution or a group of employees. It made internationally educated instructors easily confused about the working culture they were learning in a new teaching context in a new country. This study investigated workplace learning and support experiences of five racialized women internationally educated English professors and instructors in Ontario higher education institutions and how transformative their learning experiences were for their professional growth. Specifically, the study aimed to inquire about the research participants' learning processes of new professional knowledge or skills in Ontario higher education institutions and their colleagues' roles in

workplace interactions for their transformations. Mezirow's transformative learning theory outlined ten phases of the transformative learning process. The study was designed to discover if the theory could explain the research participants' learning processes by the ten phases, key contributors to their transformations, if applicable, and if any new elements that critically influenced participants' transformative learning would require to be considered to advance the theory.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Mezirow's transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1978, 2000, 2003, 2009) framed this research study. According to the theory, adults can develop perspectives, such as beliefs, values, ideas, or attitudes. They manifest "perspective transformation" when they encounter "disorienting dilemmas" and actively seek alternative views by critically reflecting on the experiences and trying out new roles, relationships, and responsibilities in interpersonal interactions (Mezirow, 2003, pp. 53 – 59). Thus, critical reflection and critical discourses significantly contribute to perspective transformations. Mezirow called perspectives "frames of reference" that were sets of assumptions and expectations (Mezirow, 2003, pp. 61 – 62). Frames of reference consist of two components: (1) Habits of mind and (2) Points of view. "Habits of mind" are habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, which form rules, standards, and dispositions in a broad sense (Mezirow, 2009b, pp. 92 – 93). "Points of view" are the expressions of opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and judgements that people can articulate in conversations and dialogues (Mezirow, 2009b, pp. 92 – 93). This study investigated research participants' perspective transformations in authentic working and professional learning situations in Ontario higher education institutions and their transformations manifesting the two components of frames of reference.

### **Findings**

Research findings indicate that not all participants demonstrated transformative learning in the workplace, matching Mezirow's ten phases of the transformative learning process. Three participants manifested their transformative learning experiences that followed the ten phases. Interestingly, two of the participants displayed different transformations in characteristics. Sharon's transformative learning about learner-centred teaching transformed not only her teaching practices but also her parenting styles with her adult children. She redeveloped her relationships with her students in her courses and established new relationships with her children regarding learning at home. By expanding her transformations from workplace practices to her personal life, Sharon changed her habits of mind. Meanwhile, Susan's transformative learning about advanced communication styles was limited to her workplace practices, and it was more expressive and articulate than Sharon's transformations. Susan's transformation was more related to the transformation of points of view rather than habits of mind. Key contributors to Sharon's transformative learning were critical self-reflection, learner autonomy, and mindfulness, while Susan's transformative learning occurred owing to her open-mindedness, social and linguistic flexibility, and supportive colleagues. Susan's transformations emphasized the importance of colleagues' supportive and encouraging responses to the new members of the institution. Both participants' transformative learning revealed that the learner autonomy crucially impacted their transformations. They both took ownership of their learning courses and actively engaged in their learning, unlearning, and relearning processes, increasing interactions with their colleagues. Two other participants who exhibited passivity in the learning process and



solitude with limited interactions with colleagues did not manifest transformations or transformative learning in the workplace. The transformative learning theory can consider learner autonomy when describing the transformative learning process in the future. This study reveals that adult learners can actively determine which information they determine to adapt and incorporate into their specific work and life situations rather than passively adopting existing knowledge in the target culture with already known roles, responsibilities, and relationships.

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# **Bridging Transformative Learning in Programs to Livelihood by Designing Your Life**

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**Abstract:** Understanding one's life mission and purpose is crucial for personal growth and commitment (Freire, 1970; Mezirow, 1991). However, individuals who find a life mission remain scarce (Kroth & Boverie, 2000). This qualitative independent research study sheds light on the Designing Your Life (DYL) workshop as a tool to facilitate individuals to explore their life missions, personal values, and career trajectories. This research explores how, if at all, a researcher-facilitated DYL workshop led Asian / Asian-American participants to engage in various phases of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1990) and take steps to live a more meaningful and fulfilling life. The research documents and analyzes available evidence while drawing upon Mezirow's ten phases of transformation (Mezirow, 1991, p. 91). By shedding light on how DYL workshops impact the lives of Asian and Asian-American individuals, this research contributes to bridging the gap between transformative learning theory and practical applications in daily life.

**Key Words:** Transformation, Life Mission, Designing Your Life

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Life Mission in Adult Education**

Kroth & Boverie (2000) underscored the crucial role of educators in guiding adults to examine their life mission and underlying shaping assumptions. "Life mission" refers to individuals' awareness of their purpose, mission, right livelihood, vocation, or calling (Leider, 1985; Covey, 1989; Stephan, 1989; Sinetar, 1987; Rehm, 1987, 1990 as cited in Kroth & Boverie, 2000). Freire (1970) stressed the importance of discovering one's life mission for direction and commitment, paralleled by Mezirow's insight: "implementing the purpose and intentionality of the learner and involved [with] the exercise of his or her conative power." (Mezirow, 1991, p.23) Nonetheless, few individuals have a clear grasp of their life mission. Kroth and Boverie (2000) called for further research to facilitate life mission development, aligning with Faller et al.'s (2021) perspective on the importance of developing self-identity, reflective capacity, and complex thinking among Generation Y.

### **Designing Your Life Workshop**

DYL workshop, founded by product design professors Bill Burnett and Dave Evans, is a powerful tool that aids young individuals in shaping their life missions by employing design thinking (*empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test.*) In DYL workshops (Burnett & Evans, 2018), participants create a life map to *empathize* their past experiences. They then *define* their views on their personal lives and work; *ideate*, brainstorm actionable steps in alignment with their life and work views; try out the actions they have identified; and reflect on these trials to prototype and test perspectives.

DYL empowers young adults during career transitions and supports women in the corporate world. Even though several thousands have experienced DYL workshop, peer-reviewed research is limited and suggests two prominent ideas: first, how DYL processes can be

iterated, and second, the benefits of DYL workshops on preservice teachers in technology universities (Wang & Sung, 2022; Waardenburg et al., 2021). This research examines post-DYL steps that individuals take to implement the 10th phase of transformation that Mezirow (1991, p.99 identified): “A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective.” It explores whether DYL can lead individuals to engage in transformative learning phases (Mezirow, 1990) and take steps to live a more meaningful life.

### **Transformative Learning Through Life/Livelihood**

Transformative learning theories have been extensively researched within classroom settings, educational institutions, and organizational settings, but much less so in the context of individuals' natural livelihood. Two studies in real-life settings, by contrast, do stand out by Kroth & Boverie (2000) and by Nohl (2015). Components of DYL workshops, including storytelling and life history, are closely aligned with transformative learning research (Tyler, 2009; Dominice, 2000). These connections inform signal ways to explore how DYL may contribute to transformative learning in everyday life outside of educational settings.

## **Research Design Overview**

### **Sample's Demographics**

This purposeful convenience sample involved 19 participants divided into two groups. Ten individuals engaged in the DYL workshop more than six months ago. This timeframe allowed for lifestyle adaptation, reflective processes, narrative refinement, and potential transformative insights. Nine individuals participated in the DYL workshop for the first time during this data collection workshop.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The researcher facilitated a two-hour virtual data-gathering workshop centered on DYL activities aimed at revisiting their past, assessing present circumstances, and planning for their future. Activities and discussions enabled small groups of 3-4 participants to reconstruct, evaluate, and generate high-quality reflections on their life experiences and ongoing processes of meaning-making. The researcher shared the Mezirow perspective transformation framework and asked participants to reflect on potential connections, similarities, or differences between the DYL workshop and this framework within the context of participants' lived experiences.

Video recordings and artifacts created during workshop were collected. Recordings were transcribed and de-identified. Data analysis was done inductively and deductively on Dedoose, a data analysis software, to code and generate themes. The deductive analysis was guided by the ten phases of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991; 2012) and focused on content reflection, process reflection, and premise reflection. The ten phases from Mezirow's work (1991, 2012) were consolidated into four main phases to extract meaningful themes.

### **Results**

While the ten phases of transformative learning were present in the workshop, participants did not report experiencing a disorienting dilemma during the workshop. Instead, they reported experiencing disorienting dilemmas in their lives outside the workshop. However, outlier data suggested a potential link between reflection activities and perceived disorientation.

There was consensus that reflection played a significant role in the workshop. Among the three types of reflection, process reflection (Mezirow, 2012) was most prevalent—especially during the life map exercise, where participants visualized their life experiences and recognized the influences shaping their assumptions. For some participants process reflection led them to premise reflection. Generating ideas for actions helped participants recognize discontent in their

lives (Mezirow, 2012). Furthermore, the planning stage encouraged them to think on a larger scale and consider possibilities beyond what they otherwise would have envisioned.

Lastly, the theme of reintegration into life highlighted the workshop's empowering nature, inspiring individuals to believe in their potential for greater accomplishments. The connection between the workshop and daily life became tangible as participants began manifesting their envisioned futures during the workshop.

Data analysis focused on whether the DYL workshop prompted individuals to take steps toward more meaningful and fulfilling lives. The findings suggest that the workshop aided participants in the individuation process, helping them differentiate their inner voices from external influences when making life choices. Participants reported feeling more confident after engaging in the DYL workshop. Some even initiated self-reflection by asking themselves, "Who am I?"

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# **Encompassing Transformation: A Holistic Approach to Assessing Learning in Adult Basic Education**

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**Abstract:** This paper presents an integrated model for assessing and validating learning in adult basic education (ABE), emphasizing transformative, formative, and summative dimensions. Grounded in critical pedagogy and a commitment to social justice, the model advocates for pedagogical approaches that assess and validate learning experiences that lead to profound personal and social changes in disadvantaged and vulnerable adult learners. The development of this model stems from a deep commitment to ABE as a practice that empowers and emancipates individuals, addressing the limitations of current assessment methods by holistically incorporating the transformative, formative, and summative dimensions of learning. Serving as the foundation for a community-based participatory research (CBPR) project, the model engages ABE practitioners and learners in collaboratively developing a comprehensive framework and exploring transformative learning experiences. An exploratory inquiry with ABE practitioners into a typology of transformative learning processes and outcomes elucidates the practical implications of the model and guides the CBPR project. Discussions highlight the implications for policies, program designs, and the validation of non-formal and informal learning, which aim to promote long-term effectiveness and societal impact in adult education.

**Key Words:** Adult Basic Education, Critical Pedagogy, Critical Reflection, Emancipatory Learning, Community-Based Participatory Research

## **Introduction: Adult Basic Education and Social Justice**

In this paper, I present an integrated model for assessing and validating various learning dimensions in ABE. This model was developed based on the interconnection of my theoretical stance and practical experience. I value adult education as an empowering, emancipatory, and ultimately transformative practice grounded in critical pedagogy that seeks social justice and a vibrant democracy (Brookfield, 2016; Darder et al., 2016; Gouthro & Holloway, 2023). This value leads to solidarity and university-practice collaboration with providers working in favor of disadvantaged and vulnerable adult learners in ABE and work-based training initiatives. This collaboration has helped me understand pedagogical efforts and the need to critically reflect on summative dimensions that do not adequately capture learning efforts. This value also propels me to resist neoliberal tendencies in ABE (Yasukawa & Black, 2016; Reder, 2020a; Cennamo et al., 2020) by sharing and nurturing “resources of hope” (Hamilton & Tett, 2019) against standardizing and homogenizing conceptions of human learning and the (increasingly) dominant “autonomous model of literacy” (Street, 2003).

This paper explores these interconnected strands and is organized as follows: Section 1 discusses the need to include transformative dimensions to justify the liberating, relational, and dialogical conception of ABE that engenders profound personal and social changes in adult learners. Section 2 argues for alternative pedagogical approaches for assessing and validating

learning in favor of disadvantaged and vulnerable adults. Section 3 proposes a holistic model of assessment that integrates various learning dimensions and serves as the foundation for a CBPR project. Section 4 presents the results of an exploratory inquiry into transformative dimensions with ABE practitioners based on critical reflection and discusses their professional appraisals. Section 5 presents my conclusions regarding the CBPR project and suggests avenues for future research.

### **The (Overlooked) Power of Transformative Learning in ABE**

Participating in learner-centered, empowering and emancipatory ABE programs, based on Freire's (1970) liberating, relational and dialogical conception of alphabetization, where reading the word also means reading the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987), can lead to "deep" learning and profound personal and social changes (King & Heuer, 2009, p. 172; Kastner & Motschilnig, 2022, pp. 227–229). These deeply personal and social dimensions of human learning are often inaccessible for ABE learners and may not be clearly identified or named. They are often hidden behind expressions like 'I feel better now' or 'I am not stupid' and are not adequately reflected in categories such as 'increasing self-confidence' in program evaluations.

These personal and social dimensions are frequently overlooked by observers, especially those who are privileged. However, these transformative dimensions of human learning, both the processes and outcomes, are crucial for disadvantaged and vulnerable adults. In many cases, participating in adult education results from unforeseen predicaments, a significant life change, or practical experiences that lead to a transformational process culminating in the readiness to learn (Pennacchia et al., 2018, p. 3).

These dimensions shed light on how disadvantaged and vulnerable adults engage in learning, revealing how and why they navigate their life-world differently, recognize opportunities for action, and, ultimately, how they are transformed by participating in ABE. Reder (2020b) observed that there is limited research examining the long-term impact and effectiveness of such programs (p. 429) and noted that it could be that participation in ABE programs "has a transformative effect on students' learning that over time leads to a wide variety of educational and economic outcomes" (p. 447). Additionally, I would argue that these transformative dimensions highlight the professionalism and expertise of practitioners who collaboratively create this empowering, relational, and dialogical pedagogical practice with each learner.

### **Adult Learning and Validation as Two Peas in Pod**

Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) can be conceptualized as a powerful tool for supporting disadvantaged and vulnerable adults, thus promoting empowering and emancipatory adult learning and education. This highlights the importance of introducing and advocating for alternative pedagogical approaches where assessment and validation of learning are seen "as a learning process" (Andersson, 2017) rather than a policy-driven summative assessment and certification for capacity-building purposes. VNFIL prioritizes the individual, placing them at the center (Villalba-García, 2021, p. 357; Cedefop, 2023), which aligns with the core concept of andragogy that sees adult learners as agentic subjects rather than passive recipients, as opposed to the conservative delivery approach that views adult learners as empty vessels to be filled.

Looney and Santibañez (2021) advocate for VNFIL to support marginalized learners, stating that "alternative assessments [...] which favour a more holistic approach to assessment of

learner achievements are supported by decades of critical theory on adult learning and social justice” (p. 442). Pokorny and Whittaker (2014) proposed three forms of recognition for prior learning in Higher Education, focusing on the learner’s perspective: *summative recognition* “for the purposes of entry into and credit within academic, vocational and professional programmes and associated qualifications”, *formative recognition* for “supporting the development of a confident learner identity, identifying further learning needs, and clarifying career pathways” (p. 260), and *transformative recognition* for “increased learner confidence, self-esteem and motivation to embark on further learning and development” (p. 261).

According to Looney and Santibañez (2021), there is a dearth of evidence “on the long-term impact of different VNFIL tools and approaches on learning outcomes”. Therefore, more research and evaluation “on whether and how alternative assessments lead to better long-term outcomes for disadvantaged learners” is necessary (p. 451). Moreover, Villalba-García (2021) noted that “how certifications provided outside formal institutions can be quality assured and their value determined remains a question” (p. 358).

### **A Holistic Assessment Model that Integrates the Various Dimensions of Learning**

Against this backdrop, I propose a model that integrates the various dimensions of learning in ABE. Participation in ABE can lead to a variety of outcomes:

- Summative dimensions are demand-related, standardized outcomes specifically envisioned by educational governance or funding authorities. These outcomes are prescribed in the program objectives as general expectations for employability and lifelong learning represented in curricula with intended learning outcomes and/or descriptors/levels within a given framework. These functional knowledge and skills are to be measured against a certain standard through performance-based assessments.
- Formative dimensions, as represented in formative assessment practices, focus on reflecting on individual learning paths. They involve using what has been learned for further learning or to gain a clearer picture of future learning or career paths (long-term aspirations), thus becoming a (more) confident learner (learning identity).
- In exploring ways to capture transformative dimensions of learning in ABE, two valuable resources were found: Stuckey et al.’s (2013) survey and Hoggan’s (2016) typology of transformative learning outcomes and processes. It is crucial to consider how ABE learners and practitioners perceive and reflect on the profound personal and social changes and to bring their experience and expertise into the production of knowledge about transformative processes and effects of ABE (Kastner & Motschilnig, 2022, p. 236).

These considerations have led to the development of a CBPR project, known as PROFUND (German for “profound”), funded by the Erasmus+ program of the European Union. This CBPR project is a partnership between three ABE providers (two in Austria, one in Germany) and my university (project number: 2023-2-AT01-KA210-ADU-000178483; project duration: 1 March 2024 – 28 February 2026). For each ABE provider, a participatory research group consisting of experienced practitioners and learners examines existing assessment procedures (such as learning progress documentation and portfolios) and reflects on (their) transformative learning processes and outcomes. These results, representing the learners’ and

practitioners' voices and their experience and expertise, are compiled to develop an assessment and validation framework, capturing the various dimensions of learning in ABE.

### **Exploring the Transformative Dimensions with a Group of ABE Practitioners**

In order to learn how to facilitate CBPR activities within the PROFUND project, I conducted an exploratory inquiry on how ABE practitioners respond and relate to the scholarly conception of transformative dimensions following Hoggan's (2016) typology. The transformative learning theory is not widely recognized among ABE practitioners in Austria, so it was appropriate to investigate with this typology to see if practitioners can use it to meaningfully reflect on and categorize transformative processes and learning outcomes in ABE.

I introduced the typology to a group of experienced ABE practitioners in a professional development program, an online micro-credentials course. To initiate critical reflection, I explained that within this typology, transformative learning is understood as "experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world" (O'Sullivan, 2002, p. 11). I also clarified that the typology is presented as a "conceptual tool" that "scholars can use to describe learning phenomena" (Hoggan, 2016, p. 57) and elucidated the six broad categories: worldview, self, epistemology, ontology, behavior, and capacity, along with their subcategories based on a German translation I had prepared. Further, I emphasized, following Kroth and Cranton (2014), that what "is deep depends on the individual", and "what may be a minor shift for one person can be a deeply insightful experience for another" (p. 27).

I issued the next task using storytelling and asked the practitioners to recall positive changes in the thoughts, feelings, or actions of participants and to choose one participant to write a short story about with a suitable headline, detailing their observations and the words or images the participant used in conversation. All practitioners then shared their stories, and we reflected on them together: What do these stories tell us about transformative learning processes? How did the practitioners contribute to this process of change? How did they provide encouragement and support? What role did the group play? What was the role of the participant's environment? Does observing transformative learning also impact the practitioners? What could ABE gain from writing and sharing such stories? Finally, each practitioner wrote a reflective paper on this exercise. Below are some professional appraisals from 14 consenting practitioners.

- There were references to all six categories in the practitioners' stories, meaning the typology was compatible with ABE. All practitioners recognized the explanatory value of the typology but suggested that a language closer to the practice was necessary.
- They felt it was very appropriate to expand the concept of learning to include transformative dimensions, as the national funding authority's ABE curriculum and assessment grid prioritizes summative dimensions. Achievement of certain levels is a legitimate indicator but does not adequately reflect the development of the learner. Therefore, such transformative progress should be documented.
- In the stories, the categories of *self* and *behavior* had many facets, and, interestingly, some may be specific and crucial for ABE learners. According to one practitioner, a person's charisma, body posture, and the openness of their facial expression may signify progress on their personal educational journey. Changes observed among participants by some practitioners include wearing more fashionable dresses, wearing short and colored hair, more self-determined behavior, and self-advocacy in



- recognizing and avoiding negative influences and relationships, and creating space and freedom to do what they wish within their family.
- Another appraisal highlighted the dialogical nature of ABE, as other learning conceptions placed learning not only on the side of the ABE participants. One practitioner stated that she learns, gets new ideas and impulses for facilitating learning, and develops new perspectives about life.
  - Appraisals also considered the impact of the duration of ABE participation: Some participants attend only for a short time or not regularly. ABE programs are characterized by dropping in and out, and some participants drift between different programs. The time factor is considered essential in ABE, as a significant positive development can only occur over a period of time. Also, practitioners may not have the chance to co-experience the transformation as participants may not become aware of their change until they are confronted with a situation where they think, react, or behave differently.
  - Appraisals show the interconnectedness of the various dimensions of human learning. One practitioner noted that, more often, it is the relationship between the practitioner and the learner that brings about changes rather than the subject matter itself. Another practitioner co-experienced a turning point when a participant achieved a certain level in the curriculum, gained self-confidence and began to help and support others in the class.

### **Outlook: Community-based Participatory Research on the Various Dimensions of Learning in ABE**

The exploratory session with ABE practitioners suggests that the scholarly typology can be used to meaningfully reflect on and categorize transformative processes and learning outcomes in ABE. However, a more practice-oriented language is necessary to capture transformative processes and outcomes. Therefore, a key takeaway on how to effectively facilitate the CBPR activities in the PROFUND project is to begin with the stories of ABE learners who are co-researchers. It is also crucial to keep the typologies (Stuckey et al., 2013 and Hoggan, 2016) in mind as a heuristic framework to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the transformative dimensions discussed and theorized in academia while also prioritizing the voices of ABE learners and practitioners.

The practitioners' appraisals based on examples of co-experienced transformative processes and outcomes suggested a productive entanglement of the summative, formative, and transformative dimensions in ABE. I believe the CBPR activities in the PROFUND project could provide further insight into this entanglement. It is my belief that some ABE learners must overcome hindering patterns of meaning-making before they can focus on subject matters like literacy and numeracy. Additionally, some transformative processes may result from both summative and formative dimensions of the learning process. My main interest lies in understanding this entanglement from the perspective of learners and practitioners to enhance our understanding of learning in ABE.

Exploring the transformative dimensions should also serve as a reminder that human learning does not consist solely of cognitive, measurable dimensions and that short-term upskilling is not sufficient. This has or should have implications for the funding, evaluation of ABE programs, and program design (Reder, 2020b; Kim & Belzer, 2021). Furthermore, it could

help to expand the strategy for validating non-formal and informal learning in Austria (BMB & BMWF, 2017), as it strictly distinguishes between summative and formative approaches.

Finally, returning to the conclusion of Reder (2020b) that there is relatively little research that thoroughly examines the long-term impact and effectiveness of ABE, the assessment and validation tool that integrates the various dimensions of learning developed in a participatory manner in the PROFUND project may serve this purpose.

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# **An Autoethnographic Journey of an Art Educator's Transformative Experiences: Reimagining Critical Incident Moments and Transformative Learning**

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**Abstract:** Reflecting on lived experiences as an art learner in South Korea and as an artist, educator, and researcher in the United States, this autoethnographic arts-based study employs Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning and Tripp's (1993) critical incident analysis to explore systematic self-reflections and visual responses to teaching moments. Through the lens of transformative learning, the study reimagines strategies for reflective practice that foster inclusive and diverse learning environments. Presenting qualitative findings in a visual essay format, this paper highlights the author's photographic reflections and written journals over two semesters in art and art education courses, linking these to the ongoing influence of the author's transnational experiences on their daily teaching and creative practices.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Critical Incident Analysis, Transnational Art Education

As an Asian female art educator, I explore my transnational art education experiences and their relevance to my current teaching and creative practices. My goal is to broaden perspectives within the field of art education. Using autoethnography and arts-based research, I engage in self-dialogues to examine the connections between my lived experiences and professional activities. This process is supported by visual documentation and written reflections, all informed by critical incident analysis.

Prior research in adult and teacher education has explored the efficacy of various self-reflection techniques and pedagogical theories, particularly in academic settings (Ahluwalia, 2009; Beigi, 2016; Boud et al., 1985; Cranton, 1992; Hillier, 2005; Mezirow, 1990, 2000). Art education scholars have emphasized the importance of critical reflective practice and transformative learning within culturally responsive pedagogy (Hood & Travis, 2023; Kokkos, 2021; Travis et al., 2018). Additionally, it is widely acknowledged that visual art plays a crucial role in enhancing sensory perceptions and fostering imaginative capacities (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 1995), with Greene particularly noting the arts' ability to shift focus from external imagery to internal cognitive awareness (1995, p. 150). Despite this, few studies have examined how transformative learning and critical incident analysis, when integrated with arts-based methods, can enhance teachers' reflections on diversity, equity, and inclusion in art education. This study extends the discussion by investigating how a teacher's autoethnographic approach, supported by critical incident analysis and visual journals, contributes to their development as an artist, educator, and researcher, and informs inclusive teaching practices in art education.

As autoethnographic stories are central to the method to present vignettes of my childhood and adolescent art education in South Korea as data and reflect on such narratives through the lens of transformative learning theory. This reflection prompts several key questions: How do my personal and educational experiences help me envision alternatives and foster safe, diverse art learning communities? How might my early art education experiences influence and transform my current teaching practices to produce something new? Additionally, I examine how

critical self-reflection and analysis of my teaching practices, documented both in writing and visually, prompt me to reconsider my perspectives on my students and my roles as an artist, educator, and researcher.

To capture reflections more effectively from two semesters in art education classrooms, this study employs qualitative research methods including autoethnography and arts-based approaches, underpinned by critical incident analysis and transformative learning. The data collection is extensive, comprising self-dialogue interviews audio recorded, photographic documentation, art journals with drawings, and written reflections on critical incidents. These self-dialogue interviews include targeted questions reflecting on my art education experiences, such as comparing my experiences as a student in Korea to my current practices as an art educator. I also explored how my transnational experiences have influenced my perceptions of aesthetics.

This study's theoretical framework is anchored in transformative learning theory, which uses prior knowledge to construct new interpretations and inform future actions (Mezirow, 1991). Data collection involved systematic written journals and visual documentation (photographs, drawings), using critical incident analysis to identify key issues in teaching situations and facilitate structured reflection (Tripp, 1993). Additionally, an arts-based method was employed, adapting creative arts tenets to explore research questions (Leavy, 2009). The study drew on multiple data sources, including written and visual reflections, self-recorded research memos, and class artifacts like teaching notes and assignments for a multi-leveled analysis and triangulation. Data sets for specific weeks included teaching notes, reflections, photographs responding to critical incidents, and analyses of the classroom environment focusing on aspects such as lighting and atmosphere. This approach enabled the accumulation of visual data and personal narratives from teaching diverse student groups over two semesters.

The study revealed how autoethnographic visual essays could illuminate previously unseen aspects of critical incident analysis and transformative learning, underscoring the value of creative practice and reflective strategies for teaching practitioners, artists, and students across various disciplines. Reflecting analytically on key teaching moments—identifying the who, when, and why—proved challenging yet essential for sharing and visualizing these experiences. Over time, my creative and teaching processes integrated seamlessly, highlighting the importance of systematic reflection. This journey reshaped my approach to project priorities and demonstrated the transformative power of reflection.

These findings are significant for educators, creatives, and scholars as they explore sustaining creative practices and pedagogies while enhancing teaching strategies. The study illustrates how specific types of visual and written reflections can broaden one's view as a learner, teacher, or artist, thereby expanding perspectives on critical reflection and fostering more inclusive, equitable, and diverse learning environments.

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## Perspective Transformation and Inclusive Education: A Literature Review

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**Abstract:** Inclusion constitutes a decisive aspect and inherent goal of Mezirow's transformative learning through the establishment of learning environments that value diversity and ensure equitable opportunities for all learners. Towards this aim, our paper investigates the ways inclusion, inclusiveness, inclusivity, and inclusive education appear in the research that has transformative learning as its theoretical framework. The collection of papers for our analysis, originates from the previously held Transformative Learning Conferences between 2003 – 2022. From our readings five (5) major themes emerged: (a) inclusive practices in community or organizational settings, (b) teaching and learning practices that foster inclusion in formal and non-formal settings, (c) educational design and curriculum development that serves inclusion, (d) inclusion as a learning outcome of transformative learning processes, and (e) how informal spaces/places (may) function as inclusive learning environments.

**Key Words:** Perspective Transformation, Inclusion, Inclusive Practices

### Introduction

Transformative learning theory is a prominent theoretical framework in adult education focusing on the profound transformation of an individual's beliefs, perspectives, and assumptions. It involves a deep shift in understanding oneself, others, and the surrounding world. In Mezirow's theory transformative learning refers to: "... the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mindsets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove true or justified to guide action" (Mezirow, 2000, pp. 7-8). However, in a recently, published paper (Wildemeersch & Koulaouzides, 2023) it was noted that there is a growing skepticism about the concept of inclusion in education. In that paper the authors claimed that inclusion is not always a given outcome of learning processes even if it is incorporated in the stated learning objectives or the educational design strategy.

Having the above in mind we decided to investigate how inclusion, inclusiveness, inclusivity, and inclusive education appear in the research that has transformative learning as its main theoretical framework. We decided to research the published papers in the previously held Transformative Learning Conferences from 2003 – 2022. Our choice was based on the assumption that papers presented in this specialized conference are more likely to give us a good idea on how inclusion is understood and practiced by theorists and practitioners who proclaim transformative learning theory as their working framework. After thoroughly reading the Conference Proceedings of the ten previously held TL conferences we came up with 67 papers that were dealing with inclusion in many different ways. We searched for papers that had



inclusion or inclusivity as part of their discourse even if they were not referring directly to those terms as learning outcomes or as teaching practices.

## Findings

After reading and carefully examining the content of the papers that we considered related to inclusion, we categorized their content in five (5) major themes: (a) papers that examine inclusive practices in community or organizational settings, (b) contributions that identify and propose teaching and learning practices that foster inclusion in formal and non-formal settings, (c) papers that highlight educational design and curriculum development that serves inclusion, (d) papers that debates for inclusion as the learning outcome of a transformative learning process, and (e) presentations that were concerned with how informal spaces/places function or may function as inclusive learning environments. Below we summarize the content of these papers in each category.

### **Inclusive Practices in Community or Organizational Settings**

A collection of 21 papers belongs into this category and provides a comprehensive overview of inclusive practices emphasizing transformative learning approaches to empower marginalized groups and promote social change either in organizational settings-workplace or community development actions. Within organizational settings we traced focus on leveraging diversity through organizational learning where emphasis is given to coaching and group learning experiences (Maltbia 2003, 2005; Yarosz and Fountain 2003). In these papers authors emphasize the importance of embracing diversity to create inclusive cultures within organizations. Inclusive leadership practice is the content of another subset of papers (Bridwell, 2011; Hovey-Ritter 2012; Gupta & Robbins, 2014; Radd, 2014). These papers focus on promoting cultural understanding and transformative coaching for inclusivity in virtual teams while they are also exploring men's role in supporting women's leadership towards fostering inclusivity. All of them advocate for inclusive leadership to enhance decision quality and cultivate supportive cultures especially in places where exclusion is an undoubtful fact like high-poverty, urban areas. Wasserman & Gallegos (2007, 2009, 2014) introduce the REAL model which combines organizational learning and inclusive leadership as a framework for addressing diversity and sustainability challenges in organizations.

In the set of papers that deal with communities and their development a series of inclusive learning practices are highlighted. From the presentation of specific non-formal programmes that challenge biases and promote social inclusivity among marginalized communities through cross-cultural, all-encompassing dialogical processes and storytelling (Defraigne-Tardieu, 2011; Hussain, 2011; Koutidou, 2011; Hallett et al. 2012; Dresner and Buck, 2014) to informal learning process like political campaigns that highlight inclusive practices in post-conflict communities (Agarwal, 2011). Moreover, Cain and Kushner (2012) advocate for leaderless organizing to amplify diverse voices in communities, while Jones (2014) focuses on inclusive community learning spaces for people who experienced trauma. The affective dimension of learning and a narrative of inclusion is also promoted in the framework of community learning and leadership (West & Green, 2018; Gilpin-Jackson Yabome, 2016) while Robbins et al. (2022) examine the experiences of White DEI community practitioners in challenging exclusionary assumptions. Overall, these papers offer valuable insights and frameworks for fostering inclusivity and promoting social justice in the community level and in organizational settings.

## **Teaching/learning Practices That Foster Inclusion in Formal and Non-Formal Settings**

We traced a significant number of 27 *papers* that delve into diverse teaching and learning practices aimed at fostering inclusion in both formal and non-formal settings.

In these papers dialogical processes appear as the main choice to enhance inclusivity and reflection among participants. According to the authors of this set of papers dialogical processes (sustained, relational, trauma & tragedy related) are key in fostering inclusivity across diverse cultural and class contexts (Diaz & Stennet, 2003; Perera et al, 2003; Merrill, 2005; Davis, 2007; Cox, 2018). Expressive practices for personal transformation and inclusion are common features in this set. Practices like the Theatre of the Oppressed, the Reader's Theatre and the Popular Theatre are found in this category (Williams, 2003; Lewis & Viato, 2007; Lawrence & Butterwick, 2007; Kaya, Gallegos & Schapiro, 2014; Striano, Strollo & Romano, 2014). Chrisostomidis (2011) advocates for a person-centered approach to teaching, using the transformative power of storytelling while a few authors emphasize embodied experiences and somatic approaches towards inclusion and the unlearning of embodied oppression (Chang 2016a, 2016b; Koenig, 2018).

A group of authors advocate for the need of culturally specific and responsive learning experiences that highlight representations of minorities to challenge biases and promote inclusivity while critical pedagogy and intersectionality is seen as the overall framework (Fareed, 2005; Sartor, 2005; Priestley, 2007; Poulla, 2011; Frkal 2016; Kofke, 2016; Morris & Saunders, 2016; Gallego et al, 2018; Bosco et al., 2022) Tyler (2007) presents a session focused on experiencing otherness to step into unfamiliar shoes and gain deeper understanding and empathy for others while Striano et al. (2014) propose inclusive philosophical inquiry to foster broader and more inclusive perspectives. Family involvement in learning processes is also discussed by two authors (Ziegler 2003; Guo, 2022). Both these authors believe that this intergenerational and relational learning atmosphere may challenge stereotypes and transcend linguistic and ethnic boundaries.

All these papers offer a comprehensive framework for nurturing inclusive teaching and learning practices that challenge systemic barriers to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.

### **Educational Design for Inclusion**

We found *nine (9) papers* that made educational design suggestions to promote inclusion. Within these papers the notion of critical pedagogical and intercultural design is promoted (Ebgo, 2005; Livingston et al 2014; Kolomyjec, 2022). Educational design that considers and recognizes fear and trauma can lead to deeper understanding of inclusion (Gozawa, 2005; Hyland-Russell & Syrnok, 2014). Recognition of the identities of non-traditional students and an actively engaged with the community curriculum are also themes that are explored as educational design options towards inclusion (Nizinska, 2011; Wong & George, 2016). Finally, there is an open call for educational environments that are considering in the design of activities ecological perspectives and social justice themes into the curriculum to make them more inclusive (Jones, 2011; Magro, 2014). All these insights collectively highlight the multifaceted approaches necessary to create genuinely inclusive educational environments.

### **Informal Spaces/Places as Inclusive Learning Environments**

The concept of inclusive learning environments is explored across various contexts, and it was traced as a theme in *six (6) papers*. Informal learning spaces as inclusive learning environments was a theme less explored in the set of papers that we investigated. Political activist movements are proposed as spaces where conventional gender norms may be challenged (Pazioni-Kalli, 2011) while we also found papers that propose working in informal spaces with

people with disabilities to foster understanding and inclusion (Escrader, 2005; Escrader, Etmanski & Bal (2005) According to the authors, by learning from those at the margins we take the opportunity to imagine citizenship as caring, and inclusive. Neighborhoods, communities, and cities (Learning Cities) are also considered as spaces for inclusive learning and social solidarity. In these papers understand diversity is a crucial factor of the learning process (Scott, Tiu Wu, & Watson, 2014; West, 2026; Wong & Watson, 2016). Through these diverse perspectives, the importance of recognizing, valuing, and learning from marginalized voices to create truly inclusive informal learning environments is highlighted.

### **Inclusion as a Learning Outcome**

Inclusion as a verified learning outcome of transformative learning processes is discussed in four (4) papers. In these papers learning processes like arts-based workshops, ethno-autobiographical sessions, learning experiences that raise critical consciousness and creative expression opportunities seem to have contributed to more inclusive perspectives (Hazi, 2003; Jones, 2003; Muhammad & Dixson, 2005; Lange, Chiu, & Gokiart, 2012)

### **Concluding Remarks**

This collection of papers, selected indicatively, for the needs of the present review, explores the potential that Mezirow's transformative learning approach could have in promoting inclusive education within various adult educational settings. Although this collection of papers highlights the power of transformative learning to challenge social norms, to empower marginalized and vulnerable groups, and to realize social change, a more critical examination of these approaches could take into consideration additional key points.

At a first stage, the decisive influence of the cultural and learning environment within which transformative approaches occur should be more highlighted. At the same time, the importance of addressing wider fundamental inequalities that maintain exclusion and marginalization, requiring a shift towards deconstructing oppression in a systemic level, should be additionally considered. Furthermore, while several papers touch upon issues of gender, race, and class, not enough attention is paid to the concurrent identities that an individual may have. As a result, there is the need for transformative intersectional learning initiatives to empower marginalized voices and challenge systemic inequalities since these are usually embodied and thus more emphasis on somatic approaches is necessary. Finally, another key point to be addressed is the limited discussion concerning practical challenges and barriers while implementing inclusive teaching approaches. Findings suggest the need for future research to explore strategies for overcoming resistance to change, fostering collaboration across stakeholders, and embedding inclusive practices within institutional settings. In conclusion, a more thorough, context-sensitive, and cross-sectoral and intersectional approach is needed to fully realize the potential of transformative learning in achieving social change and wider inclusion.

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## **Bridge-building and Belonging Beyond the Classroom**

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**Abstract:** One way to make good trouble with transformative learning and transformation is to engage in the disruptive thinking required to explore them from a decolonized lens. In a polarized and hurting world, reeling from the impacts of its colonial history: what emerges when we re-examine transformative learning and the process and outcomes of transformation from a decolonized lens? Our previous attempt at doing this led us to a model of belonging in the classroom, which placed the onus on educators to disrupt experiences of marginality and exclusion by creating spaces of belonging for all. In this model, educators are the bridgebuilders and we assume capacities such as self-reflection are accessible. What happens when those capacities are absent? Among other questions, we asked: How might we foster the conditions for belonging in society in an era of polarization? What conditions and practices support bridge-building across polarized groups? With these questions, we have set an intention to write a paper in that we explore, develop, and test at the ITLC 2024 conference, a model for bridge-building and belonging beyond the classroom. This will require looking beyond transformative learning to transformation practices that will create meaningful contact across diverse groups.

**Key Words:** Bridge-building, Belonging, Polarization, Transformative Learning

### **Introduction**

As previous co-authors (Kramlich & Gilpin-Jackson, 2022), we looked at transformative learning in the classroom and proposed that educators have a role in disrupting experiences of marginality and exclusion inherent in colonial classroom structures, by advancing belonging in the classroom (Darder, 1991, 2017). Based on our review of definitions, we generally defined belonging as the state of feeling accepted (including the holistic and spiritual state of self-acceptance), respected, included and supported. As we continue to live through a pandemic of polarization however, we found ourselves reflecting on our model, which we now call the belonging diamond, and struggling with the fundamental question of whether/how well it translates into fostering belonging beyond the classroom. This paper is an attempt to further explore how transformative learning praxis might be used to foster bridge-building and belonging beyond the classroom. We start with a self-critique and exploration of the limitations of the belonging diamond. Next, we summarize the key features of this pandemic of polarization in the world today, which is the environment that we believe humanity must urgently be seeking to transcend and transform to increase social inclusion/belonging. We then summarize key literatures/praxis that point to opportunities for bridging divides. Finally, we propose a model for bridge-building and belonging that goes a step further than the belonging diamond to address a belonging praxis beyond the classroom.

## Belonging in the Classroom

We previously proposed a model of belonging for Educators, grounded in five core practices that integrated African and Indigenous ways of knowing as well as universal human development and learning practices and needs, such as love and acceptance (Darder, 2017; Gilpin-Jackson, 2020; Smith, 2021; Taylor et al., 2023; Wilson, 2020). This model included five practices: Self-reflection (including self-awareness and self-compassion); Cultural Humility, Curiosity, Recognition (Fleming, 2014), and Acceptance (Kramlich & Gilpin-Jackson, 2022).

**Figure 1**  
*Belonging Diamond*



We realized that our model fundamentally assumes a willingness to engage and a certain level of capability inherent to educators such as the capacity for reflection. This relies on Mezirow's Transformative Learning theory that describes transformative learning as perspective transformation (a fundamental shift in worldview), which emerges for adult learners in a context of democratic principles, in which critical reflection and rational discourse across different perspectives are possible (Brookfield, 2000; Mezirow et al., 2009). The classroom functions as a fairly regulated environment, operating as an incubator wherein the educator exercises authority and control. Beyond the confines of this incubator-like classroom, our theoretical model encounters limitations without a leader and controlled environment. This necessitates a critical reevaluation of the strategies for fostering a sense of belonging within settings devoid of centralized leadership or control.

## The Context of Polarization

It is critical that humanity find models for belonging beyond the classroom because the current context of in-group thinking, polarization and radicalization are in fact driven by a lack of belonging and community. As movement and migration result in increased global diversity and various crisis' increase, so does a sense of fear and displacement, leading to the human protectionism instinct towards affinity grouping (Greater Good, 2024). This further increases fragmentation and homophily behaviours. This in turn limits diffusion of ideas, innovation and collaboration across polarized networks, as well as threatens political stability and peace (Waniek & Hidalgo, 2022). This division has been amplified in an age of social media networks

and identity politics, which continue to play out on the extremes of anti-wokeness on the one hand and cancel culture on the other. Social media has made it easy for filter echo chambers to be developed and has led to the entrenchment of politicized morality and ideological beliefs. America, for example, has become less tolerant of those from opposing political groups over the past 20 years (De-Wit, et al., 2019). The impact of this polarization is far-reaching--from divided families and local communities, to racial, class and other social divisions, to partisan impasses, to the lost economic advantages of diversity, to ongoing conflict and instability (Greater Good, 2024b).

The question becomes how might we transform and transcend these polarizations towards belonging? We know that contexts of polarization are shaped by dominant ideologies and hegemonies. Therefore, from a transformative learning perspective, these hegemonies only change through the emancipatory and liberatory thinking and action of those most oppressed in society. New awareness of the forces of oppression inherent in dominant ideologies most often occurs through ideology critique, such as through the Freirean process of conscientization (Brookfield, 2000; Freire, 1970). This perspective does not necessarily address how dominant systems receive this increased consciousness and the impact of possible hurts/harms when the oppressed act on this new awareness. In addition, in non-democratic contexts, breaking silence is often likely to increase oppression. As noted by Powell (2022)<sup>1</sup>, to overcome polarization as a global community, we must consider the context of power and a structural analysis of the desired outcomes of bridging. Also, a significant limitation of this bridge-building work arises from the potential disinterest of those in power toward bridge-building, especially if they already “own the bridge. “The task of engaging such individuals in meaningful dialogue requires thoughtful approaches, as they may lack immediate incentive to alter the status quo. This challenge is magnified within capitalistic frameworks, where tangible benefits or incentives might be necessary to encourage and foster an environment conducive to open-mindedness and constructive engagement. We therefore turn our attention now to a few perspectives of bridge-building that support our model-building.

### **Bridging Approaches**

In this section, we explore the following perspectives to bridge-building--the bridge framework, contact theory, conflict resolution, peacebuilding and appreciative inquiry.

#### **Bridge Framework**

This work builds on the Bridge Framework, introduced by one of the co-authors on bridge-building towards an equity-centered future. The Bridge Framework asserts that privileged systems and marginalized systems continue to be divided and are kept in place without the work of edge-walkers to create bridges to the desired future. The bridgework required is described as systemic changes in the hardware of organizations, systemic changes in the software of organizations; attention to trauma-informed development; and meaningful contact between the privileged and marginalized systems (Gilpin-Jackson, 2022). However, today, we see edge-walkers, within systems and outside of systems and/or as part of social movements being called out, called in and canceled. Conflict is rife and edge-walkers are exhausted and burnt out. They are experiencing systems as oppressive despite efforts to remove inequities and mitigate oppressions and leaving the systems and roles which would otherwise enable them to be the bridgebuilders we need in this era.

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<sup>1</sup> Intentionally lower case as per author’s preference for lower case spelling of their name.

## **Contact Theory**

Contact theory posits that prejudice decreases when diverse groups coexist, owing to increased constructive interactions between them (Allport, 1954; Shwed et al., 2018). Conditions that are critical for its success include equality in the group, shared goals, cooperation, and support from authorities (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Powell, 2022; Shwed et al., 2018.). The Othering and Belonging Institute, at the University of California Berkeley, offers “groundbreaking approaches to transforming structural marginalization and inequality “ (Othering & Belonging Institute, n.d.) to achieve this. Emerging research shows that contrary to popular assumptions contact between those who are the most central/dominant figures or those holding the strongest polarized beliefs, online or offline, seems to further entrench those beliefs and deepen polarizations (De-Wit et al, 2019; powell, 2022; Waniek & Hidalgo, 2022). In particular, in the online environment polarized views which increase support of in-groups are most effective in doing so when strong emotive and moral language is used, because they serve as shorthand/heuristics for supporters. Thus, when those with opposing views come into contact and encounter strongly worded polar perspectives, it elicits negative reactions from them and deepens polarization (De-Wit et al, 2019). However, network analysis research is showing that when similar members of opposing groups with lower degrees of connection are put into contact, new ideas are more likely to connect and spread (Waniek & Hidalgo, 2022).

## **Conflict Resolution and Cultural Humility**

Conflict is an inherent aspect of the human condition, and overlooking or failing to address it properly can lead to profound harm and even violence. Social media has also contributed to the rise in conflict and polarization. One cause of conflict is the unequal distribution of power and privilege which necessitates a multifaceted approach to manage and diffuse it effectively. A starting place to address societal imbalances is acknowledging and meeting basic human needs (Burton, 1990). More importantly, today we need to learn how to de-escalate and work with unhealthy conflict. To this end, researchers offer varied approaches to conflict resolution.

For instance, Rosenberg's nonviolent communication technique emphasizes the significant impact of tone and manner in communication during conflicts and shows how empathy and understanding can defuse tensions allowing constructive dialogue to happen (Rosenberg & Chopra, 2015). He proposes a four-step model which includes practicing observation, identifying one's feelings, clarifying one's needs, and making requests. The practice of cultural humility offers another effective approach. It extends beyond mere cultural awareness or sensitivity, advocating for a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation, self-critique, and the redressing of power imbalances (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998; Foronda et al., 2016; Habashy & Cruz, 2021).

## **Peace-building**

Peace-building in contexts of violence, war and armed conflict gives us another arena to explore for strategies that could be transformative for bridging polarization. Peacebuilding is defined as a focus on “transforming relationships and structures to decrease the likelihood of future conflicts “ (Zelizer & Oliphant, 2013, p. 7). Zelizer and Oliphant (2013) posit peacebuilding models progress from those that work around the conflict context to “do no harm “ conflict sensitivity training to advocate for integrated peacebuilding that moves beyond performative mainstreaming efforts and towards meaningful contact.

Some models for peace-building that move towards more sustainable contact are models such as ‘infrastructures for peace’ (I4P) promoted by the United Nations as well as models for

Truth and Reconciliation processes. Kondor et al. (2023) looked at I4Ps in Africa and worldwide, noted that national councils and commissions based on I4P structures result in public education that deescalates and bridges conflict that lays the groundwork for sustainable cross-sectional peace-building. They show further through a case study, that traditional mediums such as public entertainment through the fine arts, mentors, role models and mass media supported peace-building. However, they underscored the need for modern media, including the internet, which is being used for misinformation and disinformation that fuels conflicts, to also actively be integrated into sustainable peace-building. This could ensure broader reach, including youth engagement.

Further, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) have been established and internationally supported as a national/systemic praxis for learning from conflict, supporting collective healing and establishing individual and societal accountability for restorative and transformative justice and change in post-conflict contexts (Annan, 2016). There have been over 45 such commissions worldwide (USIP, 2011). However, a review of the success of TRCs calls for a more critical, nuanced model of evaluation. Such models must be decolonized and culturally appropriate to avoid professional, epistemological and methodological biases based on western evaluation models (Hirsch, Mackenzie, & Sesay, 2012).

### **Bridge-building for Belonging Model (BBB)**

This section pulls together the previous theories to form a model for bridging divides and fostering belonging for the world at large. In today's world, where division often overshadows unity, the “Bridge-building for Belonging “ (BBB) model offers a roadmap to a more cohesive, understanding, and inclusive society. This innovative model draws on bridging approaches/theories beyond Transformative Learning Theory to advocate for a progression through Heart, Hands, and Head—intentionally emphasizing the significance of affective connection first (inclusive of emotions and feelings), followed by collaborative action, and ending with intellectual engagement in bridging divides. In this context, this reordering of the conditions that lead to transformative learning reinforces the core role of affective engagement as a prerequisite for critical reflection, dialogue and rationality for intergroup transformative learning (Perry, 2021). It places practical collective action/engagement on shared interests as immediately following affective connection in contexts of high conflict and polarization. It thus shifts the ordering of Heron’s up-hierarchy which moves from the affective and imaginal, then the cognitive and finally the practical (Perry, 2021), to the affective, followed by the practical and placing cognitive engagement for transformative learning sequentially last.

In addition, conditions for transformation must include cultural humility and effective use of traditional and modern communications and network mediums. These conditions have not previously been included as requirements for transformative learning but are essential as our review of bridging approaches showed.



**Figure 2**  
*Bridge-building for Belonging Model*



**Heart: The Foundation of Bridging**

At the essence of bridging lies the heart—the center for trust-building and releasing one's power to pave the way for genuine connections. Drawing on powell's insights (2022), this initial phase tackles the intricacies of identity and power dynamics, asking all to participate in deep personal self-work and introspection that engages feelings and emotions, including trauma triggers. It challenges individuals in power positions to self-reflect and to acknowledge positions of privilege and power in order to foster a space where every voice is heard and valued equally. It challenges those in marginalized identities to relinquish the need for equality before bridge building, to extend trust and be willing to claim space as an equal. This is where having leaders who are bridgebuilders committed to belonging is essential to encourage all to do this critical self-work. The objective is to dismantle societal barriers, promoting an inclusive environment where equity prevails. Having all parties participate in heart-work helps to facilitate a safer, kinder, and more equitable world.

**Hands: Action Towards Unity**

Proceeding from the foundational heart work, the next step is counter-intuitive as it asks the participants to move into action. The hands' phase focuses on the active work of depolarization and the dismantling of radical ideologies to prepare the space for constructive discourse. It emphasizes the recognition of shared human interests, drawing on narratives that underline common goals and values. By first addressing mutual concerns, this stage then engages communities to work together in the transformative power of collective action. It urges people to transcend identity politics, nurturing a sense of collective responsibility and connection to lay the groundwork for dialogue and mutual understanding.

**Head: Engaging Minds, Changing Perspectives**

The final step in this process is the head phase, where intellectual engagement and perspective-taking take center stage, informed by contact theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). This stage moves beyond merely educating one group about another, focusing instead on uniting diverse parties through their shared humanity. It fosters dialogue and nurtures

a mutual understanding that is essential for shifting beliefs and worldviews. Those who have power and privilege practice perspective-taking from the marginalized who share their stories by perspective-giving (Bruneau & Saxe, 2012). With the focus on sustained change, this phase values open-mindedness and the expansion of perspectives, laying the foundation for a society where understanding and inclusivity flourish. The stage has three parts which occur in a cycle: meaningful contact results in open-mindedness and the capacity to practice moral reframing with the “other.”

### Conclusion

The “Bridge-building for Belonging” model offers more than a mere strategy for overcoming societal divisions; it presents a holistic approach to transformative learning that starts with the heart, moves through action, and culminates in intellectual enlightenment. By reordering the traditional sequence to prioritize emotional engagement and practical involvement, we pave the way for deeper, more impactful transformation possibilities.

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# **Completing the Odyssey: Black and Latino Student Veterans Reflections on War and Homecoming**

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**Key Words:** Art-Based Transformative Learning, Student Veterans of Color, Critical Dialogue

## **Introduction**

Literature addressing the experiences of student veterans, although growing, is still in a state of emergence, particularly for Black and Latino veterans (Hunt et al., 2022; Phillips & Lincoln, 2017). Current research often focuses on a monolithic understanding of the veteran experience, with "White American masculinity" (Najmi, 2011, p. 57) embedded therein. This study aims to avoid oversimplifications of the veteran demographic, by exploring the nuanced experiences of Black and Latino student veterans, employing art-based transformative learning to investigate their reflections on war, homecoming, and higher education.

## **Research Questions**

- 1) What are the lived experiences of Black and Latino student veterans as they transition from military service to civilians attending higher education?
- 2) How do Black and Latino student veterans perceive and navigate civilian life's cultural and institutional landscapes, including higher education?
- 3) What challenges and opportunities do Black and Latino student veterans encounter throughout their odyssey from soldier to (civilian) student, and how do they respond to them?

## **Literature Review**

War poet Brian Turner's insights highlight how military identity can overshadow personal identity, an effect of military conditioning designed for unified socialization (Cooper et al., 2018; Grossman, 2009). Student veterans embodying this military habitus (Young et al., 2022) in higher education often clash with an academic environment structured for non-military individuals, facing cultural incongruencies (McAndrew et al., 2019). Student veterans of color encounter additional challenges within a system that has historically privileged a White Male identity (Thelin, 2019). As more student veterans of color take on the responsibility of pursuing higher education, understanding their experiences is essential for addressing their unique needs and fostering truly inclusive academic environments (Hunt et al., 2022).

## **Art-Based Transformative Learning Theory**

Arts-Based Transformative Learning Theory (ABTL) integrates rational and extrarational knowledge, which is ideal for exploring the multifaceted (and sometimes contradictory) journey of war and homecoming. Transformative Learning Theory (TLT), developed by Jack Mezirow, emphasizes the role of social interactions in shaping knowledge and habits of mind. Art disrupts these patterns, supporting dialogue, critical reflection, and creative expression (Mantas & Schwind, 2014). The Touchstones discussion program, "Completing the Odyssey: A Journey

Home," uses poetry and visual art to disrupt presumptions of veteran identity, encouraging veterans to critically reflect on their experiences and the cultural differences they face upon returning home (Zeiderman & Takacs, 2020).

### **Method**

This study used intentional sampling to recruit 4-6 Black and Latino student veterans from a public research university in the southern United States. Participants, aged 31-53, included three Army veterans and one Marine Corps veteran. Ethnically, participants included two Black/African Americans, one Latino/Hispanic American, and one of mixed heritage.

Four focus group discussions were conducted via Zoom, utilizing texts and artworks, primarily Homer's *The Odyssey*, as Touchstones for reflective discussion. Participants formulated critical questions, reflected on them, and concluded the session with reflections on their overall discussion experience. Focus groups were open-ended but loosely guided by four units: 1) Forming a Discussion Group, 2) Implications of Service and War, 3) Returning to a Place, and 4) Creating Home.

Zoom's recording and transcription software documented the discussions. The data was stored securely in Obsidian, where the primary researcher cleaned transcripts for accuracy. Obsidian's analysis tools facilitated a thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006) procedure, resulting in four themes.

### **Findings**

The findings below are based on veterans' responses to the texts and visual art included in the program:

#### **Insiders and Outsiders**

Using Clausewitz's *On War* to discuss uncertainty and change, participants felt like outsiders in civilian environments due to their "Military Habitus" (Young et al., 2022, p. 182). The concept of 'Insiders' emerged, highlighting how veterans embody both military and civilian perspectives, gaining insights into civilian life that remain unknown to those with only a civilian background, e.g., 'real-life' understandings of inevitable change.

#### ***Calling for Critical Veteran Dialogues***

Discussions on the implications of war, prompted by Picasso's *Guernica* and photographs of the bombing, led to reflections on the 'realness' of war versus 'media portrayals.' Participants felt their individuality was overshadowed by media-driven stereotypes, complicating their recognition of multiple identities (i.e., veterans and men of color).

#### **Bridge Building**

Engaging with Book XIII of *The Odyssey*, participants drew parallels between their homecoming and Odysseus's, noting a desire for anonymity in civilian life akin to Athena's protective fog. Yet, participants felt a stronger compulsion to disclose their veteran status as a guide, i.e., helping civilians expand their perspectives on war, international affairs, and the privileges experienced in American higher education.

#### ***Hoplite Phalanx***

The final theme, which researchers named after the Greek infantry formation, illustrated the mutual protection and unified support among participants. Sections from Books XVI and XXIII of *The Odyssey* were used to prompt critical reflection on what it means to come home after service. Participants noted that loyalty was harder to find in the civilian world and placed

profound value on cultivating shared vulnerability and support among themselves and within the greater veteran community.

### **Discussion**

While we aimed to move beyond monolithic views of the veteran experience, the Touchstones Discussion units had limitations in exploring racialized identities. One participant noted, "These articles and images really honed us into our veteran identities." Despite this, the program's goal to empower individual voices led to the emergence of racialized and individualized experiences within broader generalizations of the veteran experience. Examples include perceptions of racialized betrayal from friends who saw joining the military as supporting a racially oppressive force. The emerging diverse experiences of Black and Latino student veterans emphasized the need for tailored support in higher education to meet unique needs (Ghosh et al., 2020). When implemented, veteran-specific support systems can adopt a 'one size fits all' approach (Vaccaro, 2015), which fails to recognize each veteran's unique identity and experiences. As a part of diversity recognition, intercultural competency in these support initiatives should be cultivated as crucial for addressing the racialized and individualized encounters veterans face (Hunt et al., 2022).

Participants emphasized the need for critical consciousness in higher education to create supportive environments where veterans feel safe and understood, challenging preconceived notions of veteran status. This involves establishing spaces for veterans to share their experiences with non-military peers, bridging gaps, and reducing stereotypes through personalized interactions.

### **Conclusion**

This study highlights the diverse experiences of Black and Latino student veterans transitioning to higher education, emphasizing the need for tailored support that avoids a one-size-fits-all approach and fosters intercultural competency. Creating spaces for veterans to share their experiences with non-military peers is crucial for bridging gaps and reducing stereotypes. Using arts-based transformative learning, this research underscores the importance of dialogue and critical reflection in understanding and supporting the unique identities of student veterans.

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# **New Possibilities for Transformative Learning Praxis Through a Meta-Transformative Learning Theory**

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**Abstract:** Scholars have continued to revise transformative learning (TL) theory based on other educational theories thereby creating good trouble for improved practice. For instance, Hoggan (2016) developed a model that addresses holistic aspects of transformation, and there are several integrative learning theories that have been developed beyond the TL community. For example, Tokuhama-Espinosa and Borja (2023) identified several holistic neural pathways as being primary for teaching and learning. This paper expanded upon these types of holistic and integrative theories by synthesizing learning theories from TL and elsewhere to develop a Meta-Transformative Learning Theory (MTLT) containing five domains. Examples from the field of sustainability education are given for each domain. Two major findings emerged from this project: 1) TL can be conceived of as occurring at the meta- or macro-level for each of the learning domains, and 2) TL should be an integral part of all learning theories, not separate from them.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Integrated Learning Theories, Course Development Methods, Faculty Development, Sustainability Education

## **Introduction**

Since its inception in the late 1970s, scholars have continued to revise transformative learning (TL) theory based on new data, ideas, and trends in education in an effort to create good trouble for improved practice. Several TL theories exist that seek to capture the more integrative and holistic aspects of this type of learning. For instance, Hoggan (2016) developed a model that addresses: Worldviews, Self, Epistemology, Ontology, Behavior, and Capacity. In addition, there are several integrative learning theories that have been developed beyond the TL theory community. As an example, Tokuhama-Espinosa and Borja (2023) identified several neural pathways as being primary for teaching and learning. This paper seeks to expand upon these types of holistic and integrative theories by synthesizing learning theories from TL and other learning theories to develop a Meta-Transformative Learning Theory (MTLT). Our goal is to cause more good trouble by developing a preliminary model for placement of TL amongst the constellation of common learning theories. Two major findings emerged from this project: 1) TL can be conceived of as occurring at the meta- or macro-level for each of the learning domains, and 2) TL should be an integral part of all learning theories. Such a MTLT should be utilized to guide faculty and other instructional communities of learning and practice.

## **Methods**

As recognized by Barker, Hoggan, and others (Barker, 2020; Hoggan, 2016), TL is a holistic process that actively engages students both within and beyond the cognitive domain.

Following this tradition, and to identify holistic articles that were to be included in this pilot project, major learning theories were compiled from several academic and professional websites, such as the University of Michigan’s Center for Research on Learning & Teaching, Learning Theories.com, Education Corner, and others. From these sites, 22 types of learning theories were identified and were then grouped into the following 7 major categories:

- Neuroscience Learning Theories:
  - Neuroscience
  - Neuro-Education
- Affective-Motivational Learning Theories:
  - Affective Learning Theories
  - Motivational Learning Theories
  - Social Emotional Learning Theories
- Cognitive Learning Theories:
  - Cognitive Psychology
  - Educational Psychology
  - Cognitive Architectures
  - Constructivism
- Behavioral-Experiential Learning Theories:
  - Behaviorism
  - Experiential Learning Theories
- Identity-Humanistic Learning Theories:
  - Personality Type Learning Theories
  - Identity Learning Theories
  - Humanism
- Sociocultural Theories:
  - Connectivism
  - Situated Learning Theories
  - Critical Learning Theories
  - Social Constructivism
  - Social Learning Theories
  - Social-Cultural Learning Theories
- Transformative Learning Theories:
  - Transformative Learning Theories
  - Transformative Learning Assessments

Google Scholar was then used to search for representatives of each of the 22 types of learning theories. The following criteria were used to select articles: published between the years 2000 and 2023; addressed the learning theory in the title and/or abstract; provided a summary of the learning theory as a figure, table, list, or paragraph; scholarly article; full text available; found within the first 200 articles of the search results. Of the 4,400 that resulted from the search, 87 articles met these criteria leading to at least 5 representative articles for each major learning theory category. A more systematic review of the literature on learning theories should be conducted to further confirm the findings of this pilot project.

To synthesize these models, we followed qualitative coding methodology to identify themes for the major categories. Next, we identified sub-themes that were common across these categories. We then used these compiled sub-themes to develop “micro-models” that solely

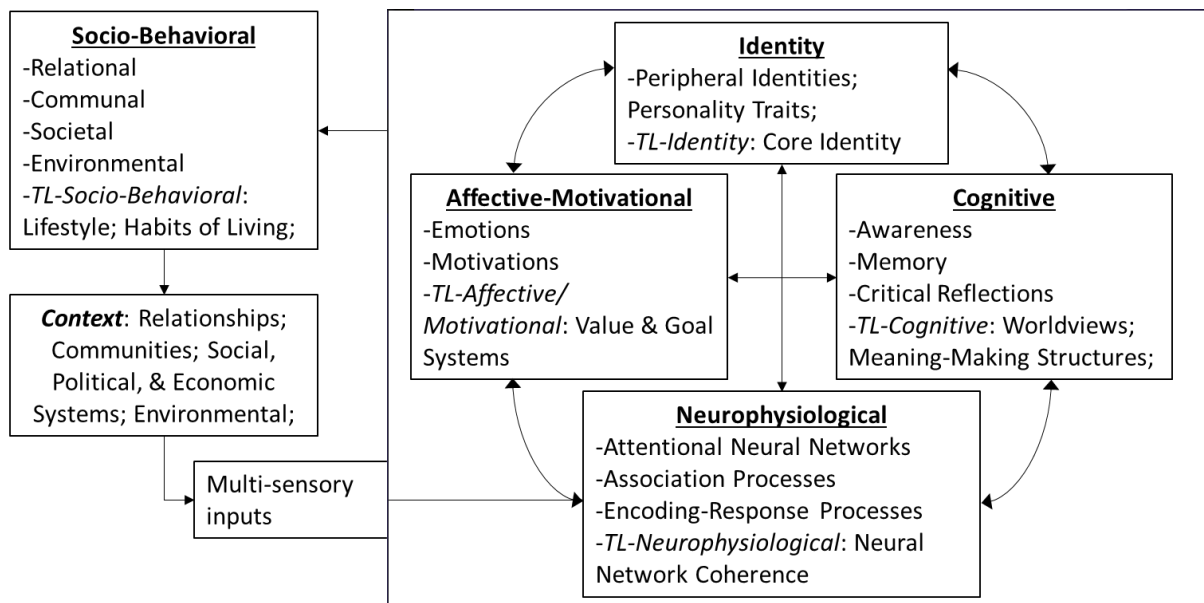
focused on their area (e.g., neurophysiological aspects of learning only). Finally, we worked to synthesize these micro-models into a single MTLT that retained the essential characteristics of each micro-model.

### A Meta-Transformative Learning Theory (MTLT)

As depicted in figure 1, the proposed MTLT is comprised of five context-dependent domains of learning in which individuals can be impacted. As discussed in each of the sections below, this MTLT locates TL within each of these major learning domains rather than being separate from them. This model can therefore help us to clarify in which domain(s) specific TL theorists and practitioners are working within. Locating TL within each of these domains has further implications, particularly in providing greater clarity on the nature of TL, as it can be asserted that TL is primarily concerned with significant changes that occur at a meta- or macro-level for each of these domains.

**Figure 1**

*Meta-Transformative Learning Theory Model*



### Neurophysiological Domain

For several decades, neuroscience has increasingly provided physiological insights into learning processes leading to a growing field of neuro-education. Attentional neural networks, associational processes, and encoding-response networks were highlighted in our literature review. For instance, Tokuhama-Espinosa and Borja (2023) identified the following neural pathways as being primary for teaching and learning: Memory, Executive Functions, Attention, Social Cognition, Relationships, Self-Esteem, and Motivation. This emphasizes biological brain processes making associations among parts and wholes simultaneously. Cortese et al. (2019) explore some of the processes by which different neural networks across the brain work together to represent stimuli through feature selection and reduction processes, providing insights into how the brain processes information from low to high abstraction.

Taylor (2001) has explored connections of TL with neurobiological functions, particularly as they relate to emotional regulation and processes. Taylor works to relate implicit memories and their neurobiological underpinnings with perspective transformations and notes several examples where perspective shifts, verbal processing, and automaticity may lie beyond conscious awareness and rationality. In the neurophysiological domain, such interdependence can be conceived as neural coordination across meta-structures of the brain that are simultaneously involved in critical reflection, emotional regulation, processing sensory input, and other functions. Our MTLT therefore conceptualizes TL-Neurophysiology as a coherence among various meta-structures of the biological brain.

### **Affective-Motivational Domain**

Educational theorists from diverse areas of research assert the importance of considering the affective aspects of learning. Ryan and Deci (2020) provide a model of internalization stages from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation, while Dweck (2017) seeks to connect goal theories with needs and representations that people construct as part of the learning processes. These and other authors assert the importance of emotions and motivations in learning processes.

In the field of TL, Dirkx et al. (2006) highlight the need for dealing with anxieties when enacting new beliefs in one's life. Wiley et al. (2021) go further by working to align the Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI) with a topology developed by Hoggan (2016). This inventory provides more extensive insights into some of the affective-motivational dynamics that might underlie TL processes. As these inventory elements help to illustrate, TL can be conceived of at a meta- or macro-level for this affective-motivational domain, where value and goal systems emerge from collections of emotions and motivations.

### **Cognitive Domain**

Consideration of the cognitive aspects of TL theory has been central from its inception (Mezirow, 2000). This domain is also central for other learning theories, which have emphasized the centrality of awareness, memory systems, and critical reflections. For instance, Çeliköz et al. (2019) present the Information Processing Model, providing insights into some of the relationships between attention, encoding and remembering processes, and various memory systems. Zhang and Soergel (2014) develop a model of sensemaking that highlights the centrality of various types of processing that are involved in acquiring knowledge to make better sense of our world.

In the development of the Transformative Learning Environments Survey (TLES), Walker (2018) depicts TL along four different approaches, one of which is the cognitive-rational approach. Similarly, Akenson et al. (2022) seek to discover common ground among transformative, civic, and leadership frameworks and highlight “awareness, critical reflexivity, engaged inquiry, [and] shift in perspective” as being central. As these TL theories highlight, the cognitive domain is a central part of TL processes. It can be argued that the kinds of TL shifts that occur for this domain happen at a meta- or macro-level, impacting individual's worldviews and meaning-making structures in addition to their specific beliefs and critical reflection processes.

### **Identity Domain**

In the broader field of education, the importance of considering students' identities is emphasized. For example, Dweck (2017) argues that self-coherence is an emergent need that lies

at the center of other motivations that people have, guiding their actions, change, and growth. Other humanistic educators, like Khatib et al. (2013), argue that all people have desires to actualize their fuller potentials and that learning about one's self is essential for education. These and other authors highlight the importance of the identity domain for learning processes.

Identity has already been explored in TL contexts. For example, Tsimane and Downing (2020) list self-directedness and self-actualization as part of the essential TL processes. Illeris (2014) has written extensively about TL and identity, conceptualizing our self-concept as existing at the intersection of partial identities (e.g., work, family, political) and a central identity that appears across contexts. Within these multiple identities are core identities influenced by layers of preferences and personalities. One's central identity, or self, which could be asserted to be the focus of TL for this domain, exists at a macro-level.

### **Socio-Behavioral Domain**

In developing an expectancy value model, Eccles and Wigfield (2020) include factors like cultural milieu, socializer's beliefs and behaviors, and social roles such as gender. Authors who are focused on situated cognition, such as Roth and Jornet (2013), help to clarify how learning and cognition are impacted by various contexts through embodiment. Overall, these and other authors provide key insights into some of the ways that sociocultural dynamics influence learning and development.

Several TL authors assert sociocultural influences and behavioral actions as being integral for TL processes. For instance, Nohl (2015) identifies social testing and mirroring as well as social consolidation as part of the core phases of TL. In discussing TL at individual, group, and organizational levels, Henderson (2002) argues for mutual integration of these levels and that each must be engaged for transformation to occur. Finally, Barker (2020) works to develop a Transformative Learning Maturity Model by integrating insights from TL, global learning, and Indigenization theories. The highest level for this model involves embedded networks of collaborative learning to meet decolonization and social outcomes. As in the other domains, TL-Socio-Behavioral can be conceived of at a macro-level as TL changes in this domain necessitate macro-transformations of one's lifestyle and social networks.

### **MTLT in Practice: Sustainability Examples**

In the field of transformative sustainability education, considering these five domains of learning at the micro- and meta/macro-levels can help educators more effectively support students' learning and TL processes. Our examples here focus on the meta/macro-level.

An environmental and sustainability educator mindful of the neurophysiological domain could use concept mapping activities at both the micro- and macro-levels (Novak, 2010). The process of building concept maps, and the resulting graphic, mimics how the brain functions – concepts and clusters of concepts that are connected by neurons. By reflecting on how concept maps mimic brain function, students may re-see their own learning from a cognitive science perspective. Neural pathways are further strengthened as students describe their maps to classmates and create compilation maps over a whole unit or semester.

In the affective domain, an instructor could adopt a *teaching for transformative experiences* framework (Heddy and Sinatra, 2013) to give students a context on which to reflect more deeply about recycling motivations. From the resultant micro-level shifts in students' emotions, motivations, and goals, the instructor could move them to deeper reflections using imaginal methods or critical reflection prompts on a service-learning project so that students

consider their value systems (e.g., individual choice, being good stewards of resources, natural beauty) that inform their emotions about recycling.

In the cognitive domain, environmental educators consider students' pre-existing knowledge about, and understanding of, ecosystems and other foundational sustainability topics as well as students' metacognitive skills – how they learn sustainability content. To give opportunities for macro-level shifts, the instructor could employ problem-posing case studies (Santos et al., 2024). Prompts are structured to ask students to consider the perspectives of different individuals in the story (e.g., wildlife managers, low-income residents, city officials) to realize there are worldviews other than their own and to consider from where their perspectives originated. These encourage student reflection at the premise level, not just at content or process levels, allowing them to consider challenges in various sustainability scenarios before jumping to solutions.

Our learners' connectedness to nature and nature processes, environmental identity, and/or ecological identity should be a focus of transformative sustainability educators. Existing survey instruments (e.g., Ecological Identity Scale, Walton & Jones, 2018) could be employed as pre- and post-tests to look for changes in identity due to course activities. Assignments that help students reflect on where they see themselves in relation to ecological processes could include guided nature walks, which enhance place-based learning and help reveal how much they see themselves as a part of, or separate from, nature. Service-learning projects to connect students with pro-nature others more socially could lead to macro-level shifts in ecological identities.

A project during which students weigh and categorize the waste that they and their families generate in a week could be a socio-behavioral kickoff activity to have them start thinking about their everyday sustainability behaviors. At the macro-level, the instructor could ask students to compare their week-long waste-collection results to others in the class and data on the same project with students from other cultures or countries. This could help bring students awareness and empowerment to examine what habits of living they have “inherited” that may be harmful to the earth or others, and then decide for themselves based on their own reflections, feelings, and reasoning what new lifestyle they want to strive for.

As this section demonstrates, the MTLT can be used to guide faculty in the development of transformative sustainability education programs.

### **The MTLT as a Metatheory**

In Hoggan's (2016) article, “Transformative Learning as a Metatheory,” he argues that TL should not be considered a specific theory of TL, such as Mezirow's definition, but rather as an analytic metatheory that “seeks to provide categorizations of components that are common among all the underlying theories” (p. 63). Throughout our paper, we have argued that TL can be conceived of as transformations that occur at a meta- or macro-level for each of five domains. To further identify common components that characterize TL as a metatheory, Hoggan asserts that three essential aspects of transformation be considered for learning outcomes, breadth, depth, and stability, which we redefine here for our MTLT.

For Hoggan, *depth* is the “degree to which it affects any particular type of outcome.” For the MTLT, we would define depth as changes within a specific and single domain that correspond to shifts in specific elements within that domain. Depth captures not just changes at the meta- or macro-level for a specific domain but also corresponding changes at the micro-level to specific elements within that domain.

*Breadth* is defined by Hoggan as being “the number of contexts in which a change is manifest” (p. 71). In our model, we agree that context is important, but we have moved this to the stability criteria below. Instead, we assert that breadth refers to changes in one domain aligning with corresponding changes in another domain. So, while depth is related to shifts that occur extensively within a single domain, breadth is associated with similar and corresponding shifts that happen across several domains of the MTLT.

Hoggan then describes relative *stability* as an irreversible and permanent change that has transpired. We seek to build on this assertion, as well as Hoggan’s explanation of breadth, by asserting that there are at least two aspects of stability: Time and context. We argue that both depth and breadth transformations should endure across time. We also believe that stability should be characterized by transformations that endure across several diverse contexts. If TL shifts endure across time and contexts, then it is a stable transformation.

Finally, seeking to further build upon Hoggan’s work, the MTLT can provide an expanded definition of TL. Hoggan defines TL as “processes that result in significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts with the world” (p. 71). Based on this definition and our model, we offer the following expanded definition of TL: *Meta-Transformative Learning refers to processes that result in depth, breadth, and stability changes to a person’s neurophysiological, cognitive, affective-motivational, identity, and socio-behavioral domains.*

### **The MTLT In Praxis: A Beginning in the End**

With this metatheory in mind, there are many potential applications for TL programs, such as the sustainability case example discussed above. The depth criterion could be used to assess the percentage of course concepts/skills that are directly related to the TL shifts that a course is seeking to support. The breadth criterion might assess how many of the MTLT domains the course is directly engaging in. The time stability criterion helps to ensure that the course is continually engaging with the depth- and breadth-related activities across most of the course, while the context stability criterion is focused on the number of diverse contexts in which students are engaging. We offer this example as a jumpstart to enact the MTLT in practical and transformative ways. As we have sought to build upon Hoggan’s approach to conceptualizing TL as a metatheory in practice, we hope that others will continue to expand the MTLT presented herein.

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# Conceptualizing Transformative Listening in the Workplace: A Theoretical and Practical Proposal

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**Abstract:** The paper explores the concept of transformative listening as a catalyst for personal and organizational development within corporate environments. In this sense, a proposal was prepared for 15 leaders from the same organization, in accordance with the action research cycle and the assumptions of transformative learning, consisting of reflective conversation circles, phenomenographic interviews with managers before and after participating in the program to map the different conceptions about listening, an interview with the person responsible for the HR area, and a focus group with the subordinates of these leaders. A transformative listening protocol was adapted for the work environment with the inclusion of critical incidents and employed during conversations. Results support the research argument. Managers changed in terms of their conceptions about listening; some presented changes in their practices, and subordinates noticed changes in the leaders' behavior. The research brought relevant implications, presenting a concept of transformative listening at work, differentiating it from other types of listening; the adaptation of a transformative listening protocol for the corporate environment with the use of critical incidents; and presenting a viable way to build a place of listening at work based on reflective conversations, which can serve as guidance for facilitators and organizations.

**Key Words:** Transformative Listening at Work, Transformative Learning, Critical Reflection at Work, Corporate Education, Manager Development.

## Introduction

The management of people and corporations has been reconfigured. Dialogue and listening emerge as crucial skills to deal with current and future challenges (Schnepfleitner & Ferreira, 2021). There is a need to encourage another type of listening in organizations, transformative listening, for the development of people since this dimension of listening has the potential to stimulate critical reflection, acting as a trigger for the transformative learning process. To understand this potential, a development proposal was prepared for 15 leaders from the same organization. The results revealed that transformative listening stimulated with the use of a protocol can promote leadership transformation.

## Theoretical Reference

Transformative learning evokes elements such as critical reflection, dialogue, and individual experience, which allow the questioning of beliefs and the proposition of new ways of acting (Mezirow, 2003; Schnepfleitner & Ferreira, 2021).

Dialogue requires high-quality listening skills, which help to understand diverse perspectives (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2018). Listening is essential and strategic in the organizational environment, contributing to decision-making and people development (Neill & Bowen, 2021).

Transformative listening is a path to transformative learning, involving critical reflection, individual experience, and dialogue. The combination of these elements allows leaders to question their assumptions and ideas and promotes openness to listening to other perspectives (Schnepfleitner & Ferreira, 2021).

However, there is a gap in research on listening in the workplace that brings a practical and transformative proposal that uses listening as a means of learning based on reviewing assumptions (Itzchakov & Grau, 2022). It was in this direction that this study was carried out.

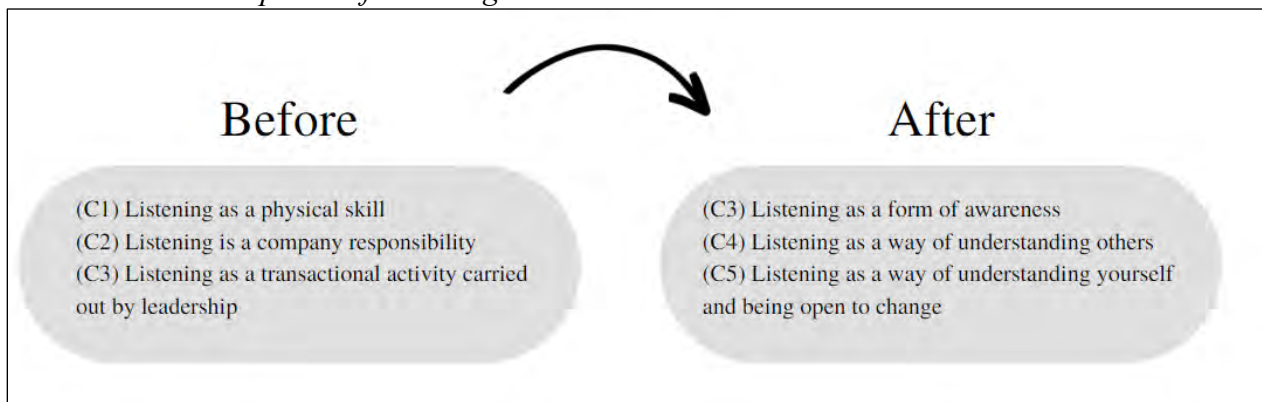
### Methodology

This is qualitative and interpretative action research. The proposal was composed of three reflective conversation rounds, inspired by Paulo Freire's culture circles (Freire, 2014), held monthly, with the application of a transformative listening protocol<sup>1</sup> adapted to the work with the inclusion of critical incidents, called PETIC (Transformative Listening Protocol based on Critical Incidents). A focus group with subordinates to check perceptions of changes in leaders' actions. Phenomenography (Marton, 1981) was used to analyze the interviews carried out before and after the managers' participation, presenting the variations in the conceptions of the leaders who experienced the exercise of transformative listening.

### Results

The analysis of the interviews in two moments revealed the variations in the conceptions of listening: firstly, they were pragmatic and oriented towards the idea of transactional leadership (Bass, 1990), focusing on the supervision and management of daily tasks. After completing the program, the conceptions changed and began to be understood in the dimension of human relationships and the emotions involved, as can be seen in the following figure 1.

**Figure 1:**  
*Variations in Conceptions of Listening*



*Source: prepared by the authors*

<sup>1</sup> Note: Transformative Listening Protocol, the original protocol was developed by a study group that investigates transformative listening in educational contexts for adults, and, when applying it in different contexts, observes that listening is an embodied, relational, intersubjective, and culturally learned process (ANDERSON SATHE et al., 2022).

The experience of listening with the use of the protocol repositioned the concept of listening as something that transcends the issue of leadership or organization, listening began to be understood as a relational action between people, which generates understanding about the other, acceptance, brings emotions surface and reveals how willing people are to be present when listening, bringing to light new perspectives and possibilities for action.

In some cases, it was only possible to realize the impact of listening to others when they saw the emotional response of the person they were listening to. In other cases, listening contributed to changing assumptions that reflected in their way of relating to their subordinates, as can be seen in this example:

**Frame 1:**

*Comparative analysis of variations in conceptions and reports of transformation*

	Initial conception	Final conception	Stories of transformation
E4	C2 When we have something to say, whether it is constructive criticism or not, the company always listens.	C6 In my head, wow, I know how to listen, but I didn't know. I started putting my team as a priority	I changed my thinking, I changed my way of acting, now they are a priority, so when they call me, they will have priority with me. And that really worked. So, every time they call me, I stop immediately, turn on the camera, every day I'm like this.

*Source: prepared by the authors*

All managers became aware of the way they listened at work and changed their conceptions of listening. In the focus group, some subordinates of the participating leaders identified changes in the behavior of their superiors, which indicates that the experience had some practical signs that were noticeable at the end of the experience.

**Implications**

The results support the research argument.

From a methodological perspective, the transformative listening protocol model (PETIC) can be replicated, adapted, or modified in different professional environments and corporate contexts. It is important to emphasize that the protocol is not a tool that controls dialogue, in the sense of restricting listening interactions to a script. The protocol should be used as a tool for stimulation and mental planning for listening.

For those who wish to build or adapt a protocol, some aspects must be considered to generate authentic and reflective communication. Transformative listening will occur when reflection generates reaching the assumptions.

The use of the protocol is a trigger to the transformative learning process, and this will revisit dilemmas, awareness, exploration of changes and new beginnings. Therefore, it is essential to be open to this learning movement. Applying the protocol in hierarchical situations, for example, a leader applying it with his team, may not produce the desired result due to the power relations that exist in the corporate environment.

From a practical standpoint, the adaptation of a transformative listening protocol for the corporate environment with the use of critical incidents presents a viable way to build a place of

listening at work based on reflective conversations, which can serve as guidance for facilitators and organizations.

To institutionalize the place of listening, it is necessary to observe whether the factors that favor the creation of a place of listening are present in the organizational environment: open communication and a climate of trust, openness to change and appreciation of opinions, honesty, and openness to trying new beginnings and an environment free from coercion are essential.

The place for listening is not a meeting room or a training session, it is any space for dialogue and sharing of experiences that allows listening and reflection. This can occur in meetings or development sessions if the organizational environment creates conditions for this.

From a theoretical perspective, the research contributed to the development of the concept of Transformative Listening at work and advances the work of the research group of the transformative learning group.

The concept of transformative listening at work had not yet been debated in the organizational studies' literature and it is presented, differentiating it from other types of listening. Transformative listening at work is a soft skill. In addition to empathetic, active, and deep listening, it encourages speaker and listener to access their individual frames of reference, breaking with transactional logic. It is crossed by the exercise of critical reflection, which promotes changes in perspective or assumptions that materialize in actions that are visible to the individual and to those with whom they interact at work.

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## **Beyond Gestural Solidarities: Exploring the Intricacies in Transforming Organizations for Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI)**

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**Abstract:** Institutional endeavors to transform organizations into the embodiment of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (JEDI) have multi-faceted aspects, or “many faces” (Erfan, 2021). This study investigates the integration of Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) within organizations through the lens of feminist philosophers like Noddings (2003) and Tronto (2010). Feminist care critiques the application of care within paternalistic frameworks, risking the commodification of care as highlighted by Ahmed (2012) and leading to mere “gestural solidarities” as described by Berlant (2011). Real-world cases underscore the inadequacy of care ethics alone in addressing deep-rooted systemic issues linked to meritocratic and capitalist dynamics. Utilizing Bateson’s concept of the double bind, we explore the paradoxical tensions in JEDI efforts and advocate for transcontextual learning to navigate these complexities. Our study underscores the need for critical engagement with underlying mechanisms of desire, learning, and care to transcend superficial gestures and foster transformative change.

**Key Words:** Care, Feminist, JEDI, Transformation

Transformative learning theories provide a robust framework to address the challenges and opportunities inherent in integrating Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) within organizational cultures. Central to this discussion is the concept of caring orientations, which Eisler describes as “concern for the welfare and development of ourselves, others, and our natural environment” (Eisler, 2007, pp. 41-42). However, Erfan (2021) criticizes how JEDI initiatives in organizations often overemphasize reframing efforts to challenge the status quo, which can lead to dismissive attitudes toward these initiatives. This phenomenon, referred to as the “many faces of JEDI” (Erfan, 2021, p. 110), reveals that simply infusing care ethics into daily practices is often insufficient for transforming organizational cultures.

This study explores whether transforming daily practices through care ethics can fundamentally reconfigure organizational culture. Drawing on the insights of feminist philosophers on care ethics (Noddings, 2003; Tronto, 2010), we highlight that care should be enacted within institutions with attention to purpose, power, and particularity (Tronto, 2010). When care is defined paternalistically, determining what care recipients need from the caregivers’ perspectives, there is a risk of commodifying and diluting care ethics. Ahmed (2012) underscores this risk, noting the transformation of genuine care actions into “technologies for the elite,” which illustrates the disconnect between these actions and their political utility. Similarly,

Berlant (2011) argues that emotional performances of care often result in mere “gestural solidarities” (p. 194).

Real-world observations of essential workers, who lack robust economic, cultural, social, psychological, and environmental supports, illustrate these philosophical points (Scully-Russ et al., 2022). These observations highlight the limitations of using care ethics as a universal remedy for systemic issues rooted in the complex dynamics of meritocratic logic. This logic perpetuates “the fantasy of meritocracy,” which suggests that struggling will eventually lead to “a good life promised by capitalist culture” (Berlant, 2011, p. 167). Recent discussions by Sandel (2020) on the global impacts of meritocracy reinforce these concerns. Thus, positioning the ethics of care as “self-transforming compassionate recognition” (Berlant, 2011, p. 182) might overlook the intricacies of unlearning capitalist influences prevalent in meritocratic systems, neglecting the challenges faced by those embedded in capitalist cultures that simultaneously promote meritocracy and social inclusion.

To address these complexities, our research investigates the double-binding effect of care ethics within JEDI transformations. Utilizing Bateson’s concept of the double bind, we explore the deep-seated paradoxes of JEDI efforts, where Bateson (1972) points to the enduring tension between intersubjective contexts and broader systemic relationships that can lead to suspended agency and potentially cause schizophrenia. In managing these tensions, transcontextual learning is essential, involving a receptive capacity to “listen for patterns and ethos, gestures, inklings, and vibes” (Bateson, 2022, p. 994). By confronting these underlying contradictions that might foster pathological learning patterns (Sorenson, 2005; Visser, 2003), we advocate for a critical engagement with the mechanisms of desire, learning, and care, aiming to transcend superficial engagements and achieve meaningful, transformative change.

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## **Troubling Transformation Through an Experiential Learning Apparatus**

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**Abstract:** This paper explores post-anthropocentric transformative elements of entangled intra-actions by reviewing research of pharmacy students' experiential learning in veterinary settings. Transformative learning theory and praxis have important roles in adult learning theory. Jack Mezirow is credited with first establishing transformative learning theory. Theory and praxis of transformative learning evolved over time in response to critiques, varying definitions, and perspectives of different theorists. Critical reflection is an important element of transformative learning praxis and is commonly applied by professional students within experiential learning rotations. Although critical reflection may seem anthropocentric, I examined students' critical reflection documents and interview transcripts in my research to explore post-anthropocentric entanglements. I engaged the diffractive methodology of agential realism proffered by Karen Barad to speculate how entangled intra-actions are in-relation to transformative learning.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Agential Realism, Intra-action

### **Troubling Transformation Through an Experiential Learning Apparatus**

In the natural sciences, I understand transformation as a physical process. A simple example is transformation of water. Water can be transformed from ice to liquid to water vapor by applying stressors. Interestingly, transformation occurs when stressors are applied. What is being applied to produce transformation? How does transformation occur under particular conditions? Since water did not transform itself, what is the importance of 'other' in transformation?

In the social sciences, Jack Mezirow presented transformative learning of humans through metacognitive epistemology (Mezirow, 2006). Specifically, frames of reference (e.g., habits of mind, discursive rationality), critical reflection, and reflective discourse. Mezirow conceptualized transformative learning by noting,

cultures enable or inhibit the realization of common human interests – the ways adults realize common learning capabilities. Who learns what and the when, where and how of education are clearly functions of the culture. Transformative learning is a rational, meta-cognitive process of reassessing reasons that support problematic meaning perspectives or frames of reference, including those representing such contextual cultural factors as ideology, religion, politics, class, race, gender and others. It is the process by which adults learn how to think critically for themselves rather than take assumptions supporting a point of view for granted. (pp. 36-37).

Mezirow recognized 'others' as a factor of cultural context and situated transformative learning into a way of knowing (Mezirow, 1996; Mezirow, 2006). When exploring Mezirow's transformative learning theory and practice evolution informed by other theorists, Cranton and Taylor (2011) posited "there is no reason that both the individual and the social perspectives cannot peacefully coexist; one does not deny the existence of the other, but rather they share

common characteristics and can inform each other” (p. 195). What is the importance of ‘other’ in transformation? What is being applied to produce transformation? How does transformation occur under particular conditions? What compels humans to critically reflect in the first place and what is the role of nonhumans?

### **Entanglement of Agential Realism and Transformative Learning**

I engaged Barad’s (2007) ethico-onto-epistemological framework of agential realism to trouble transformation. Using an agential realist approach, transformation is a (re)iteration of becoming (ontological way of being↔becoming). It is ethical because we consider the other. Actually, there is no ‘other’ since we (humans and nonhumans) are all a part of the differential becoming of the world and our way of knowing (epistemology) “is a physical practice of engagement” (p. 342). Instead of interactions between humans and nonhumans, we are all intra-actively entangled within the world.

Different intra-actions bound within an apparatus produce different phenomena. For my research purposes, the apparatus is experiential learning used as a tool to create a difference (trans)forming pharmacy students towards becoming competent within the boundary of the veterinary pharmacy profession. The apparatus is a generative performative material-discursive practice where nature and culture, humans and nonhumans intra-act. An agential realist stance supports transformation from traditional anthropocentric (human-centered) pharmacy learning to post-anthropocentric (decentered human) pharmacy learning.

As a preceptor to pharmacy students engaged in Advanced Pharmacy Practice Experience (APPE) rotations in a veterinary setting, I noticed the majority of their pharmacy learning is anthropocentric, yet some students work in settings where they fill veterinary (nonhuman) prescriptions. The adult learning model of experiential learning (Merriam & Bierema, 2013) is ubiquitous in pharmacy schools (ACPE, 2015). The majority of APPE rotations involve human patients. The role of veterinary pharmacy experiential learning is transformative in many ways including (a) by pushing past anthropocentric learning, and (b) by recognizing animals as patients.

Pharmacy students typically engage critical self-reflection (Mezirow, 1994) while in pharmacy school and during their APPE rotations. I collected pharmacy students’ critical reflective documents and participated in synchronous online individual interviews (Roulston, 2022; Salmons, 2022) with pharmacy students to generate data. Using a diffractive methodology (Barad, 2007; Mazzei, 2014; Nicolaidis & Scully-Russ, 2018), I examined interview data and reflections via diffractive analysis to garner insights and further inquiries. A diffractive analysis entailed reading through data using multiple theoretical concepts to garner new insights and inquiries.

### **Speculative Remarks**

For our purposes, in this particular paper, I read students’ critical reflective documents and interview transcripts through Mezirow’s (1996; 2006) transformative learning theory and Barad’s (2007) agential realism. I engaged a diffractive analysis by exploring entangled intra-actions using Barad’s (2007) ethico-onto-epistemological framework and examined how entanglements of humans and nonhumans come to matter when we approached transformative adult learning through a post-anthropocentric new materialist philosophy. Transformative learning entangled with agential realism produced ethico-onto-epistemological insights and further inquiries for exploration.

### **Ethico-onto-epistemological Insights**

Although traditional ethics determined ‘self’ as a separate subject from ‘other’, Barad’s agential realism entangled intra-action of self and other. The ethical stance of a post-anthropocentric transformative learning approach examines responsibility and accountability in-relation, the entangled mattering (becoming) of self and other, whether human or nonhuman (p. 393). The relationship is not between student and animal, the relationship is an entangled intra-action of student and animal. An ethical production of transformative learning when reading through critical reflections and interview transcripts illuminated recognition of animals (nonhumans) as patients.

Traditionally, ontology is considered a state of being. However, using an agential realist approach, ontology is a reiterative, recursive state of being and becoming. Being and becoming can happen simultaneously, and being (re)configures within a state of becoming. Students and animals within an entangled intra-action expressed an ontological state of being↔becoming. For example, frames of reference (re)configured; meaning, habits of mind (state of being) were produced by entangled intra-actions of humans and nonhumans. Students expressed greater confidence and competence in their ability to treat nonhuman patients (becoming and being veterinary pharmacist).

From a traditional stance, transformative learning is a way of knowing. Importantly, in my research, humans’ and nonhumans’ ways of knowing are co-produced from entangled intra-actions. Students did not proceed relations of animals but only came into being and knowing within relationships. Intra-active entanglements (re)configured ways of knowing of students. Students had little if any veterinary pharmacy learning (knowledge) prior to experiential learning rotations in veterinary settings. Illumination of (re)configuration (transformation) became apparent within documents and interview transcripts.

### **Further Inquiries**

Inquiries produced by this research for further exploration enfolded transformative learning theory and an ethico-onto-epistemological stance. Are we epistemologically separate or do we know (learn) in-relation? How does situation of humans and nonhumans within ontological relations inform our knowing (learning)? How can we recognize humans and nonhumans ethically entangled sharing responsibility for our being, becoming, learning, and knowing? What is produced by approaching transformative learning from an ethico-onto-epistemological framework?

In sum, critical reflections of pharmacy students about experiential learning illuminated transformation by entangled intra-actions of students (human) and nonhumans (e.g., animals, medications, instruments, instructional materials). From an agential realist stance there is no true ‘other’, we are all connected and in-relation within the becoming of the world. Transformative learning is a continual process of being and becoming where relationships matter (human and nonhuman).

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# **Bildung and Transformative Learning: Some “Traces” in the Self-Development of Two Female Figures in the Late 18<sup>th</sup> Century, Sophie and Gertrud<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** Since the second half of the 18th century, the category of *Bildung* has acquired a greater semantic complexity, referring a process of an in-depth transformation, that involves each person during their entire life. Starting from this awareness, the contribution will focus on two female figures, Sophie and Gertrud, protagonists of two well-known pedagogical novels (Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Émile, ou De l’éducation*, 1762 and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi’s *Lienhard und Gertrud: Ein Buch für das Volk*, 1781-1787), to highlight their personal process of transformation as self-development. By focusing on some aspects – such as the role of critical reflection on experience and the importance of a knowledge derived from everyday life – this paper aims to illustrate the close relationship between the categories of *Bildung* and Transformative Learning. Indeed, by analysing some of the episodes described in these novels, it is possible to bring out some traces of the transformative dimension that characterises their *Bildung*, conceived as a fundamental dimension that enables Transformative Learning.

**Key Words:** Self-development, *Bildung*, Female Figures, Transformation, Experience

## **Introduction**

Between the 1700s and the 1800s, many scholars – such as Johann Gottfried Herder, Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe – reflected on the category of *Bildung*, «the most important idea of the 19<sup>th</sup> century», according to the definition offered in 1960 by the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (Gadamer, 1960, p. 43).

Indeed, the concept of *Bildung*, whose roots lie especially in the Medieval Mysticism and Humanism, is conceived as a fundamental category, that emphasises the necessary striving of each person towards self-transformation (Gennari, 2014; Sola, 2016), assuming peculiar pedagogical characteristics, which distinguish it as a concrete issue that involves the each person’s existence (Sola, 2016). The reflection on the best ways to educate the human being is a recurring issue that, despite the diversity of historical periods, endures throughout the centuries, as demonstrated by the ancient ideas of *paideia* and *humanitas*, the Christian-Medieval concept of *perfectio*, the Humanistic-Renaissance notion of *dignitas hominis* and the Neo-humanistic category of *Bildung* (Gennari, 2014; Sola, 2016).

Since the age of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Bildung* has indicated an idea of in-depth and harmonic development of the human being, involved, during his existence, in a process of ongoing transformation (Sola, 2016). Through this process, people construct themselves,

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<sup>1</sup> The structure and content of the essay are shared between the two authors. In particular, paragraphs 1 and 2 are written by Andrea Potestio and paragraphs 3, 4 and 5 by Alice Locatelli.

recognising that, without this original aspiration to give themselves a “shape”, they would be *der Mensch ohne Form* (Schiller [1795], 2007).

Furthermore, the essence of *Bildung* is the result of an endless and always perfectible process (Bertagna, 2018) which is realised, starting from experience, in an ongoing alternation between practice and theory (Potestio, 2020).

Considering these aspects, it is interesting to focus on two pedagogical novels that, published less than twenty years apart, belonged to the same historical-cultural context: Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Émile, ou De l’éducation* (1762) and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi’s *Lienhard und Gertrud: Ein Buch für das Volk* (1781-1787). Indeed, these two pedagogical novels offer some useful elements to outline the profile of two female figures, Sophie and Gertrud, and the process of “transformation” that distinguish their self-development. By analysing some of the episodes described in these novels, it is possible to bring out some traces of the transformative dimension that characterises their *Bildung*, understood as a fundamental dimension that enables Transformative Learning.

### **The Cultural Background of Rousseau and Pestalozzi’s Pedagogical Reflection**

Rousseau and Pestalozzi are widely recognised as two important and paradigmatic authors in the History of education, who led the development of the modern pedagogical reflection in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. This aspect is confirmed by the Italian scholar Franco Cambi, who states that «it is a current and correct judgement from a historiographical perspective that Rousseau is the “father of modern pedagogy”. Theoretical father and historical father» (Cambi, 2011, p. 162).

In addition, Redi di Pol highlights that: «Pestalozzi became famous in Europe as a follower and, above all, as the one who put into practice the ideas developed by Rousseau. He was also recognised as the promoter of an educational method that could contribute to the moral and political regeneration of peoples and nations» (Redi Di Pol, 2012, p. 98).

They lived in the cultural atmosphere of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and appreciated the Greek and Roman world, reading the classical authors, such as Plato, Plutarch, and the Stoics. Pestalozzi closely studied Rousseau’s pedagogical thought and was influenced by the principles of natural education described in the pedagogical novel *Émile, ou De l’éducation* (1762).

At the same time, there are some significant differences between the two Swiss authors that should not be overlooked. Rousseau belonged to the French-speaking culture, wrote his texts in French, and engaged in a critical and original dialogue with the leading authors of the Enlightenment. Pestalozzi was educated in a German-speaking cultural environment, wrote his works in German, and implemented his most important educational experiences in institutions in the reformed German-speaking part of Switzerland. Moreover, Rousseau’s *Émile* is an ideal and utopian pedagogical novel aimed at showing how, through a harmonious education, each person can reveal his or her own good essence.

Pestalozzi, on the other hand, focused more on implementing concrete strategies to foster social transformation. Examples of his involvement include his work at the school-farm of Neu Hof (1774-1779), described as «one of the first experiences of popular education in the contemporary age realized in a community educational context» (Scaglia, 2020b, p. 57), where he provided education for poor children and boys. In addition, Pestalozzi’s efforts at the orphanage in Stans (1799), the popular school in Burgdorf (1799), and the institute in Yverdon (1805-1825) are further examples of his commitment to practical educational initiatives.

This attention to the concrete dimension of education leads him, especially in the latter part of his life, to criticise the excessive emphasis that Rousseau places on human freedom (Pestalozzi, 1774, p. 68).

However, both Rousseau and Pestalozzi recognise that the essence of every human being is *physis*, a deep and integral dimension that cannot be reduced to psycho-biological or social explanations. Education, therefore, enables each person to transform and improve himself/herself through the relationship with himself/herself and others (*Bildung*), bringing his/her hidden essence to perfection.

According to these considerations, it is interesting to highlight the specific features of Sophie and Gertrud's profile: indeed, these two female figures reveal some interesting transformative aspects that, on the one hand, underline some cultural elements of the Modern Age and, on the other hand, highlight dimensions that were already recognisable in earlier periods and that came to maturity precisely between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

According to Carla Xodo, the 18<sup>th</sup> century could be considered as «the century of the woman» (Xodo, 2014, p. 13), as women were protagonists in visual arts and in literature. Mythological figures such as Abelard's Heloise, Rousseau's Julia, and Goethe's Marianne, as well as the women portrayed in Carlo Goldoni's plays, exemplified this trend (Xodo, 2014, p. 14), depicting female characters with more complex and multifaceted psychological features, as well as greater freedom, self-determination, and self-awareness. While women's existence was still largely defined by the roles they had to assume as «daughters, brides, mothers and sisters» (Pancera, 2014, p. 190), the transition between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries witnessed the juxtaposition of old and new elements (Covato [1999], 2022, pp. 215-216). In that context, on the one hand, pedagogical reflection emphasised the importance to educate girls to become good wife and mothers (Covato, 2014, p. 18): indeed, since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, doctors, educators, and philosophers had increasingly stressed the centrality of the maternal role with more emphasis than in the past (Covato, 2018, p. 67). On the other hand, a rethinking of women's roles in the family and in society was encouraged by the Enlightenment and later by Romanticism. During this historical period, several authors presented a new image of the female figure, no longer exclusively tied to traditional roles, but also portrayed as the protagonist of her own personal fulfilment and social regeneration (Covato, 2014, pp. 67-68). This ambivalence makes it possible to highlight the presence of a transformative tension in Sophie and Gertrud, which takes on new and interesting characteristics, particularly significant from a pedagogical point of view.

### **Sophie**

As is well known, Rousseau introduced the figure of Sophie in the fifth book of *Émile, ou De l'éducation* (1762), when he described Émile's «last part of youth» (V, 633).

Rousseau dealt with the original characteristics of the female educational path, starting from the observation of the natural diversity between men and women, that makes them complementary. From her childhood, Sophie was educated to fulfil the traditional roles of wife and mother, in accordance with society's expectations for women. Indeed, she had been taught women's work, including cooking, the preparation of her own clothes, and domestic economy. Rousseau underlined the fact she could not cultivate her skills systematically, but, instead, spent her time training her graceful voice in singing (V, pp. 607-608). Two aspects are particularly interesting: firstly, the centrality of experience in her educational path and, secondly, the relevance of those «informal learning» in the developing of her personal identity (Bertagna, 2010; 2018; Potestio, 2013).

Indeed, Rousseau emphasised that Sophie, who had «a pleasant mind, though not brilliant, a solid mind, though not profound», acquired knowledge not through reading, but through the observations she was able to make during her encounters with the few people she met (V, p. 610), firstly their parents. The mother, especially, represented a central figure who provided her daughter with an education based on the balanced use of words and the respect for norms and customs (Pancera, 2014, p. 195), aimed at preparing her for marriage. Sophie was indeed no longer a child (V, pp. 615-616) and was portrayed in the period of transition between childhood and the assumption of her identity as an adult woman through marriage.

The author stressed her personal involvement in the choice of her future husband: she «looked for a man and found none, looked for a soul and found none» (V, p. 622). Although the young woman embodied the ideal female model, expected to be a faithful wife and virtuous mother, in line with the idea that the happiness of an honest girl consists in making an honest man happy, Rousseau allowed the girl some freedom, reflecting the spirit of the times. Indeed, in that context, although marriage was still considered to be a contract, it had to be «freely chosen by man and woman» (Pulcini, 1990; Covato [1999] 2022, p. 222).

After being a young girl educated according to nature, Sophie was protagonist of a transformation in the final pages of the novel, becoming Émile's wife and mother. Although she had followed the traditional female path, marriage was the event that gave Sophie a more complete identity. As a wife and mother, she and her husband realised a series of social «good works» that benefited the community of belonging (V, p. 728).

However, starting from the idea that *Bildung* is an ongoing and ever-improving process that involves every human being throughout his or her existence, inspired by the ability to transform oneself and one's surroundings, Sophie did not appear as a static character and carried on her process of transformation. Indeed, in the unfinished novel *Émile et Sophie ou les Solitaires* (1780), Sophie experienced a negative transformation, becoming a “vulnerable” wife who was guilty of the worst crime for women: infidelity (Bortolotto, 2014, p. 248).

### Gertrud

The pedagogical novel *Lienhard und Gertrud: Ein Buch für das Volk* (1781-1787), written by Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, is divided into four volumes in which the author, after the failed experience of Neuhof, defined the fundamental aspects of his pedagogical proposals (Becchi, 1970, p. 75; Scaglia, 2020b, p. 57). In his work, the author presented Gertrud, a woman whose profile was different from that of Sophie: she was no longer a young girl, but an adult woman, the wife of the bricklayer Lienhard and mother of seven children. Therefore, she had already experienced the marriage, the fundamental event in women's lives of that period. By comparing Gertrud with her husband, Pestalozzi immediately emphasised her exceptionality: while Lienhard earned a good living, but he was used to drinking and gambling, Gertrud was described as the best woman in the village. However, due to her husband's vices, she and her children were in danger of falling into extreme poorness, as Lienhard didn't overcome his alcohol addiction.

In the following pages, the author again emphasised Gertrud's virtues, describing her as «a good, quiet, hard-working woman». For these reasons, she was an authentic *exemplum*, for her husband and children, a role that Lienhard himself acknowledged. By acting «in silence», Gertrud was portrayed as a «great mother», able to take an effective leadership role within the family, thanks to her deep devotion to her husband and children. This portrayal was in line with the context of Lutheran popular life, in which exemplary education in the family was



fundamental, conceived as a «spiritual microcosm of the Lutheran church and state» (Scaglia, 2020a, p. 177).

While Gertrud was described as the ideal wife and bride, she was «endowed with a “saving mission” in her own family and in the wider community of the village in which she lives» (Scaglia, 2020b, p. 57). Indeed, the protagonist, «untouched by evil» (Becchi, 1970, p. 76), promoted a real “transformation” in the small village of Bonnal, seeking the help of the young nobleman Arner, thanks to whom Lienhard and the other villagers found employment.

Moreover, in promoting this change extending to the community, Gertrud increasingly assumed the role of a *magistra*, not only within her family, but also in the village itself: indeed, the school itself was inspired «by the family education in which Gertrud is at the centre» (Becchi, 1970, p. 79). Therefore, Gertrud’s “transformation” went beyond her family and had significant educational and social implications, by contributing not only to the education of her own children, but also to that of other members of the village, thanks to the ideas drawn from her daily experience. Indeed, the transformation depicted in this pedagogical novel was made possible by Gertrud’s knowledge gained from her experiences, both within her family and in the community. By consciously reflecting on these experiences, the protagonist had developed her own criteria for domestic and civic wisdom, which she applied in different life situations.

Critical reflection, then, did not only concern the experiences she lived in the first person, but also enlivened the relationship with her children: thanks to a “thoughtful love”, a love regulated *with* and *by* reflection on the nature of one’s educational duties (Scaglia 2020b, p. 63), she was a mother who «loves and is interested in developing children’s emotional skills along with their critical ones» (Nussbaum 2011, pp. 75-76). Indeed, promoting a full education that involves “mind, hand, heart” of her children, she regularly invited them to reflect on important and edifying events of the week. Through the dialogue, all aspects of daily life revealed their pedagogical value and remained «deeply engraved in the heart», offering the children keys to interpreting their surroundings and elements that contributed to the development of their personal conscience.

### **Conclusion: Some Brief Reflections**

Sophie and Gertrud are two interesting figures from a pedagogical perspective. Their *Bildung*, contextualised within the most important innovations introduced in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, reveals some elements of transformation resulting from the possibility of making free choices. Indeed, by examining some key episodes in their self-development, it is possible to identify the key aspects of their transformation. Especially, Sophie became wife and mother, thanks to the marriage which symbolised her full integration into society. In addition, her commitment to good works strengthened her role as a benefactor of the community.

The personal and social dimensions are linked also in Gertrud. She experienced a transformation that had a positive impact on the whole village, where she also became a *magistra*, thanks to the valorisation of the knowledge she had gained from her experience as a wife and mother. Furthermore, Gertrud, as a “loving mother”, promoted her own development through the transformation of lived experience, inviting her children to do the same through dialogue and reflection. She was able to continually give shape, in an ongoing process (Bertagna, 2018, p. 126), to her role as wife and mother. Although Sophie showed a more extensive process of transformation (as illustrated by the episodes described by Rousseau in *Émile et Sophie ou les Solitaires*), Gertrud’s identity couldn’t be defined once and for all, but, rather, as the result of a

reflexivity about her own and others' processes of education, as well as her relationships with her husband and children.

Finally, in pointing out the elements that had made Sophie and Gertrud two “transformative figures”, it is also possible to identify some traces of certain elements that characterise the concept of Transformative Learning in the contemporary age (Mezirow, 1978). Firstly, it shares the same horizon of *Bildung*, conceived as the possibility for every man and woman to know themselves as free beings. In addition, the importance of critical reflection on experience (Di Nubila-Fedeli, 2010; Fabbri, 2016), as well as the ability to examine one's own experiences (Fabbri-Romano, 2017) and the centrality of learning from everyday life contexts (Marsick-Watkins, 1999; Marsick, 2009; Fabbri-Romano, 2017), appear significant. Sophie and Gertrud thus emerge as two characters who, while following the traditional female path, were involved in a process of self-development aimed at realising their potential and achieving a deeper awareness – of themselves, their role and the world around them – that fulfilled them and contributed to the improvement of the communities in which they lived.

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# Information Resources as Tools of Transformation: An Interview Study

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**Abstract:** Aligning select phases of Mezirow’s Critical Premise Reflection with an understanding of Information Encountering as described in Human Information Behavior research, implies a model for Transformative Information Encountering (TIE). Building on my 2022 paper, *Promoting Transformative Encounters in Libraries and Archives*, this paper presents findings from fourteen interviews conducted to explore individual experiences with TIE. With directed analysis of transcripts, themes emerged including the potential for a college campus to serve as a community of co-questioners, a lack of TIE directly connected to traditional information institutions (i.e. libraries, archives, and museums), the potential impact of certain types of information resources over others, and the importance of transformative information sharing in the context of close trusting relationships.

**Key Words:** Information Encountering, Serendipity, Education, Transformative Theory

## Introduction

Points of synergy exist between Transformative Education theory and studies of Human Information Behavior (HIB). Specifically, there are aspects of Mezirow’s stages of Critical Premise Reflection that align with elements of Information Encountering (IE) experiences. Studying this alignment may provide insight for both educators and information professionals (i.e. librarians) interested in practices that elicit transformation for those with whom they engage.

In my 2022 paper, *Promoting Transformative Encounters in Libraries and Archives* (Lowe, 2022), I introduce the concept of Transformative Information Encountering (TIE), as a bridge between Transformative Education – specifically the phases of Critical Premise Reflection – and IE. Erdelez defines IE as “. . . finding interesting, useful or potentially useful information when looking for different . . . information, not looking for any information in particular or not looking for information at all . . .” (Erdelez & Makri, 2020, p. 736). IE researchers investigate diverse types of encounters with a wide range of information resources, considering the full range of impacts unexpected information can have. IE studies have revealed that encounters can range from mundane to life-changing (McCay-Peet & Toms, 2015). At times, encounters with information serve to reinforce existing ideas, while at other times they can take an encounterer in a new direction (Foster & Ford, 2003). The existence of life-changing information encounters that can take a person in a new direction implies that information resources — and therefore information professionals — have a role to play in the phases of Critical Premise Reflection (Lowe, 2022, p. 432).

The definition of TIE is grounded in a unification of IE models with Mezirow’s definition of Critical Premise Reflection:

[T]he emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these new understandings. (Mezirow, 1981, pp. 6–7)

Three phases of Critical Premise Reflection as defined by Mezirow align with elements of IE processes: Phase One-The Disorienting Dilemma; Phase Four-Recognition of Shared Questions; and Phase Seven-Acquiring Knowledge and Skills. Each of these phases presents key opportunities for providing transformative information (Lowe, 2022, pp. 434–435).

Whereas Mezirow highlights the experiences of disorienting dilemma, shared questions, and acquiring knowledge and skills, IE researchers discuss “triggers” (Erdelez, 2004, p. 1022), the “social aspect of serendipity” (McCay-Peet & Toms, 2015, p. 1468), and information-seeking behaviors. In other words, some *triggers* may cause a disorienting dilemma that prompts Critical Premise Reflection. The transformational impact of discovering shared questions is evident in discoveries from IE studies as to the social factors present in such experiences. Within the process of acquiring knowledge and skills, a person will engage in information-seeking behaviors which Information Science researchers study in detail. In order to align these related concepts, I define Transformative Information Encountering as “Encountering information that leads to a change of strongly held beliefs, values, or world views, whether in the moment or after a process of reflection and learning” (Lowe, 2022, p. 432). It encompasses transformations directly connected to information resources that occur both within and beyond classrooms.

I have posited that intentional shifts in practices with information resources may promote experiences with TIE. These include centering information resources that present the perspectives of marginalized communities, designing inclusive spaces, promoting dialogue, and utilizing an understanding of critical pedagogy to reframe the roles in information-seeking interactions.

From Fall 2021 to Spring 2022 I conducted fourteen interviews with individuals from a diversity of identities, exploring their experiences with TIE to discover to what extent the proposed practices could have the effect of promoting transformative encounters with information. This study is grounded in two questions: What are the qualities of information encounters that lead to a change in worldview or beliefs? and To what extent is that transformation attributable to the information itself versus the context in which it was encountered?

### **Existing Literature**

Information resources can catalyze disorienting dilemmas, especially by providing the “encounters with difference” Wergin identifies as core to creating the circumstances that allow a person to question their assumptions about the world (Wergin, 2020, p. 31). In discussing Mezirow, Wergin defines a disorienting dilemma as “. . . something that catches you off guard, off balance, something you can’t quite make sense of, something you can’t easily make meaning of. And it is too disturbing to ignore” (pp. 28–29). I posit that centering information resources that present the perspectives and experiences of marginalized communities will increase the likelihood of those who use these resources having encounters with difference (Lowe, 2022, pp. 435–436). Additionally, intentionally designing inclusive and accessible spaces will increase the

diversity of the people in those spaces, expanding the opportunities for human-to-human encounters with difference (p. 436).

To the extent that fellow human beings can serve as information resources (Erdelez & Makri, 2020, p. 736), intentionally designing events, classrooms, and other gathering spaces to allow for dialogue makes it possible for people to discover those with whom they share questions (Lowe, 2022, p. 437). Both educational and cultural environments continue to engage the “sage on the stage” format, where one or several experts deliver their expert analysis of an idea or issue. When these environments are disrupted so that everyone present has a voice and shares ideas, people may discover the potential for community in their process of transformation. This sense of community is a necessary condition for moving forward from the uncertainty of discovering that you have questions that threaten to separate you from your established community (Sloman & Fernbach, 2017, p. 12), and allows a person to continue a process of transformation.

“Acquiring knowledge and skills” (Mezirow, 1994, p. 224) is a more traditional use of information resources, and both educators and information professionals share the core goal of promoting people’s ability to do so. For these information-seeking interactions to be “transformative” it is necessary to reframe the roles of *knowledge seeker* and *resource provider* with an awareness of the power dynamics at play. In their article “In Pursuit of Antiracist Social Justice: Denaturalizing Whiteness in the Academic Library,” Brook et al describe “. . . a reciprocal, dialogic process,” in which “librarians and patrons would share and be affected by each other’s knowledge, care, and actions” (Brook et al., 2015, p. 275). Referencing Freire, they promote “. . . problem-posing methods of critical pedagogy in reference interactions to draw out patrons’ struggles against oppression and to help build strong and lasting solidarities . . .” (p. 276). *Resource providers* heighten the potential for TIE when they can engage with knowledge seekers as co-conspirators more than as gatekeepers.

### **Methodology**

To increase the likelihood that the results of a study with a small pool of interviewees has the potential for broad insights, I committed to developing a participant pool in which no ethnic identity, gender identity, or age group made up more than 50% of those interviewed. By actively tracking the results of my recruitment, I was able to identify the need for more focused recruitment of participants from particular demographics. From a pool of thirty-two respondents, I invited twenty-two to interview, which resulted in fourteen interviews.

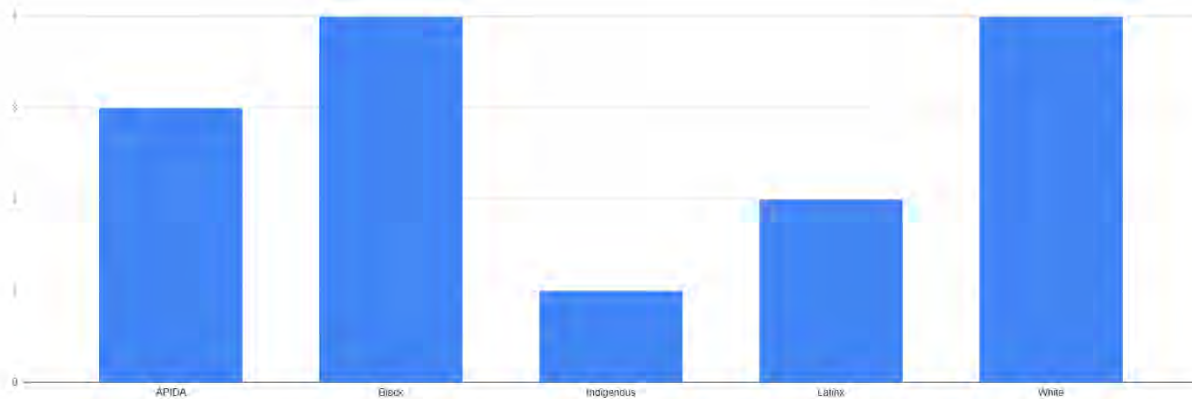
Drawing on “critical incident technique” (Luo & Wildemuth, 2017, p. 251), my semi-structured interviews consisted of ten general questions asking participants about moments throughout their lives when they had changed their beliefs or values, each with a subset of potential follow-up questions I could ask to elicit more details. Rather than directly ask interview subjects whether they had transformative encounters with information, I asked them to describe moments in their lives when they had changed their minds about something they saw as important. I followed this with questions about whether information resources had played a role in those transformative moments, additionally exploring what other factors had contributed to these transformations. The interview questions began with more recent transformative experiences, moving back in time to the values that adults in their lives had communicated in childhood, and whether those had transformed as they moved into adulthood. Most participants discussed three to four major transformations of worldview.

In analyzing the interview transcripts, I relied on an approach to grounded theory described as “directed analysis of content, in which initial coding starts with a theory or relevant research findings” (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2017, p. 319). My coding was guided by Mezirow’s Phases of Critical Premise Reflection, and the body of HIB research on IE. I worked with a research assistant to interrogate initial coding attempts in order to refine the definitions and applications of each code. I used the coded transcripts to write an analytical summary highlighting the participant’s comments in relation to the research questions stated above. Each participant received a copy of the analysis of their interview, with a request to reply as to whether it was a faithful representation of the ideas they had intended to share.

### Results

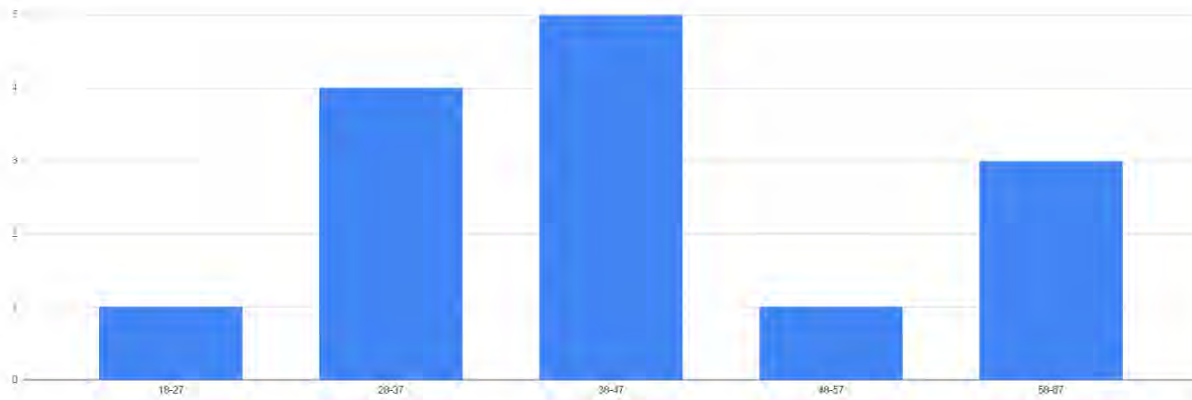
I was successful in recruiting a diverse pool of participants in which none of the prioritized identities made up more than 50% of the pool. Of the fourteen individuals interviewed, three described ethnic identities classified as APIDA (Asian, Pacific Islander, Desi American), four described ethnic identities classified as Black, one identified as Indigenous, two described ethnic identities classified as Latinx, and four described ethnic identities that can be classified as White (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**  
*Participant Ethnic Identities*

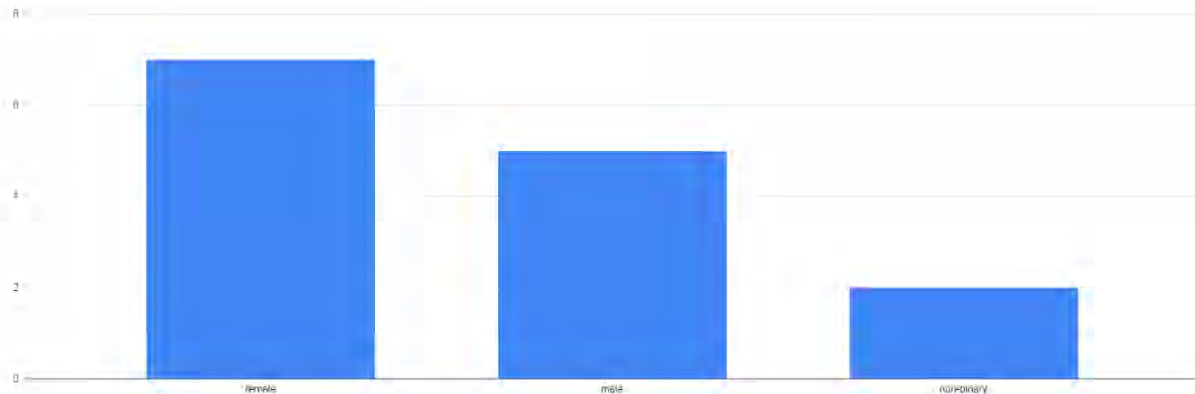


The ages (Figure 2) and gender identities (Figure 3) of participants were similarly diverse.

**Figure 2**  
*Participant Age Groups*



**Figure 3**  
Participant Gender Identities



All interview participants described having transformative experiences as the result of person-to-person interactions. These experiences were usually grounded in one of three contexts: a close relationship, an affinity, or an academic/educational setting. Some participants strongly emphasized the important role dialogue had played in the development of their worldview. “Emiliano” called conversations, “the single most thing that has been influential.” “Frances” said, that “humans and life experiences,” had been key information resources. “Nothing opens your eyes better than sitting in a sidewalk café and talking to somebody . . . and they give you a whole different perspective on American politics and American society,” she said. “imilla” shared that “dialogue has just helped information actually be informative, rather than just be this thing that exists in isolation or a vacuum.”

When participants cited material resources that played a role in transforming their worldviews, they tended to fall into two categories: *personal* or *intellectual*. Participants relied on a variety of material resources including YouTube videos, books, musicals, and government websites. Many noted that resources with a sense of personal connection to the topic had high impact, including personal narratives and biographies. They highlighted the poignancy of these *personal* materials in specific transformative experiences, while materials consisting of *intellectual* analysis were more often mentioned as being generally informative in a learning process.

In describing information-seeking practices only two of the participants described encountering *transformative* information in the setting of a library, archive, or museum. One of these outliers was an archivist who discovered the transformative information in the process of her work. Another was an archivist who was impacted by what she *did not* find while conducting research in a library. Encounters in academic settings were far more prevalent, whether that was due to a professor, a specific course material, or the course more generally. “imilla” emphasized that the combination of “reading different texts and thinkers” and “having that mentorship relationship” with some of her professors, is what most “concretely expanded” her “consciousness.”

No participants described using libraries, archives, and other cultural institutions to actively pursue lines of inquiry related to TIEs. They were more likely to seek out a close personal connection, someone they saw as sharing affinity, or general internet sources to further their learning on a given concept. Several participants were self-described avid readers, but were more likely to seek out reading material in a bookstore than in a library. Notably, even



participants who identified as librarians and archivists rarely described information-seeking activities leveraging these institutions as resources.

Participants' descriptions of their transformative experiences with information provide evidence that promoting access to diverse perspectives will increase the likelihood of TIE. "Olympia" described finding value in having access to interdisciplinary information resources, highlighting her MFA program that encouraged her to take classes outside of the department. She described this as "broadening" her mind. "Dragon" shared that living in different parts of the United States and serving in the military with people from different parts of the country, informed his understanding of the intersections between racism, geography, and economic mobility. "Lena" identified her experiences working at a community center as something that "cemented" her beliefs and values, in part because she worked closely with "a lot of different people than I had ever met in school" with a diversity of experiences. She learned from "all the stuff they faced" and from seeing "how much of an impact" the program had. These experiences in turn informed "Lena's" choice of graduate programs.

Participants' descriptions of their transformative experiences with information provide strong evidence that designing spaces that promote community and connections will in turn promote TIE. "Emiliano" described his experience of learning from a labor union after becoming a member. He saw that the questions he had about working conditions and general labor encounters were shared, and that questioning these things was part of a long labor history. He expressed a feeling of "relief that you're not losing your mind. That it's not just you. There are other people that have been in this tradition." "Maverick" described a community he discovered while participating in a student labor strike as a graduate student. After having been raised by parents who explicitly taught him that "socialism is bad," he found himself in conversations with people he described as union activists, community organizers, and "proper communists" who impacted his views on collective action and catalyzed his curiosity about socialism. The theme of community-supported information-seeking is also evident in "M. Leonora's" description of being an Indigenous person seeking resources that draw on Indigenous perspectives, and Danielle's statement that she was committed to reading "anything somebody Black wrote," as someone who identifies as Black. In each of these descriptions, some sense of communal questioning is present in either human or material information resources.

Any evidence as to the potential impact of reframing reference interactions in libraries and archives must be extrapolated from participants' descriptions of other interactions that promoted their personal transformation processes, as none of the participants described a reference interaction as part of their transformative experiences. For example, several participants described the qualities of interactions with resources that tended to increase or decrease the likelihood that they would be receptive to new information. "M. Leonora" described a preference for what she called a "constructive" approach, allowing her to add to and grow from her existing understanding, and providing concrete next steps. In describing why she believed a teacher's lesson about evolution in contrast to her creationist upbringing she said, "I felt like his worldview added something, whereas my family had a reductive worldview that eliminated a lot of things that were interesting." When "Danielle" described the church she preferred to attend over the one she was raised in, she said that she felt like they were "just happy to see me" and were not concerned with what she was wearing. She also appreciated that they were not "fire and brimstone-ish." "imilla" identified her father's communication approach as one that did not prime her to be open to what he was saying, describing it as "aggressive and hostile, kind of like 'I know better than you.'"

## Discussion & Conclusion

Throughout these interviews the impact of information encountered in the context of higher education was a repeated theme. Many of these encounters occurred in classrooms, though some occurred elsewhere in an academic context, such as on campus between classes. Participants stories imply that the transition onto a university campus can itself become an “encounter with difference” that leads to a disorienting dilemma (Wergin, 2020, p. 31). It also appears that a campus at large, or even fellow students in a classroom, can serve as a community of co-questioners that make it possible to continue a transformative process. The information provided in courses, whether text- or lecture-based, address the phase of “acquiring knowledge and skills” (Mezirow, 1994, p. 224). With these ingredients, higher education is an ideal location to promote TIE.

As someone conducting this research from the perspective of Information Science, I was disappointed to see that in the majority of the stories the participants told, there was no role identified for libraries, archives, or museums (LAMs). One reason for this may be that the majority of LAMs are not engaged in practices that promote TIE. That is a topic for a different study. Another possible explanation is that people sometimes access information through or because of LAMs without consciously realizing that LAMs are involved. Nevertheless, the prevalence of TIE stories grounded in classrooms, and the lack of such grounded in LAMs, implies an opportunity for LAMs and educators to pursue a new dimension of their long-standing parallel existence. As the people responsible for selecting the databases, ordering the course texts, and building the media collections teaching faculty rely on, information professionals, especially academic librarians, can seek and center resources that provide encounters with difference and promote a sense of community. We can advocate for the use of these resources. When we show up as guest speakers to give introductions to library resources, we can be mindful of whether we are showing up as the sagely gatekeepers, or co-conspirators in a liberatory process.

This study demonstrates that information resources have an important role to play in transformative education. When defined narrowly as books, articles, and other physical media, information resources may be more likely to have transformative impacts the more closely related they are to personal narrative. When defined more broadly, which is widely accepted in Human Information Behavior research (Erdelez & Makri, 2020, p. 736), the impact of personal narrative and personal-narrative-adjacent resources extends to include direct testimony, interviews, and casual conversations as potentially transformative information resources.

This study affirms the importance of understanding information resources beyond published materials. Information encountered in the context of close, trusting relationships or shared affinities appears more likely to have transformative effects than what is encountered in a textbook. Even when the information encountered is in the form of a material resource, this study implies a greater possibility for transformative impacts when that resource features a sense of personal connection to the subject matter, such as personal narrative or biography. The undeniable throughline is the human-to-human connection necessary in any transformative experience.

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## Cultural Heritage and Educational Communities. Transformative Learning and Professional Skills for a New Urban Welfare

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**Abstract:** Reflections and practices that focus on cultural heritage have been enriched in recent years with new horizons that reinterpret both concepts and categories and methods of fruition and educational purposes. A challenge for pedagogy that we are facing in an Italian national research project and which we discuss during the round table. On this occasion, the methodology of participatory action research will be analyzed in relation to the transformative learning approach, highlighting opportunities, risks and limits that may be encountered. The project we are carrying out has important macro-objectives: analyzing the professional profiles of educators involved in the promotion and valorisation of cultural, artistic and museum heritage and innovate training environments, creating digital learning environments, transmedia solutions and narratives that allow us to talk about communities and urban complexities. In the round table we would like to pose some questions: how to move from a “sentimental” interest in artistic heritage to an awareness of artistic heritage not only conservation, but also education and innovation? How can we “disorientate” educators and allow them to be builders of effective learning communities? What are the thematic changes that we need to activate to make the project activity effective?

**Key Words:** Transformation, Social & cultural innovation, Heritage Educators, Methodology of Participative Action Research

### Introduction

In the context of the questions proposed by the congress, the study and research project presented here aims to problematise the learning process relating to the cultural heritage of the young generations and the learning paths of educational figures such as the museum educator.

In the roundtable we aim to reimagine the concept of *transformation* and *transformative learning* which requires expanding our vision beyond individual changes, considering how these processes can trigger collective and structural transformations at community and society levels. Mezirow’s transformative learning theory focuses on the need for critical reflection and dialogue to bring about meaningful changes in personal perspectives. We would like to consider integrating a more holistic approach that includes social awareness, emotional and environmental justice, and recognition of the intersections between various systems of power and privilege. Integrating a collective vision: transforming the concept of transformative learning to include not only self-transformation but also collective transformation and the creation of communities capable of shared and sustained action towards common goals.

In this context of participatory action research, the questions that we would like to pose as reflections in the round table are foundational of the theory of transformative learning: How to move from an interest in the artistic heritage of a “sentimental” type, to an awareness that artistic heritage is not just conservation, but also education and innovation? What are the patterns learned since childhood that organize the relationship with cultural heritage? How can we “disorientate” educators and allow them to be builders of effective learning communities? What are the subject changes that we must activate to make the project activity effective?

### **Scientific Research in the Field of Artistic and Cultural Heritage for the Promotion of a New Urban Welfare**

The scientific research project that will be at *the centre* of the round table aims at deepen and enhance that area of pedagogical research with an interdisciplinary character and a strong social impact concerning the promotion of pedagogical and educational skills and professionalism (Iori, 2018) aimed at reflecting the suggestions that the enjoyment of artistic and aesthetic experiences (Musaio, 2016; Musaio, 2015, Dallari, 2005) have on the educational, social, cultural and economic level. From this perspective, attention is paid to paths, processes, contents and experimentation of media modalities for the training of operators able to contribute to the valorisation of material and immaterial resources that make up the cultural heritage of a given community (Nuzzaci, 2011).

The interdisciplinary nature of the project makes it necessary to define common areas and aspects of research through different approaches. Through this part the co-proponents will be able to refer to a common core of concepts and indicators emerging from their integrated theoretical sensitivity. In this way it will be possible to define multidimensional and multidisciplinary strategies necessary for the research. In particular, the participatory-action-research model as a training device that encourages “methodical thinking” will be used and “investigation logic” as key competences for complexity management will be deepened. From the pedagogical point of view, this approach represents a model of empirical research aimed at tackling the issues related to educational practice as they arise within a specific training context. Therefore, it is not placed in a separate space from the educational activity but gives a form of conscious investigation to this activity. Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a socio-educational approach to research based on three different complementary methodologies: the survey, that is related to thought and to the sphere of rationality; the emotional involvement; related to feeling and its meanings; the sphere of action, through which ideas are turned into reality (Orefice, 2006). Thus, the participatory-action-research is aimed not only at the acquisition and the spreading of knowledge, but it is also useful to combine the outlook of the subjects involved in the research work and the perspective of the researchers of the team who, in this case, play a vital role in the work of collecting and directing different experiences. Within a reflective and transformative epistemological framework, the participatory-action-research implies a “democratic” approach to scientific research in so far it highlights the role of the addressees of the research work and their context of reference since they are source of forms of “located knowledge” and constructors of their own identity dimension.

The objectives of the pedagogical reflection in reference to the theoretical-foundational plan will concern some essential areas:

- strengthening and growth of the research field concerning the profile of the different professional figures in relation to the promotion and valorisation of the artistic-cultural heritage, of the museum educator, of the educational paths, of experience, of learning and training, in order to highlight junctions, methodologies, tools and

- possible areas of experimentation that contribute to define in a clearer and more perceptible way these professions also towards the citizens;
- the in-depth study of the pedagogical profile of the museum as an “educational place”, in consideration of what pedagogical science has highlighted with regard to the foundations of an education that not only relates to the temporal dynamics of subjects and the world, but also to the places where it manifests itself and expresses itself in different ways and according to a diversity of contexts (Frabboni, Pinto Minerva, 2002). The in-depth study of the “museum educational place” will also be projected in order to grasp its nature as a complex cultural institution, open to the changes and transformations required by social changes, even more so in the current scenario of health, social and economic emergency.

This research project, on the practical and project -phase level will deal with the following pivotal areas:

- 1) Elaboration of possible responses to the varied questions concerning the modalities, the contexts, the skills and the knowledge of museum educators,
- 2) Elaboration of educational experiences to valorise specific cultural/artistic sites and landscapes associated with the understanding of their didactic employment,
- 3) Development of training courses in the arts and creativity for education professionals. The “professional” creativity to which educational workers must be trained is an “ethical” modality: this modality, which implies the assumption of responsibility and capacity for judgement, can be exercised and become a “professional posture” through paths of reflexive practices.
- 4) Development of educational and cultural pathways aimed at the promotion of well-being, both on an individual and social level, with particular reference to the role of human development increasingly recognised to art in the workplace and in organisations (Berthoin Antal et al, 2019; Paolino and Berthoin Antal, 2020).
- 5) Development of educational and cultural paths with the purpose of care, since the attention to the constituent dimensions of the artistic-cultural heritage should also be articulated in relation to the rethinking of the relationship between people and the promotion of dynamics of care, well-being and regeneration. As highlighted by studies and research on the intertwining of Arts, Culture, Health and Wellbeing (Gillam, 2018), the combination of art and health is to be promoted in the cultural programming of both museums and local bodies involved in the performing arts, and in the dynamics of social connectivness by “third sector subjects” and associations:
  - a) for the promotion of art and culture as a protective factor of individual and community health,
  - b) to promote policies of reciprocity (mutuality) that draw on empathy, the sense of closeness and responsibility between subjects.

In this research process, the Participatory action research methodology seems interesting to us in relation to the questions posed by the congress regarding the methodology of transformative learning.

Participatory Research-Action and Transformative Learning are two complementary teaching methodologies that are based on direct experience, collaboration, and social transformation. Together, they create a dynamic and engaging learning environment that enables

students to develop the knowledge, skills, and values needed to address real-world challenges and contribute to positive change.

Participatory action research (PAR) and Mezirow's transformative learning theory share multiple connections, especially in the way they both emphasize the importance of experience, reflection and dialogue in the adult learning process.

- 1) Reflection and dialogue: Mezirow places significant emphasis on critical reflection and dialogue as mechanisms through which adults reframe and transform their pre-existing perspectives (Fleming, 2018). Similarly, Participatory action research encourages ongoing reflection and dialogue among participants to promote social and individual change.
- 2) Transformative change through direct experience: Participatory action research focuses on direct experience and active participation as catalysts for change and learning. This parallels Mezirow's "disorientation" phase, where an individual begins to question and reconsider his or her assumptions following challenging experiences (Percy, 2005).
- 3) Application in different contexts: Both theories find application in a variety of contexts, including educational, community and professional settings, thus facilitating transformative learning through inclusive and participatory practices (Gravett, 2004).

Mezirow's participatory action research and transformative learning intersect in their goal of promoting meaningful and lasting change through experience-based learning, critical reflection and constructive dialogue. Both methodologies argue that learning happens best when individuals are actively involved and critically reflect on their experiences, leading to deep transformation in thinking and practice.

In the round table we will focus on the questions of the congress starting from these considerations.

- To radically challenge our self- and collective-understanding of what it means to transform ourselves, our communities and society, we must get below the surface of the theory and practice of transformative learning. This means exploring the less visible and often unexamined foundations that support our current educational and social paradigms.
- Exploring cultural and historical roots: Investigate how historical and cultural power structures influence the premises of transformative learning and how these premises can be challenged or reinterpreted to foster greater inclusiveness and equity.
- Critique of epistemological foundations: Questioning the very foundations of knowledge on which transformative learning is based, examining who is authorized to know and who is marginalized in dominant educational discourses.
- Expanding the methods and voices included in research: Adopt a more inclusive approach to transformative learning research, valuing the voices of marginalized communities and using methods that reflect and respect a variety of experiences and perspectives.

Incorporating these elements into the discussion and practice of transformative learning not only broadens our understanding of what it means to "transform," but could also lead to a more effective and profound application of these concepts in educational and social contexts.

This collective and profound effort towards a more radical understanding of transformation can serve as a catalyst for significant and lasting changes in society.

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## **Contextualizing and Transforming Child Rights Education - A Decolonizing, Participatory Project in Canada and Uganda**

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**Abstract:** Transformative Education in child rights education can inspire personal and societal change for children and teachers in schools, as well as the larger communities. We present findings from an ongoing five-year decolonizing, participatory action research project which asks what processes support primary school educators in different contexts - a city in Western Canada, a village in rural Southwestern Uganda, and two towns with large South Sudanese populations in Northern and Central Uganda - achieve impactful contextually-relevant child rights education that empowers children to learn about and exercise their rights. Considering findings from 36 teachers in 15 schools in three Ugandan sites and eight teachers in four schools in Canada, we reflect on how to best deconstruct our assumptions about what children need, want, and experience to truly listen to and learn from them. Working towards a decolonizing research approach, we discuss how the study has given attention to and taken into account diversity of knowledges, cultures, and practices across the three sites, as well as relate divergent, factors across these heterogenous contexts that impede and support the full realization of child rights so that we are better able to support transformative change that cultivates children's empowerment and agency.

**Key Words:** Child Rights Education, Critical Pedagogy, Elementary School, Transformative Education, Contextualizing and Decolonizing Pedagogy

### **Introduction**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) outlines core universal child rights and the responsibilities of duty bearers, particularly states, to ensure their enactment. All countries, except the United States, are members of the UNCRC. Other regional documents, such as the African Charter for the Rights and Welfare of the Child (The Charter) offer more contextualized interpretations of the rights presented in the UNCRC, which some perceive as Western-centric. Both the UNCRC and The Charter include a child's right to learn about their rights (Covell et al, 2017; Wabwile, 2016). Yet, "...the vast majority of children remain in the dark about their rights and schools remain largely oblivious to the need for implementing the full range of children's education rights" (Covell, et al, 2017, p. 296). Little research exists on how children's rights education can be embedded in meaningful, culturally- and age-appropriate ways in classrooms, particularly in primary education in global contexts. Even fewer studies have explored the praxis of Transformative Education (TE) approaches to child rights education, although those that have indicate its immense potential for children's empowerment (Bivens et al. 2009).

This paper reports on a five-year decolonizing, participatory action research project that engages educators in Uganda and Canada in developing and implementing effective and

transformative child rights education that supports children's learning about and exercising their rights by considering local contextual demands. It draws on the unique insights of children, teachers and community members on how efficacious child rights education can impact children's empowerment and transformation when appropriately contextualized and reflected upon.

### **Theoretical Considerations**

Transformative Education (TE), as understood through the theoretical frameworks of Mezirow (1990, 2005) and Freire (2005), posits that "...emancipation...through learning is grounded in the freedom to think critically, [engage] in mutually respectful dialogue with others and act individually or collectively to change the world" (Fleming, 2022, p. 8). Mezirow (2005) argues that critical reflection and rational discourse are necessary for education to be transformative (Magendzo, 2005). Freire (2005) claims that the relationship between learners and educators is central to the process of meaningful, collaborative learning and personal growth that supports critical inquiry and that: "...teaching becomes a two-way process where the teacher-student and the student-teacher become jointly responsible for the process in which all grow (Cortese, 2005)" (del Magro et al, 2020, p. 5).

Although TE has primarily focused on adult learning, TE programming for children, grounded in children's rights, has demonstrated that, through critical thinking and reflection..., students make learning relevant; for themselves, for the issues which affect them and for their own contexts. TE animates autonomous social change through learning and is relevant even for young children...Rather than being objects of educational goals, students become subjects of education, transforming their learning into a vital resource to meet their needs and achieve their objectives, thus transforming the educational sector into a tremendous motor for social change. (Bivens et al, 2009, p. 106)

Thus, provided with opportunities and effective guidance, children are able to engage with and shape their educational journey in meaningful and agentic ways that can shape their understandings and experiences in the world, and as well positively impact society more broadly.

### **Methodology**

This project employs a decolonizing, participatory action methodology, where research is conducted *with*, as opposed to *on* participants to affect positive change. We draw upon participants' knowledge, experience, and expertise of their contexts to identify existing resources, strengths, conditions and prioritized local needs (Beeman-Cadwallar et al, 2012). To respond to the culture, situational factors, resources, education parameters and structures within diverse global contexts, we need to acknowledge, appreciate, and respect cultural knowledge, and recognize this knowledge often does not transfer to other settings so defer to those with expertise in those settings.

Magendzo (2005) saw the main purpose of rights education to promote changes in teachers' perspective and their relations with students, colleagues, and parents. This aligns strongly with the emphasis on criticality, dialogic and supportive relations, and reflexivity emphasized by both Mezirow and Freire for TE. This project has promoted teacher training, spurring creativity in curricular design. This helps foster relevant and meaningful curriculum within specific environments and gives children voice to articulate their concept of rights, while

also building educators' capacities to develop and implement effective, child rights-focused education. Monthly reports with the teacher-participants chronicle their integration of child rights education into their teaching, the benefits and challenges for children they have perceived in this education, and any observations regarding parent and community responses to child rights education. We collaboratively developed feedback responses, activities, and professional development workshops, alongside pedagogical practices to support this learning including: classroom set-up that encourages collaboration and the sharing of ideas; critical thinking that encourages children to reflect on the relevance of their school learning to their real life experiences; developing agency and learning about their rights; contextualized learning, developed/nuanced by teachers; inquiry-based learning; and participation of parents that responds to the realities of the local communities where children live and schools are located (Bivens et 2009).

### **Methods**

This study uses mixed method, including: pre and post-project questionnaires with teachers (of which the pre-project questionnaires have been completed); observations from teachers workshops (of which two sets of workshops with all teachers have been completed); observations from classroom visits (of which two classroom visits per schools have been conducted); postcards created by students in Canada and Uganda and shared with each other; videos of activities that Canadian and Ugandan children wanted to share with each other; notes from monthly check-ins with teachers (of which eight-to-10 sessions have been completed); notes from online research team meetings, and focus group discussions with teachers, parents and community stakeholders.

### **Findings and Discussion**

This section highlights early project findings. Using a decolonizing approach, we attempt to learn how child rights education might best be adapted and/or developed, promoted, and implemented in ways that effectively respond to the very diverse contexts of the four research sites.

#### **Diverse Contexts**

Despite being a High-Income Country (HIC) with considerable education resources and a reasonably high level of public education, Canada has educational challenges. Canadian multicultural, multilingual, inclusive classrooms are complex environments. Although limited to a maximum number of 22 students in Kindergarten, 24 in grades 1-3 and 30 in grades 4-7 (GVSD, 2007), teachers must know how engage with the learners as individuals with diverse needs, experiences, understandings (e.g., linguistically, culturally, socioemotionally, disability-related) and engage with the class as a collective on a learning journey (MacPherson, 2004).

In Uganda, teachers in our study have class sizes ranging from 19-190 students, and vastly divergent ages and levels of student ability. During the pandemic, most Ugandan children missed two full years of schooling and many Ugandan children have not regularly attended school for reasons including: expense of school fees and related costs; farm and domestic work requirements at home; gender discriminatory practices that mitigate girls' attendance. In addition, two of the Ugandan sites in this study include many children that have experienced upheaval, uncertainty, and re/dislocation due to regional conflicts and refugee situations (particularly from South Sudan).

## **Rights**

Within 1076 postcards children shared with each other, children drew or wrote rights pertaining to nine UNCRC children's rights. The child's right to rest, play, culture and arts (Art.31) was the most frequently illustrated right (42.7%), followed by food, clothing and a safe home (Art.27), and education in both Canada and Uganda. 16% of the students listed an identifiable child's responsibility on their postcards, with the right to food, clothing and a safe home the most frequently listed under the child's responsibility to sweep, cook, clean, make the bed and burn rubbish. This was followed by a child's responsibility to make play materials.

## **Curricula**

Both the BC Curriculum and Uganda's National Curriculum are fundamentally aligned with child rights. The Ugandan teachers identified how child rights could be highlighted and emphasized in every subject area in the curriculum during workshops, as well as a section of the curriculum that exclusively concerns children's rights. As part of the workshops, teachers laid out various rights and responsibilities that mapped onto the national curriculum from nursery school to secondary school across social studies, physical education, science, math, language studies and religion. A teacher in a parental focus group discussion suggested, "that rights already exist in the curriculum, but it has not been as clearly outlined as it was done in this workshop, particularly because of the focus on responsibility [within the workshop discussions]".

Similarly, Canadian teachers understood that children's rights were infused throughout the curriculum and were already invested in integrating them into their teaching. One grade 3 teacher remarked, "children's rights are relevant to all subjects at all times" [paraphrased] because they can enhance curricular content without increasing planning and teaching time. She exemplified this by sharing an activity aligned with this project. Starting with reading a book that discussed various children's experiences of walking to school around the world to illustrate diverse childhoods globally, she asked children to draw or paint their own walk to school and as well as a child from another culture. She discussed how these learning activities responded to British Columbia Government's Grade 3 Curriculum (n.d), including Social Studies, Big Idea: "People from diverse cultures and societies share some common experiences and aspects of life"; English Language Arts 3, Big Idea: "Curiosity and wonder lead us to new discoveries about ourselves and the world around us"; and Arts Education 3, Big Idea: "The arts connect our experiences to the experiences of others." Similar learning was had through sharing the postcards with children in the two countries.

## **Resistance and Support**

We encountered some resistance from parents in both countries when seeking their consent for their children to participate in the study. In Canada, the parents of one child who had recently joined the school declined consent for reasons the teacher did not understand; however, she questioned whether the parents fully understood the project, as they were not fluent in English. All other parents consented.

In Uganda, resistance was more common, but almost always alleviated when the teachers spoke with parents about the project. Reasons for resistance were primarily related to parents' fears that by learning about and exercising their rights children might become 'disobedient' and/or 'disrespectful' and parents' authority would be undermined, as typified by one stakeholder who suggested, "the right to protection leads to indiscipline".

In Uganda, we gained considerable insights into their support for, resistance to, and concerns about child rights during the focus group discussions with community

members/stakeholders and parents. The turnout (n=136), duration and levels of engagement for each meeting exceeded our expectations. Adults in these locations demonstrated a keen interest in children's well-being; they emphasized that parents and community members were responsible for ensuring all children had what they needed to thrive. They were familiar with many rights. When asked which right they believed were upheld particularly well in their communities they expressed a right to education, protection, a good environment, healthcare, food, and to be heard. Oddly, those most strongly upheld - education, food, healthcare, protection and shelter -were also identified as the rights most violated in their communities. Those in attendance – PTA members, teachers, educational administrators, community leaders are committed to education for children and this may have colored their answers. Other rights violations identified included to be heard; to freedom of expression; to play, to rest; to movement.

Discipline and corporal punishment arose in all the meetings and teacher workshops in Uganda. Children commonly experience physical abuse/corporal punishment at home (where this is legal) and at school (where it is illegal). Some expressed concern that child rights education could lead to children exercising rights disrespectfully and/or without sufficient attention given to their responsibilities. In Uganda, children's contributions to the household are more relied upon than in Canada. For example, children must contribute to the household through farming, fetching water, washing clothes and dishes, and collecting firewood. Focusing on the interplay between rights and their corresponding responsibilities, undergirded by the African Charter, helps allay fear and gain parent, school and community support. They expressed interest in learning more about alternatives to corporal punishment to guide children's behaviour, indicating that they are open to changes in practices to better support children's rights.

Parents and community members shared that when children's rights had initially been introduced in Uganda, they were perceived as a threat to adults that would interfere with children's lives with potential negative (even legal) repercussions. It was claimed that national campaigns and directives around children's rights contributed to, ironically, the deterioration of the community involvement and care in the lives of all children living in the community. One participant said, "a child belongs to a community- each one's responsibility to look after children- but now because of the child rights it is more difficult for the community to intervene because of their rights and the police can become involved." Participants bemoaned the decline of the traditional, collective care and responsibility for children and wanted more community discussions and workshops to revisit children's rights. They requested a facilitation guide to lead meetings/workshops, which we are currently developing.

Attesting to local support, a participant in Moyo shared that it was a good location for the study because they had, "been in an emergency situation since the independence of South Sudan and Uganda. We have many issues, not enough health care, not enough teachers and child rights have never been well articulated. We hope this kind of education can support us... we are the last implementers on the ground, as head teachers, teachers, PTA, CMC, we have important roles [to share knowledge about] rights and responsibilities or the problems come back".

### **Joy, Learning, and Interest for Children**

Perhaps most importantly, this project has demonstrated how a TE can facilitate a synergetic and complementary integration of children's rights and curricular content that provides for meaningful, contextually-relevant, and culturally-responsive learning that fosters curiosity, criticality, social engagement, and empowerment.

Our study provides a wide range of examples to demonstrate the uptake and expression of child rights (and corresponding responsibilities) by the children in this study. Teachers in Uganda consistently shared that by including rights and responsibilities in their classes, they found children's engagement improved and behavior issues diminished. In one school in Uganda, teachers shared a story about a student who had been acting out and was almost suspended, but after the teacher had a discussion with him about his rights and responsibilities, his behavior changed, he became the Head Boy and now counsels others. In one of the Canadian classrooms, the researchers joined for some in-class activities around children's rights and learned that all the children in the class believed that they had been bullied at some point during their childhoods.

Further, children claim their right to play. One teacher in Uganda conveyed how she could not keep the children in class once the playtime bell had rung because they reminded her of this right. Children in Uganda identified the corresponding responsibility of the right to play as making play materials (such as balls, skipping ropes, dolls). The children in Canada were challenged to make their own play materials/environments and they produced videos capturing each other tobogganing down a snow-covered hill in the school playground, touring a "fairy house" they had made in a tree, and displaying a hockey stick they had made from branches and twine.

Children in Canada posed questions to the Ugandan children, who in turn, posed questions for the Canadian children. These exchanges fostered growing awareness of different global contexts, as illustrated by their question focused on the weather, food, games, chores, school clothes, and hobbies. Children's interest was shown by the children in Canada asking to send gifts to children in Uganda and the children in Uganda being surprised Canadian children did not grow their own food. They also showed delight in their commonalities, such as their love of football, their friends and family, what they learned in school and even their names.

Teachers discussed how child rights education had brought about positive change in the classroom and school environment. They suggested children not only saw rights as related to themselves, but to all children. The understanding of rights shed a new light on responsibilities such as the right to food meant a responsibility to grow (in Uganda) and prepare food and wash dishes. Children in Canada and Uganda noted the right to a clean environment meant responsibility to care for the environment. It remained a 'chore' but there was an elevated understanding of the relationship of the chore to the right.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In troubling TE, Tibbitts (2005, p.113) asked how human rights education furthers personal transformation and social change, how they are interrelated or separable, and how they vary in different cultural settings. An outcome of this project has been 'conscientization' of child rights through pedagogical approaches that engage children in active learning linked curricular content in which every day experiences strengthen knowledge and practices to support the transformative potential for awareness, promotion, and enforcement of the rights of all children.

Engaging teachers, children, community members and parents has opened doors to dialogue on the enormous potential for transformation of deeper understanding of children's rights and ways that active support of child rights can positively impact all community members in the diverse contexts of the research sites. Thus, children's rights education that encompasses criticality, action, reflection, and discourse and responds to the local context, has powerful potential for children and for the world they are destined to lead. Effective children's rights

education encompasses an exploration of the world, including difficult topics such as oppression, inequalities, and injustices (with sensitivity to children's ages, situations, and developmental stages). Children must be provided with opportunities to consider what rights mean to them and those in their home, schools, larger communities, and they would share and actively exercise them. This aligns with Freire's (2005), assertion that "human activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world" (p.125).

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# Transformative Overture(s) to the Caged Bird's Song of Freedom. Educational Approaches "Intra Muros"

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the perceptions of 9 adult educators working in Second Chance Schools within Prisons regarding their educational philosophy, learning theories, and practices. The study investigates whether their perspectives align with Transformative Learning Theory and/or Critical Pedagogy, and whether their teaching aims to stimulate transformation, delineating the nature of such transformation and its discernible manifestations. The study employed a qualitative approach grounded in Mezirow, Brookfield, and Freire's theories, conducting in-depth interviews from September 2023 to March 2024.

**Key Words:** Transformation, Critical transformative learning, Critical Pedagogy, Prison education

## Introduction

Over the past decade, there has been a surge in prison education literature, focusing on methodologies and practices that facilitate inmate participation and psychosocial and cognitive empowerment or on the connection between education and motivations related to incarceration (sentence reduction or acquisition of professional degrees/diplomas for post-release rehabilitation) (Behan, 2014 & 2021; Biao, 2017; Dimitrouli & Rigoutsou, 2017). Emphasis is on informal educational programs using innovative methodologies (storytelling, gamification, digital literacy, arts, media), digital media, language tuition, access to higher education and library facilities, civic engagement and social (re)integration (Antonopoulou et al., 2022; Behan, 2021; Kellner & Share, 2019; Biao, 2017; Kokkos, 2007). Additionally, studies examine the impact of faith/spirituality (Pike & Hopkins, 2019; Hallett et al., 2016), life histories and autobiographies (Belknap, 2015; Magos, 2014), and the role of educators as "teacher-activists" (Belknap, *ibid*) in inmates' transformation (Keen & Woods, 2016; Mayo, 1999).

However, a significant gap exists in international and national contexts regarding the exploration of prison education through transformative learning (TL) and/or critical transformative learning (CTL) and its potential impact on incarcerated individuals (Kroth & Cranton, 2014). Research highlights obstacles such as limited time for discussion and trust building, power dynamics, resource scarcity, and security concerns within prison environments (McAleese & Kilty, 2020; Pike & Hopkins, 2019). Furthermore, studies suggest that TL may occur after formal education or during higher-level programs in prisons (Tønseth & Bergsland, 2019; Pike & Hopkins, 2019; Pike, 2015), with transformations observed among older, long-term



inmates aligning their cognitive and behavioral patterns with broader social structures (Behan, 2014).

Some studies report TL occurring within specific mental habits during art and experiential courses, like narrative workshops based on autobiographical stories (Warr, 2016; Magos, 2014). Others propose TL abstractly or theoretically, or advocate for its methodological implementation (O'Connor, 2021; Keen & Woods, 2016). Fewer suggest linking TL with the purposes of critical pedagogy, like liberation, empowerment, and citizenship (Costelloe, 2014), or propose community-based teaching and learning models as alternatives to dominant paradigms (Sferrazza, 2018). In Greece, literature on TL and education for citizenship is limited, often focusing on individual courses (Kavalou, 2021; Katsamori, 2020; Tsakona, 2018). Only one study examines the impact of Second Chance Schools post-release, noting rare cases of significant transformation and social rehabilitation (Dimitrouli, 2016).

To address this research gap, this study aims to explore the following questions:

- a) Do educators in Prison Second Chance Schools promote transformative learning, drawing upon Mezirow's theory or critical transformative learning principles as advocated by Critical Pedagogy and the perspectives of Freire and Brookfield?
- b) What are the objectives of their teaching practices? Is the primary goal to facilitate transformation, and if so, what specific types of transformation are targeted?
- c) Are educators able to identify any transformative effects on their incarcerated learners?

### **Education within Detention Facilities in Greece**

Education in detention facilities follows international and European guidelines, ensuring the right to education for all prisoners (United Nations, 1966). It covers academic, vocational, creative, and cultural activities (Council of Europe, 1990). In Greece, inmates' educational rights are constitutionally protected (Article 16§4), with specifics in the Penal Code (Law 2776/1999). Programs aim to enhance inmates' education and vocational skills, accommodating foreign inmates and ensuring educational continuity during transfers or disciplinary actions.

Second Chance Schools in Prisons (SCSPs) target adult inmates without junior high school diplomas. In a two-year program, they earn equivalent diplomas and reduce penalties by two days for each school day. Greece has 12 SCSPs (Dimitrouli & Rigoutsou, 2017), aiming to empower inmates through education, critical thinking, and societal reintegration (Chondolidou, 2010).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Our research primarily draws on the theories of Mezirow, Brookfield, and Freire, incorporating concepts like critical pedagogy/consciousness, transformative learning, emancipatory learning, and pedagogy of hope. Mezirow himself places his work within the tradition of social reform influenced by American pragmatism and focuses on how people interpret their world and potentially effect social change, nevertheless it is mainly atomocentric in its scope (Welton, 1995 in Gioti, 2019, 231; Gioti, 2024). Transformative Learning, (Mezirow 1991, 2000, 2003, 2009) a ten-stage process, empowers learners to deepen their understanding of their historical reality and is activated by triggering events or disorienting dilemmas that create emotional disturbance.

Integral part of transformative learning is the process of critical reflection, where stereotypical assumptions and guiding principles are questioned and reassessed, leading to perspective transformation (Kokkos, 2019 & 2020; Mezirow, 1991). Adults come to realize how

their socio-psychological assumptions limit their self-perception and relationships, restructuring them to make room for a more comprehensive integration of their experiences (Mezirow, *ibid*). This process can act as a catalyst for social reform, and socio-political emancipation by critically examining and challenging societal norms and structures (Welton, 1995; Mezirow, 1991, 168-169; Mezirow & Ass., 2000, 9-12, 22-29). Critical reflection constitutes a process of liberation, allowing individuals to become critically aware of the reasons and the consequences of their actions (Mezirow, 1998, 185; Finger & Asún, 2001, 57; Gioti, 2024). Educators practice critical reflection and transformation by guiding and motivating learners to explore different perspectives (Mezirow, 2000; Mezirow & Ass., 1995). Central to transformative learning are the processes of meaning-making through dialogue, exchanging views, and seeking mutual understanding, which validate experiences and encourage reflective learning, ultimately enhancing autonomy in thought and action (Mezirow, *ibid*; 2007) while prison classroom is considered itself disorienting (Keen & Woods, 2016, 25).

Freire - the father of Critical Pedagogy- (2021, 2009, 1994, 1977) and Brookfield (2017, 2016, 2009, 2005) offer a distinct approach to education, transformation and critical reflection emphasizing their inherently political nature and the connection between knowledge and power. Their approach centers on the dialectical relationship that prompts questions, challenges assumptions, identifies contradictions, and uncovers inequalities reproduced by powerful minorities and dominant ideologies. They argue for an education that critiques broader political and social structures, fostering critical awareness beyond personal transformation. They foreground the emancipatory dimensions of learning and the active engagement of learners as social actors.

Mezirow emphasizes individual transformation/growth, self-realization, and societal progress as outcomes of CR and TL. However, overemphasizing self-improvement and entrusting the agent of social change to the individual rather than social movements can undermine and psychologize collective emancipation reducing it to personal transformation (Gioti, 2019, 2024; Brookfield, 2017; Inglis, 1997 in Gioti, 2019, 233, 235-236). Brookfield and Freire advocate for education that fosters collective action toward emancipation and radical social transformation (Toka & Gioti, 2023). For a critical educator, carceral classrooms can become critical public spheres that provide a safe space in the threatening and oppressive environment while transformative process is understood as “racialized, classed, and gendered spaces, reinforced and amplified by correctional practices that individualize, pathologize, punish, and control” (Pollack, 2019, 2 in McAleese & Kilty, 2020, 277). Therefore, they highlight social construction of criminality and considering issues such as class, punishment, economic inequalities, and injustice (Behan, 2014, 25). It is crucial to differentiate between those who gain skills to navigate existing power structures and those who actively seek emancipation by challenging and transforming those structures by engaging students in critical reflection as ideology critique (Gioti, 2024; Brookfield, 2017).

However, challenging embedded assumptions disrupts our safety and certainties (Brookfield, *ibid*), particularly in dystopian environments like prisons. Initially, educators need to evaluate if the current context permits transformation and critical awareness, determining if there’s room for change. Can we expect change among incarcerated individuals when society isn’t adequately addressing the root causes of criminality? Following this assessment, we can delve into how educators can create a framework to initiate this transformation. Are such processes viable within prisons, or do other urgent matters take precedence?

## Methodology

We conducted qualitative research with 9 in-depth interviews (duration: 1:15' to 1:54') with adult educators who have taught in 7 different SCSPs (Koridalos/Athens-Attica, Larissa/Thessaly, Chania/Crete, Diavata/Thessaloniki, Trikala/Thessaly, Malandrino/Fokida and Domokos/Fthiotida) (Table 1). The research sample is convenient and purposeful, selected according to specific criteria: educators with over 3 years of teaching experience in SCSPs, representing diverse SCSPs, and teaching various subjects. The sample includes 9 participants (6 females, 3 males). Table 1 presents their profile.

**Table 1**

*The participants' profile*

A/A	Practice	Studies	Experience in SCS	Teaching subject	Age	Family status	Interview duration
IN1	Adult educator	Theatrical Studies and Communication, Master and Phd in Cultural Industries, PostDoc on incarceration issues	7	Cultural -aesthetic Literacy	46	Single	1:49
IN2	Adult educator	Philologist / Researcher in the field of prison education	5 (3 years as a volunteer)	Greek Language Programs / Greek Language Literacy	50	Married/ 2 children	1:15
IN3	SCS Principal /Director of Education and Training of Detention Centre	Theologist, Sociologist, Philologist, Journalist	18	Social Literacy	59	Married/ 3 children	1:50
IN4	Adult educator	Public administration, Masters: M.Ed./ Adult Education	7	Social Literacy	61	Married/ 3 children	1:22
IN5	Principal of SCS	Sociology, Economics	7	Social Literacy	58	Married/ 2 children	1:47
IN6	SCS Principal /Director of Education and Training of Detention Centre	School of Informatics/Accounting and Finance	4	Computer Science/Information Technology Literacy	46	Single	1:52
IN7	Principal of SCS	Philologist/Researcher in the field of Adult Education	18	Creative Writing	63	Divorced with children	1:51
IN8	SCS Principal/Director of Education and Training of Detention Centre	English Language and Literature-Economics	8	English Language Literacy	43	Married/ 3 children	1:38
IN9	Adult Educator, former Head of the department for Vocational Education and Training in General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs	Law/Adult Education/Researcher in the field of prison education	20	Counseling (psychosocial support for inmates)/ training of correctional officers	63	Married/ 1 child	1:54

## Research findings

We analyze and present the raw material in the following 4 thematic categories that correspond to our research questions:

### **The Purpose of Teaching**

Educators face constraints in setting long-term educational objectives due to the unique circumstances of detention. Most prioritize trust-building within their educational teams, nurturing self-confidence, empowering inmates' personalities, and enhancing their social skills. They see these efforts as crucial for establishing a sense of security and encouraging a shift from

an “inmate” to a “learner” identity. Additionally, they aim to instill in inmates the importance of avoiding recidivism post-release through educational activities, linking this effort to the professional reintegration opportunities they believe SCSPs can and should offer.

### **Learning theories educators adopt**

Most educators do not explicitly adhere to specific learning theories. They work on diagnosing learning needs, experimenting, and utilizing learners’ experiences. Attempts are made to challenge dysfunctional assumptions, which are temporarily deconstructed during incarceration. Some respondents, with significant theoretical backgrounds, are implicitly or explicitly influenced by Freire’s theory which emphasizes education’s role in social change. Moreover, many educators unconsciously incorporate elements of Mezirow’s work, as they find that oppressive norms can be revised in the classroom, offering inmates a pathway to “legitimate escape”, and leading to improvements in their lives behind bars.

### **Practices, Context, and Barriers**

Most educators implement cooperative teaching methods, utilizing dialogue and learners’ prior experiences. Those responsible for social and cultural/aesthetic education explore topics concerning prisoners’ experiences and assumptions, such as legal issues, social norms, written and unwritten laws, and power dynamics. Additionally, techniques such as brainstorming, Q&A sessions, discussions, role-playing, and dramatization are employed, significantly aiding in Greek language learning, given the substantial percentage of foreign inmates. All educational activities and techniques are rooted in adult education principles.

Various practical difficulties arise in implementing the educational process, across various fronts. The prison itself is considered a significant obstacle, given the hardships of incarceration, struggles with addiction, family separation, and legal uncertainties. Moreover, painful past educational experiences pose hurdles for many incarcerated individuals. Other challenges include language barriers, inadequate educational and supportive materials tailored to adult and inmate education, insufficient supervision and specialized training for educators and correctional staff, fragmented educational provision without continuity in other structures, and deficiencies in building infrastructure and equipment.

### **Transformative Learning and Critical Pedagogy and Their Effects on Prisoners**

There is ambiguity regarding the extent of transformation among inmates attending SCS. Change typically begins with visible changes in appearance and progresses to alterations in behavior, mindset, and beliefs. Factors like motivation and engaging learning conditions are considered. Transformations that touch upon the theories of Freire and Mezirow are noticed throughout the educational journey. However, they wane over time due to the discontinuation of the learning process, making it challenging to sustain critical awareness and profound change. Educators commonly recognize that education alone merely sets the foundation for subsequent steps. The key question is whether change and transformation will endure and influence inmates’ lives post-release.

Inmate education is a vital asset when cultivating skills essential for professional reintegration. However, post-release support from institutions and individuals is crucial but not always obvious. Without it, overcoming the stigma of incarceration becomes challenging. Ultimately, inmates’ lives are predominantly shaped by their social and material circumstances, with individual resilience playing a secondary role.

When exploring the underlying factors influencing criminal behavior, it becomes evident that social class distinctions heavily influence criminality, with oppression and power dynamics prevalent both inside and outside prison walls. The family environment, socio-economic

background, and society's unwillingness to substantially support former inmates profoundly affect their course. The paradox, however, is that despite these challenges, inmates are encouraged to believe that by changing their perspective and behavior, they can break the cycle of recidivism. Contrarily, the educational process rarely grapples with ideology critique and how societal structures have shaped the constraints imposed on these individuals. Instead, education seems to be confined to inmates' self-reflection, encouraging them to recognize and perhaps enhance their inner resilience, while avoiding situations that could exacerbate their disillusionment and frustration.

### **Discussion**

Our research findings resonate with prior studies by McAleese & Kilty (2020) and Pike & Hopkins (2019), highlighting challenges within prison education, and by Warr (2016) and Magos (2014), revealing transformations in experiential and art-based courses. Another significant observation, in line with research by Costelloe (2014) and Sferrazza (2018) is the disconnect between transformative learning and critical pedagogical goals like empowerment, emancipation and profound personal and societal transformation. Indeed, as Dimitrouli (2016) also notes in her research, significant transformations post-release remains rare.

In addressing our research inquiries, it appears that most educators do not consciously integrate aspects of transformative learning or critical pedagogy into their practice. Instead, their focus remains on imparting skills for post-release professional reintegration and enhancing personal resilience and psychology amidst incarceration's challenges. Subsequently, changes primarily concern the above aspects as also pointed out in relevant studies (McAleese & Kilty, 2020; Tønseth & Bergsland, 2019; Behan, 2015; Costelloe, 2014). There are educators who recognize education's potential for transformation and liberation. However, practical constraints like limited resources -both human and material- poor confinement conditions, and short duration of attendance hinder sustainable change (McAleese & Kilty, *ibid*). One educator explicitly refers to how Freire's theory influenced her teaching, emphasizing the perpetuation of inequalities by dominant structures and advocating for systemic shifts to enable true transformation. There are limited accounts of individuals who, after their release, succeeded in changing their lives but had to completely sever ties with their previous conditions to achieve this transformation as Pike & Hopkins (2019), Dimitrouli (2016) and Behan (2014) also showed.

Ultimately, it is determined that significant changes are necessary for transformative processes to take root, necessitating comprehensive shifts at both the governmental and societal levels. Prisons require substantial support, including enhanced infrastructure, adequate staffing, improved living conditions and comprehensive training for educators and correctional personnel. Moreover, the duration of the educational process should be extended to encompass other educational structures within the prison and for the duration of the individual's incarceration. These measures are crucial for fostering change within the prison environment. However, the most formidable challenge lies in societal reintegration post-release, where individuals confront enduring stigmatization, inequalities and exclusion and systemic barriers to reintegration. Even though they are released from the physical confines of prison, they remain entrapped in the unseen cage of a society that fails to "see" them.

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# Individuation, Socialisation, and Transformation – The Three Dimensions of Education

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**Abstract:** Transformative learning has been typically understood as a specific kind of learning where humans' ways of thinking, meaning making, and perceiving the world, others, and self, change drastically and irreversibly. However, we consider transformation not only as its own demarcated way of learning but as an essential and indistinguishable part of the concept of education itself. Traditionally, two intertwined dimensions have been associated with education: socialisation and individuation. Socialisation refers to the process of becoming part of the larger community, whereas individuation can be described as becoming oneself under the current system. These two processes ensure that society can keep functioning, when new individuals become suitably integrated into the existing society while retaining the possibility for personally meaningful, unique ways of being and living. We argue, however, that if education is understood to include only these two aspects, the concept of education is left incomplete. Following, we state that an element of transcendence is an essential part of education. Therefore, we propose that transformation should be considered as the third main aspect of education. The element of transformation opens the possibility of change and a genuine transcendence of the status quo for both individuation and socialisation.

**Key Words:** Education, Individuation, Socialisation, Transformation, Transformative Learning

## Introduction

Ever since Jack Mezirow first formulated the theory in the 70's, transformative learning has been understood as *a specific kind of learning*. Although there has been debate on what kind of learning outcomes transformative learning refers to, a general consensus has been reached that transformation fundamentally and irreversibly changes a person's ways of thinking, meaning making, and perceiving the world, others, and self (Mezirow, 2018; Kegan, 2000). Transformative learning can be described as learning where not only who we are, but how we are in and with the world, changes (Hoggan, 2016; Matikainen, 2022).

In light of the historical context, it is understandable that Mezirow placed transformative learning first and foremost in the realm of critical theory (Mezirow, 1981). As such, transformative learning can be seen as a counter-movement for the previous era of traditionalism and norms. According to Illeris (2014), after World War II life became increasingly defined by de-traditionalisation. This meant that traditions and norms were eroding, social regulation was decreasing, and people's possibilities for individual choices increased accordingly. Individuals started to have more power and opportunities to make decisions about their own lives. Therefore, the political (e.g., student, hippie, and peace) movements of the 1960s and 70s provided an

opportune ground for the rise of a learning theory that considered individual transformation together with social emancipation. (Illeris, 2014; Newman, 2012.)

However, placing transformative learning in the realm of critical theory has to some extent separated transformative learning theory from mainstream pedagogy and formal comprehensive education. This separation seems to imply that transformation is something that only happens in specific educational situations and contexts or during special life experiences. This has been reinforced by the – very legitimate – debate on what type of learning outcomes can be called transformative (e.g. Hoggan, 2016; Newman, 2012). Indeed, if *transformation* is understood as a generic instead of a specific concept with a precise definition in the educational field there is a danger of identifying all education with transformational aspects. In this case transformational learning, as defined originally by Mezirow, loses its unique specificity and depth. For example, the theory has become so widely accepted in adult education that there is a real risk that it is used to describe almost any change that seems meaningful to the learner (Hoggan, 2016). It is a far cry from the critical tradition if the concept is used, for example, to mean changes which increase human productivity in a neoliberal spirit (Brookfield, 2005).

In this paper we analyse the question: Is it possible to understand transformation as a part of the concept of education without transformation losing its depth and unique features as well as its radical potential? Almost 50 years after the first explicit formulation of the theory, we believe it is time to revisit the concept of transformation and explore its role as a distinctive and indispensable aspect of education. Following, in this paper we consider transformation, not as its own demarcated way of learning, but as an essential and indistinguishable part of the concept of education itself.

### **The Traditional Definition of Education**

Traditionally, two intertwined dimensions, socialisation, and individuation, have been associated with the concept of education. Socialisation refers to the process of people becoming part of their larger communities. These communities include, for instance, family, school, friend, and work groups as well as the whole (national) society. Socialisation is usually considered to take place spontaneously without (much) conscious intention or action, but socialising newcomers into existing communities is also one of the main aims of formal education. Educational institutions strive to raise students to become full members of society (see e.g., Biesta, 2015b).

According to Arendt (2013), after the creation of modern societies, the aim of socialisation has been to embed in people norms and rules concerning what is the correct way to be a member of the society. Arendt (2013) stated that the ideal goal of modern labouring societies is that people behave ‘like *one* big family’, where individuals’ most important goal in life is to give their contribution to the survival of the society, in other words, the growth of economy. This kind of behaviour is nowadays strengthened by the discourse of an on-going global competition between nation-states. Arendt (2013) called the process of internalisation of specific, normatively right ways of behaviour *conformism*. Indeed, Arendt (2013) thought that mass-culture was created and reinforced through conforming to norms and strict rules of the society. In a more post-modern note, Arendt (2013) as well as other scholars (e.g. Bauman, 2013; Foucault, 2019; Fromm, 2017), argued that these internalised norms, rules, and regulations become a faceless authority. The challenge with faceless authority – the abstract idea of ‘normatively correct behaviour’ – is that it is hard to rebel against, because oftentimes there is no specific person against whom to rebel. In this idea of socialisation as conformism there is barely

room left for uniqueness, true individuality, and political action, as everyone is expected to submit to the normatively right ways of behaviour.

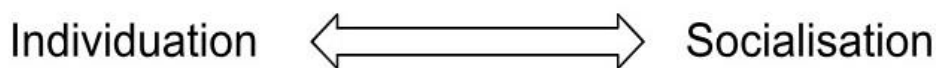
Individuation, on the other hand, can be described as becoming a self-governing individual of the society. It is indeed an important task of education to help individuals to find their personal strengths, potentials, and eventually their place in society. Individuation has become a more apparent goal of education from the beginning of the 1900s (see e.g. Foucault, 2019). Especially the writings of Nietzsche contributed to the creation of the modern idea of the individual in the West (Malik, 2014). Following, in today's Western democratic societies being an individual is perceived as important as being a part of communities. However, as Durkheim (1893/2023) elucidated over a hundred years ago, individuation in modern societies mainly means people finding their place in the structure and hierarchy of labour division. However, in our contemporary understanding it is thought that during the process of individuation people are educated to perceive themselves as unique individuals so that people do not 'lose themselves' in their social communities. Truly, the goal of individuation is that everyone would have the ability to think, speak, and act for themselves. This is an important task, so people do not become completely conformed in or, in the worst-case scenario, instruments (i.e., mindless soldiers etc.) for their communities (see e.g., Arendt, 2013; Biesta, 2015a; Männistö, 2020).

Socialisation and individuation together are traditionally considered to form the basis of the concept of education. These two separate but intertwined processes ensure that society can keep functioning, when new individuals become integrated into the existing society without blending in with the masses. Individuation and socialisation are also understood intertwined in a way that they both affect each other. On the one hand, society always sets limits to what an individual can become and on the other hand, society is made up of individuals. The dynamic between these aspects is dialectical. They are always interlinked and interacting with each other. (Hoggan et al., 2017.)

This kind of traditional definition of education can be represented with a double-headed arrow (Figure 1). On one end of the arrow is individuation and on the other socialisation. The arrow acts as a kind of string, which means that both aspects of education are constantly affecting the other. Education always operates at some point on the spectrum.

### **Figure 1**

*The Two Dimensions of Education*



### **Transformation as Part of the Concept of Education**

We argue that when focusing only on socialisation and individuation, education is left to work mainly on the present, current states of affairs, in other words, status quo. For example, socialising individuals into a capitalistic or an authoritative system only reinforces the status quo of the system, not the society's or individual's capacity to profoundly transform themselves or the system. Hence, normative ideals on how to lead a good life, become successful, and how societies should work, dominate in our contemporary cultures. Societies aiming mainly to

survive in global competition are not truly interested in educating people to grow as human beings, to care for humanity, human rights, equality, or ecological questions because economical survival overrides everything else. Indeed, socialisation into the current systems and a specific, narrow understanding of individuation have invaded most of the spaces in education so that societies have been able to ensure they work like ‘well-oiled machines’ (see Arendt, 2013). Not much room for true, deep transformation has been left, especially in formal (school) education.

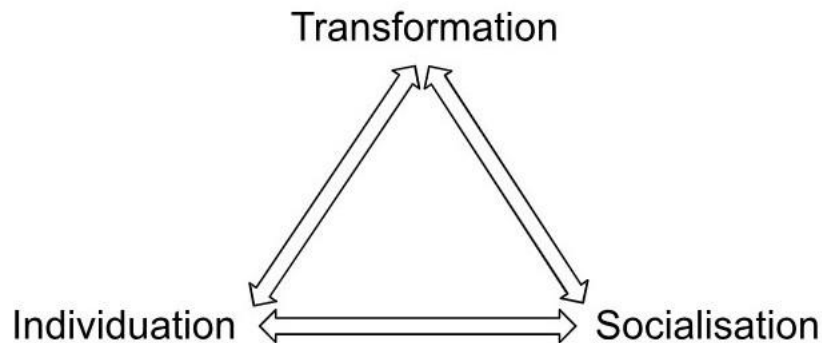
In the relatively rare educational contexts where there actually is room for real plurality and enough space and time to learn as well as grow as a human being, transformation has been perceived as a demarcated, even counter-cultural, way of learning (see Brookfield, 2005; Mezirow, 1981). This has led to the belief that transformative learning can only happen in special contexts and situations for example adult education programs designed specifically for it. We argue however, that without transformation, our understanding of education is left incomplete. If education is thought to include only socialisation and individuation, it cannot sufficiently open up radically new horizons for the future. This is why we understand transformation as something that transcends the present. In transformation, something genuinely novel sprouts through the cracks of the current states of affairs (e.g., Matikainen, 2022).

We believe that one important role of education is to open up ways for people to strive for a better and fundamentally different kind of future. As Värri (2014) has put it, one crucial task of education and educators is to formulate answers to the question concerning what a better future looks like and how to work towards this goal. The answers we give concerning how to create a better future are always tentative, since it is impossible to give definitive answers to this question – only the future will, in the end, reveal what would have been ‘good’ in any given situation (Värri, 2014). Yet education always essentially involves an imagined future horizon, which determines the nature of the educational actions to be taken in the present moment. Consequently, every educator does have a vision (conscious or unconscious) of the direction in which they are guiding their pupils and students, because if educators did not have a vision for the future, what would education in reality be aiming for? That is why we see an element of transcendence as an essential part of education and propose that transformation should be considered, not as a demarcated way of learning, but as an integral part of education.

In our view, transformation is needed as the third dimension of education, so that the potentials of humanity, in other words, the essentially better future horizons are taken into account in the definition of education. Hence, we propose education to be comprehended as a triangle where all the walls of the triangle are made up of two-headed arrows (Figure 2). The vertices of the triangle are thus individuation, socialisation, and transformation.

**Figure 2**

*The Proposed Three Dimensions of Education*



Bringing transformation as the third dimension of education, as the apex of the triangle, has implications also for the way in which individuation and socialisation are to be understood as part of education and consequently how we should arrange our educational spaces time and material wise. Because all the parts of the triangle interact, education must be defined in a completely new way. The element of transformation opens up the possibility of change and a genuine transcendence of the status quo for both individuation and socialisation.

### **The Need for Space for Radically New Future Visions in Educational Practices**

Our formulation poses positive challenges for the theory and research on transformation and transformative learning. In the field of transformative learning, we should take a moment to consider whether we perceive transformation as a specific way of learning or more comprehensively as part of education itself. If we end up with the latter, like we have suggested here, it is important that the concept of transformation is still understood as a specific rather than a general concept. This ensures that transformation does not become ‘a floating signifier’ that ultimately might not mean anything at all (Hoggan, 2016; Illeris, 2014; Newman, 2012).

Accepting transformation as an elemental part of education also demands viewing socialisation and individuation through transformation (as well as the other way around). When we view socialisation and individuation through transformation, we are essentially re-politicising education. We are forced to take the unanswerable question of better tomorrow to a more serious and concrete level: What kind of future are we aiming for in education? What kind of socialisation and individuation are needed in this future vision? To have any hope of giving a successful answer to these questions, the answer cannot be formulated solely on the premises of the status quo. This in a way puts transformative learning back to its academic roots. As Hoggan (2016, p. 59) writes: “Transformative learning theory was originally developed specifically to address the learning involved in broad social change”.

Aiming for broad social change through re-politicising education means that education cannot be understood mainly in Arendtian terms as conforming to the existing norms, in other words, as something where consensus and cohesion are at the center. For example, neoliberal capitalism – while boasting as the ideology of infinite possibilities – often closes possibilities for actual social change (Brookfield, 2005). With regard to issues such as climate change or global

inequality, capitalism often closes the possibility for true transformation through the argument that it is unrealistic to aim for transformation since we need to be constantly labouring to ensure economic growth which again is perceived to form the foundation for our survival and wellbeing. Through this discourse capitalists produce a closed, self-enforcing system, which constantly justifies its own existence (we have to labour to ensure economic growth as economic growth is needed for wellbeing and repeat) (see e.g., Mouffe, 2005). This is why, for educational practices to genuinely allow room for transformation, it is necessary to reconstruct and analyse the current systems and their socio-cultural foundations in order to formulate concrete visions for a better future.

What does all this mean for teaching in educational institutions? If transformation is taken seriously as a part of the concept of education, we need to have the ability to imagine different futures. Consequently, this poses the need for change for many of our educational practices, as education that takes the possibility for transformation seriously should always have space for the transformation to happen. Fully packed lessons and minute-by-minute learning plans do not allow room for transformation. This may, however, be easier said than done in the daily practices of formal education. This poses some difficult questions for the educators and teachers, for example:

- How do I ensure that there is a genuine possibility of transformation for my students/pupils?
- Can I rely on the curriculum of my institution in my teaching, or does it preclude genuine negotiation and deliberation that would be necessary for transformation?
- How do I approach the themes of socialisation and individuation from a transformational perspective?

If transformation is seen solely as a specific way of learning, it is easy to think that transformation requires a certain environment or conditions to be met in order to take place. Our argument however has been that transformation should be understood as part of all education. To put it simply, the idea is that all teaching and education always imply, by definition, the possibility of even radical transformation. All this might mean a small step towards a possible personal transformation for the student in our class but a major leap for the concept of education.

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# Transformative Learning Through Artificial Intelligence Coaching: An Exploratory Study

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**Key Words:** Workplace Coaching, Transformative Learning, Critical Reflection, Artificial Intelligence Coaching, Leadership Learning.

## Extended Abstract

Workplace coaching has evolved over the years as one of the most effective ways of developing leaders in organizations (Athanasopoulou, and Dopson, 2018; Bozer and Jones, 2021). Recently, scholars have shifted focus to understanding the mechanisms, process, and factors that determine the effectiveness of coaching (Bozer and Jones 2021, Graßmann et al., 2020). While coaching plays a key role in learning, scholars and practitioners argue that coaching remains inaccessible to most employees and therefore the need to be democratized to be more accessible (Terblanche et al, 2022). Extant literature on the future of workplace coaching points to Artificial intelligence (AI) as one mechanism that can extend coaching services to larger pool of employees within organisations (Boyatzis et al., 2022; Schermuly et al., 2022, Terblanche et al, 2022).

AI coaching is defined “as machine-assisted, systematic process to help coachees set professional goals and construct solutions to efficiently achieve them” (Graßmann and Schermuly, 2021, p106). Pioneering studies that compare AI and Human based coaching have demonstrate that AI can achieve initial levels of human coaching outcome as AI can be programmed to prompt coachees’ reflection to facilitate self-reflection, set goals (Terblanche et al., 2022) and guide them through steps to learn and develop key leadership capabilities (Graßmann and Schermuly, 2021; Malafronte and Mbokota, 2023). These studies also highlight some limitations of AI coaching, such as AI inability to give feedback to coachees and read emotions which are critical for learning (Boyatzis et al., 2022; Malafronte and Mbokota, 2023; Terblanche et al, 2022). While the relationship between AI and workplace coaching is an emerging phenomenon, it promises to shift the boundaries of learning and development (Graßmann and Schermuly, 2021; Mikalef et al., 2023) and we wonder what value it could bring to the field of transformative learning.

Transformative learning (TL) is “the process of effecting change in a frame of reference” (Mezirow 1997, 5). While the initial trigger through which this process occurs is the onset of a disorienting dilemma that is often triggered by a life-changing experience or a learning intervention (Cox 2015; Fisher-Yoshida and Yoshida 2022), the main mechanism for TL is *critical reflection* which enables individuals to reflect on their meaning perceptive (values, beliefs, and assumptions). Several studies have demonstrated that workplace coaching can facilitate transformative learning (Anand et al., 2020; Fisher-Yoshida and Yoshida, 2022; Mbokota et al., 2022) as it can facilitate critical reflection, the examination of meaning perspectives, and the ability of a coaching intervention to enable individuals to reconstruct new meaning (Gray, 2006; Fontes and Dello- Russo 2021).

As part of key coaching features, the literature confirms that some of the key mechanisms that allow for effectiveness in coaching includes coach competencies such as a working alliance,



active listening, asking relevant, and specifically reflective questions (Athanasopoulou, and Dopson, 2018; De Haan and Nilsson, 2017; Ibarra & Scoular, 2019; Pandolfi, 2020). However, working alliance on its own has been found not to contribute to coaching outcomes (De Haan et al., 2020). We therefore argue that AI coaching is not limited by the boundaries of the need for a good working alliance between coach and coachee.

Scholars have called for more research on active other ingredients such as thoughts, feelings, and intuitions, which can be shared and developed with AI (Pentina, et al., 2023). These requires both active listening and reflective questioning. Active listening requires a coach to listen attentively without being judgemental and not interrupt the coachee (Pandolfi, 2020). Initial studies conducted argue that AI coaching lacks feedback capability, it can ensure that the coachee is not interrupted (Terblanche et al, 2022). We therefore argue that AI coaching has the potential for effectiveness with regards to the competence of attentive listening, though partial. However, the emergence and use of Generative AI in coaching can contribute to developing knowledge curation and coaching conversations (Passmore and Tee, 2023). Generative AI capabilities enable high-quality intent and text prediction<sup>1</sup> from the very vast database of the Internet, which could provide the AI coach with feedback capability. How effective would this feedback capability be is an area that we are interested in exploring in this study,

The main differentiator in coaching is asking relevant questions, specifically for transformative learning (the mechanisms of critical reflection), reflective and incisive questions are necessary for generating both cognitive and affective process of learning (Mosteo et al. 2021). We therefore propose that the use of generative AI in coaching can trigger critical reflection and thus facilitate transformative learning. This is enabled by goal setting as it is a central feature of coaching which facilitates positive emotional experiences that encourage learning and so, modifies thought patterns, affect and behavior (Latham & Locke, 1991). These are understood as schemas in psychology meaning perspective in transformative learning and are key components of learning and development processes in relation to individuals' working goals and tasks,

Recent studies in AI and coaching leadership development explain that AI coaching can facilitate change and leadership competencies such as self-regulation and change in perspectives in key managerial activities such as communication, work organization and self-management (Malafronte and Mbokota, 2023; Malafronte and Loufrani, 2023). Today's Generative AI demonstrates near-human language capabilities that could enable individuals to reflect, back and forth their own perceptions and meanings with an AI Coach which could trigger critical reflection to reframing one's meaning perspective.

In this study we use a qualitative enquiry and a multiple case design to assess the potential of generative AI in facilitating transformative learning. Our sample comprised of ten (10) cases where each case was exposed to a minimum of three (3) AI coaching conversations. Data was collected amongst middle managers from South Africa and France. This study is underway, and we believe by the time of conference we should be able to share some preliminary findings as to whether TL can be facilitated through AI coaching?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ig.ft.com/generative-ai/>

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## Facilitating Good Trouble: A Model for Engendering Perspective Transformation

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**Abstract:** The standardization of course design and delivery along with a strong desire for scalability—allowing a large number of professionals to attend—turns facilitators of learning into mere mediators of content. These standard practices in corporate contexts prevent facilitators from actioning their espoused theory of supporting their participants’ in acquiring a capability, or developing a capacity. The authors propose that fear can prevent facilitators from taking the action (Ahmadi, Vogel, & Collins, 2016)—or more importantly stepping back, taking no action and allowing for the emergence of new and greater outcomes—necessary for participants to engage in meaningful learning. This paper presents a model for the rigorous design, development, and facilitation of experiences that provide space for the emergence of unintended but worthy learning. The model provides course creators and facilitators the tools to gain and maintain a learning environment suitable for doing the difficult work of engaging in perspective transformation. Additionally, the model provides guidance for engaging in discourse and reflection on concepts and in identifying internally and externally produced oppressive processes and structures. Facilitating learning in this manner may result in good learning and encouraging participants to question authority will likely get facilitators and participants into good trouble.

**Key Words:** Facilitate, Transformative, Critical, Reflection, Design

### Facilitators

The term facilitator seeks to differentiate these professionals from the instructor, lecturer, or trainer. However, many facilitators, like instructors, lecturers and trainers before them, continue to curate content instead of actioning their espoused theory of supporting their participants’ in acquiring a capability, or developing a capacity. The authors propose that fear can prevent facilitators from taking the action (Ahmadi, Vogel, & Collins, 2016)—or more importantly stepping back, taking no action and allowing for emergence—necessary for participants to engage in meaningful learning. This paper will present a model for the rigorous design, development, and facilitation of experiences that allow for the emergence of unintended but good learning and allow facilitators can get into good trouble.

In our experience, organizations with risk aversion prefer—and often need for continuing professional education accreditation—standardized training and education that adhere to preapproved timings, scripts, and slides. Such sessions tend to focus on content delivery instead of the individualized work required to develop a new capability or more complex capacity. Facilitators can instead instigate good trouble by giving participants permission to question foundational personal and organizational assumptions. Receiving permission to do the work on themselves as professionals can feel liberating, especially when participants identify barriers and otherwise oppressive processes and structures. Additionally, facilitators need permission to step

back and allow the participants to do the work. Providing space for the participants to work through tough concepts may feel counterproductive for some facilitators, but learning in the struggle (Vieta, 2014) provides opportunities for participants to make connections with past experiences, the perspectives of other participants, and a deeper understanding of the ideas presented.

Unfortunately, even among those facilitators willing to take risks and who purport to adapt instruction fail to do so for a variety of reasons (Silverthorn, Thorn, & Svinicki, 2006). Even after receiving the latitude to reflect in action and adjust instruction, modifying well-crafted plans, rehearsed presentations, and changing content can prove itself an exceedingly difficult task for even the most seasoned facilitator. More so, with corporate accreditation requirements, changing content can preclude participants from earning continuing professional development credits required for maintaining their certifications or licenses (NASBA, 2024). Deviation from timed events, preplanned questions, and approved assessments can lead to the loss of professional qualifications for the facilitator and the participant. Fear of this loss pushes organizations to carefully script coursework and prohibit facilitators from deviating from predetermined timing and content requirements. Fortunately, methods to meet credentialing requirements and create meaningful learning experiences exist.

In addition to consulting the accreditation requirements, rigorous planning and communication can avert the disaster of losing continuing professional education credit and still focus on instigating the good trouble of liberating the thinking and actions of participants. The authors propose a model for creating and facilitating programs that engages participants in examining their purpose, values, feelings, and how they make meaning as they work toward developing more ideal capabilities and complex capacities. This model provides the latitude for facilitators to adjust and support participants as they engage in the work required for good trouble—perspective change. Such work includes challenging personal and organizational assumptions, so that, for example they can recognize their passive participation in their own oppression, such as what might prevent them from taking risks like having difficult conversations, or advocating for themselves in light of worker exploitation. Perspective change occurring in leadership courses can be as profound as leading to participants questioning their desire to continue working in their current profession (McCann, 2022).

### **The Model**

This model materialized through the examination of the transformative learning literature and two distinct, long-standing, successful transformative learning programs (McCann & Barto, 2018; Corrie, 2023). These programs purposely provided a space (Meyer, 2009) for transformative learning to occur, which Mezirow (2003) defines as “learning that transforms problematic frames of references—sets of fixed assumptions and expectations—to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change” (pp.58-59). Although each of the programs were not assigned this lofty outcome in the original syllabus, the program planners recognized the value in going beyond transmitting otherwise readily available content.

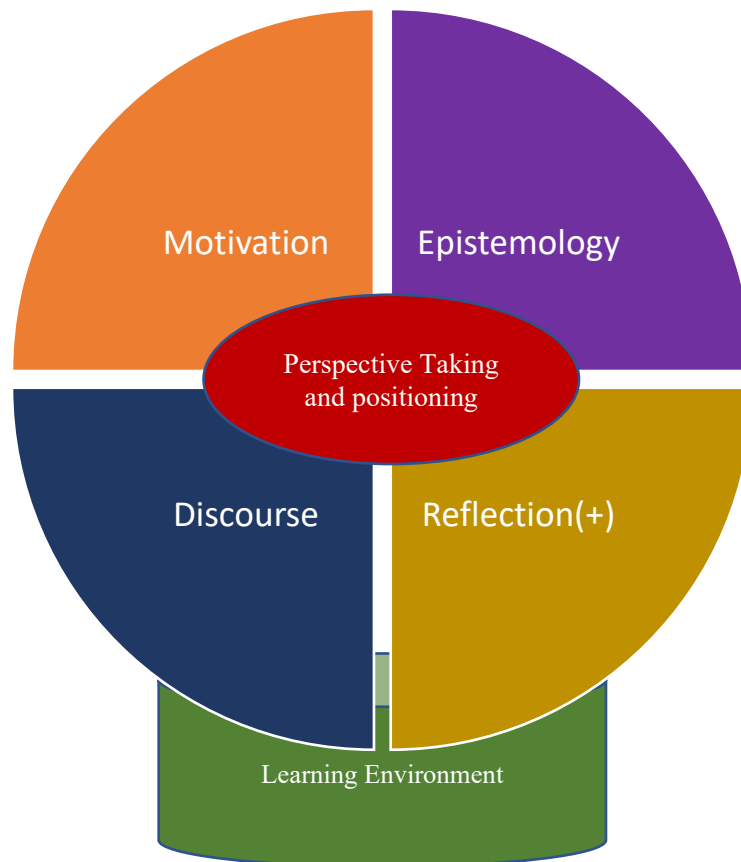
Mezirow (1991) further describes how facilitators create this type of learning. He states that:

They do this by setting and enforcing norms of participation in these communities that embody the ideal conditions of learning in so far as possible, including rules regarding

equal opportunity to participate, role reciprocity, bracketing biases, focusing on issues, hearing alternative arguments, examining assumptions, and seeking consensus. (p. )

The model (Figure 1) begins with establishing the foundation of future work, the *learning environment*, which requires that participants and facilitators negotiate needs and norms of participation from moment to moment. Next, attention to learner *motivation* helps examine participant purpose in relation to extrinsic influence. The work in this model transpires through *discourse* with self, others, and the material itself. Much of the work concerns *epistemology*, or how the individual and organization creates knowledge. This investigation of what and how the participants know lays the groundwork for embodying and exemplifying course concepts, instead of simply being satisfied by superficial understanding of content. The course curated discourse leads to the next part of the model, *reflection*. In the model, reflection refers to individual process reflection and covers the spectrum to the more difficult and essential practice of critical reflection. Lastly, *perspective taking and positioning* takes the center of the model as they touch each component and directly relate to addressing a participant's worldview.

**Figure 1**  
*Model for facilitating perspective transformation*



Together, through purposeful design, these components create opportunities for emergence (Pendleton-Jullian, & Brown, 2018), or the rise of something new when two systems interact. One opportunity for emergence occurs when facilitators introduce the system of a new concept to the participant's system of current ways of knowing and doing. In this construct, the facilitator needs to develop the tools and tolerance to provide the space for emergence—something new to emerge—instead of demanding predefined outcomes. The authors understand that putting aside behavioral objectives or learning outcomes is far worse than veering off script. We also insist that the normally low level objectives will inherently be met and exceeded if facilitators allow participants the space to understand the course concepts. Therefore, we recommend meeting the credentialing body's requirements by continuing to draft behavioral objectives and further using the selected concepts as meta themes.

Designers select meta themes, or concepts that hold relevance in achieving stated learning objectives as much as they contribute to engendering perspective transformation in the participants. Meta themes serve as the systems that will result in the emergence of new capabilities and capacities in later stages of transformative learning. Upfront, the concepts promote an exploration of more ideal ways of being, and serve in the participants critical assessment of assumptions. And when trying on new roles, building competence and confidence, and reintegrating the new perspective, the same meta themes continue to provide the support participants require for perspective transformation.

For example, participants may learn about questioning. Using a model used in conducting executive coaching, the participants learn how to ask better questions. Teaching these techniques, facilitators fulfill requirements outlined in their objectives. But the meta theme of questioning goes much deeper. It enables them to *reflect* on their current frames of reference, help others in the course surface theirs during *discourse*, reframe their *motivations* for conducting the work, and question their *epistemological* foundation of their knowledge. Questions also allow participants to practice curiosity and empathy, the foundation for *perspective taking and positioning*. Combining these systems through different exercises with the foundation being the participants context and experience creates a recipe for emergence.

Even in teaching the same content as traditionally designed and delivered programs creating space for emergence is what separates this model from others. Participants may still receive instruction in how to ask questions like a certified executive coach in both programs. However, in our construct, the focus shifts from practicing question techniques to improve their ability to question to using questions to challenge the participants' frames of reference. This counterintuitive perspective held by the course facilitator provides the space for participants to focus on the work they require to grow instead of achieving overly generalized standards that focus on the art of questioning. Such leeway does not give the participant a pass on doing the work of asking good questions, nor the facilitator on showing prepared. This type of learning environment requires facilitators arrive significantly over prepared to adapt to the ebb and flow of individual and group needs.

The facilitator should treat the course or workshop similar to how a personal trainer treats their clients. Each individual—even in group settings—require different stimulus to achieve their desired growth. In this personal trainer metaphor, the individual's height and weight differ as much as their stamina, endurance and strength, and a good trainer will derive the individual's current state and devise a plan to bring them closer to their goals. Although, such a method would be ideal for facilitating transformative learning, we often lack the resources of time and money to create truly bespoke learning contracts for each participant. This does not prohibit a

facilitator from taking a well-designed course or workshop and adjusting to individual and group needs, not just programmatically but more importantly in the moment. Creating such space for participants to explore their beliefs and the concepts can result in powerful learning as if it were created just for them.

The authors achieve this by allowing the participant to bring their context and expertise with them to the course. Facilitators position participants as the expert of their own context, but this does not prohibit them from questioning the validity of their perceived barriers, or limitations on applying concepts in their context. In addition to using the concepts throughout the course, it also creates a means for participants to experiment with integrating the course concepts into their lives for their personal and professional betterment. Using their own context and centering them as an expert of their own context allows for a better relationship between participant and facilitator, which can be empowering (Phillips, Baltzer, Filoon, and Whitley, 2017). This requires that a facilitator serves as a coach, instead of a teacher who holds all off the answers. The facilitator must also come prepared with additional concepts and exercises that they may need to use when confronted with unexpected opportunities. However, reflecting in action (Schon, 2017), changing our lesson plans, or deviating from paths that were proven successful in the past can prove difficult (Silverthorn, Thorn, & Svinicki, 2006).

One's frames of reference as an educator can create barriers to changing how one facilitates and limit the development of a learning environment conducive to good learning. Educators can feel a sense of duty to provide students with all off the information, and demonstrate their expertise by diving deep into the content. Slide decks, course syllabi, schedules, and past success with those refined plans makes it very difficult for facilitators to adjust in the moment. Tools and practices exist that can allow facilitators to start making those adjustments when such needs arise. Facilitators should reflect-in-action to intuit and survey participants for the purpose of assessing their needs.

Intuiting what the group needs based on a facilitator's assumptions and superficial indicators can prove difficult and even dangerous. A common false belief includes assuming participants are closed or shutdown if they cross their arms and lean back. Facilitators need tools to collect data to (in)validate their assumptions and surface blind spots. Tools for this data collection can range from the observation of tired participants [sluggish, sighing], or informal, verbal surveys, or anonymous classroom critical incident questionnaires (Brookfield, 1998).

As a word of warning, facilitators that solicit feedback to address and adjust to the participants' needs but fails deliver on that promise will certainly lose credibility. Establishing credibility in the learning environment also requires that the facilitator *talk the talk* and *walk the walk*. If you say you do something, you also have to model doing that thing. The requirement of reflecting in action and reflecting on action does not mean that facilitators must change everything all of the time. Reflecting in action can simply refer to recognizing opportunities to stand back and letting the discourse flow in unforeseen directions, it's not simply change for change sake. For example, allowing or a pause in preplanned events—especially the beloved, powerful exercises the facilitator is especially excited about—for participants to briefly ventilate their frustrations may not result in participants feeling better, but it does provide facilitators with data to use in future discourse as they challenge the participants' thinking. Recognizing these opportunities and demonstrating empathy builds trust for the facilitator in the learning environment and new relationships, ideas and learning to emerge. As an example, a facilitator may believe that they hold a solid answer, but by simply asking participants for their perspective opens up the learning environment to more voices and ideas.

The authors believe that although transformative learning is never a guaranteed outcome, using rigorous planning and preparing tools to allow for emergence can lead to meaningful changes in participants' frames of reference. These changes can certainly include the lower level behavioral objectives found in many corporate trainings like *recognize*, *define*, and *know*, but more importantly it can empower participants to become their more idealized version of a professional. Achieving that more idealized version of themselves however, may require the difficult task of questioning well-established organizational or professional norms, values and beliefs, especially those that led to their current level of success, but may now limit future growth. Facilitating in this manner can lead to difficulties for the facilitator, but more importantly, challenging professional norms, values, and beliefs can lead to the participant getting into good trouble as they challenge their professions current ways of knowing and doing. For example, having interns or junior associates speak up during an executive meeting may buck long standing norms, open up opportunity for contradicting senior leaders' perspectives. This risk can make things uncomfortable, but it also yields new voices and ideas for the room; and that brings about good trouble.

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# Engaging a *Dark Side* Perspective: Integration of Second Wave Positive Psychology and Transformative Learning Theory

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**Key Words:** *Dark Side* Perspective of Transformative Learning, Second Wave Positive Psychology, Emotions, Liminality

## Introduction

Transformative learning is a process of self-development and transformation in which individuals deeply examine their beliefs, assumptions, and values, weighing various viewpoints to authenticate their understanding of truth and reality (Mezirow, 2003). Emotions, especially conflicting ones, play a pivotal role in intensifying reflection and learning and contribute to the construction of meaning in our lives (Dirkx, 2001, 2006). While this process can be enlightening, it can present a complex and arduous journey filled with emotional chaos and self-questioning (Cranton, 2016; Kasworm, 2008). Venturing beyond comfort zones, especially during crises, can lead to profound emotional reflections; however, the transitional phase between two states of being can be challenging (Mälkki & Green, 2014). Integrating insights from the second wave positive psychology within Transformative Learning Theory offers a new *dark side* perspective to help individuals acknowledge, appreciate, and embrace emotions, build depth of meaning, and create the openness needed when facing life's dilemmas (McClain, 2024). Rooted in the work of Ivtzan et al. (2016), a *dark side* perspective emphasizes recognizing and integrating life's darker facets to cultivate new viewpoints to deepen individuals' understanding of meaning, navigate liminal spaces, and edge emotions (McClain, 2024). The *dark side* framework provides a foundation for emotional dialogue, aiding individuals in understanding liminality and transitioning through transformative learning phases. Embracing a *dark side* perspective of transformative learning provides an additional perspective and critical elements through which individuals can broaden their exploration and involvement in the transformative learning journey (McClain, 2024).

## Dark Side Perspective of Transformative Learning

The *dark side* framework comprises eight essential elements, each of which is not necessarily sequential or mandatory to explore. However, these elements offer crucial intersections and navigational landmarks to enrich the transformative learning process. The first key element of the *dark side* perspective emphasizes the need to allow perceived positive and negative emotions to help build a nuanced understanding of mental states, recognizing they “inherently involve complex, intertwined shades of light and dark” (Ivtzan et al., 2016, p. 19). This approach encourages discourse and exploration of the tension between emotional states, allowing individuals the freedom to explore and reflect on emotions within their context, free from popular characterizations and expectations (McClain, 2024). A second element involves a deeper integration of developmental psychology theories with second wave positive psychology. This integration offers a fresh viewpoint for establishing links between fundamental elements of Transformative Learning Theory and individuals in their research pursuits. A third element of the *dark side* perspective focuses on uncovering a meaningful purpose in life, acknowledging the potential discomfort that arises from the conflict between one's comfort zone and the pursuit of

purpose. Despite this tension, embracing the *dark side* can lead to a transformative journey towards experiencing a deeper sense of purpose (Ivtzan et al., 2016).

The fourth element of the *dark side* perspective involves focusing on adversity, resilience, and growth, highlighting the positive outcomes that can arise from confronting adversity and trauma (Ivtzan et al., 2016). A fifth element of the *dark side* perspective highlights the benefits of contemplating one's mortality as a means of engaging in authentic, deep, critical self-reflection and cultivating a greater appreciation for life (Ivtzan et al., 2016). The sixth element of the *dark side* perspective involves exploring suffering, compassion, and interconnectedness, emphasizing that suffering is a natural part of life and can contribute to building self-compassion (Ivtzan et al., 2016, p. 144). Exploring suffering through reflective dialogue fosters individual understanding and self-awareness, facilitating the journey toward achieving a more integrative level of engagement (Ivtzan et al., 2016; McClain, 2024). Authentic engagement with one's spirituality is the seventh element of the *dark side* perspective, as it can serve as a catalyst for transformation by addressing unresolved conflicts and fears within the psyche (Ivtzan et al., 2016). Lastly, the eighth element of the *dark side* perspective focuses on the hero's journey framework to highlight the significance of complex and chaotic life experiences in fostering personal growth and development (Ivtzan et al., 2016). Drawing inspiration from Campbell's (1949) seminal work, this approach aids individuals in reflecting on their self-perception and transcending limiting perspectives.

### **Implications of a *Dark Side* Perspective**

The *dark side* perspective enhances discussions on emotional chaos. It deepens understanding of the interconnected concepts of liminality, comfort zones, and edge-emotions, revealing the intricate interplay between emotion and cognition within transformative learning (Mälkki, 2012; Mälkki & Green, 2014). Within a state of emotional chaos, the deterioration of mental well-being may go unnoticed, deviating from perceived norms (McClain, 2024). Ivtzan et al.'s (2016) research on the *dark side* of self-awareness emphasizes the gradual appreciation of complexities within personal experiences, enabling recognition and acceptance of perceived negative emotions. The *dark side* perspective provides a framework for internal dialogue, aiding in the comprehension of liminality and facilitating the exploration of comfort zones and edge emotions within a liminal space (McClain, 2024).

A *dark side* perspective does not depict a journey beyond merely acknowledging dark thoughts for positive transformation; it entails actively embracing deep self-awareness and critical reflection (McClain, 2024). Moments of regression highlight the necessity of adopting a *dark side* perspective to navigate struggles within the transformative learning process. References to literature, personal reflections, and academic work offer avenues for examining and re-examining phases of the transformative learning journey in relation to the *dark side* perspective (Ivtzan et al., 2016). Moreover, they affirm that cultivating meaning and compassion begins with the deep self, gradually reaching an integrative level that fosters adversity, resilience, and growth. Emphasizing suffering and compassion illuminates crucial aspects of emotional awareness in the meaning-making process (Ivtzan et al., 2016). Sharing experiences of grappling with mortality aims not to glorify the process but to encourage constructive reflection and appreciation for life's journey (Ivtzan et al., 2016). A *dark side* perspective involves establishing a safety net utilizing diverse sociocultural resources, which can serve as navigational aids to track progress and provide crucial support (McClain, 2024). Employing a strategic pessimistic approach (Ivtzan et al., 2016) in developing this safety net and navigational references ensures

authenticity and critical reflection, allowing individuals to balance assumptions, biases, compassion, humility, vulnerabilities, and confidence in determining what is deemed essential and healthy (McClain, 2024).

### Conclusion

The *dark side* perspective inspires to help cultivate power and voice during life's triumphs and challenges (McClain, 2024). The *dark side* framework provides a foundation for emotional dialogue, aiding individuals in understanding liminality and transitioning through transformative learning phases. This perspective equips learners with the tools to reshape perspectives, discover deep insights, and enhance resilience, ultimately leading to a state of flourishing (McClain, 2024).

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# **Cultural Preparedness of Adult Educators: A Changing Dynamic in Higher Education through Transformative Learning**

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## **Introduction**

Framed by Mezirow's theory of transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000), my study conceptualized the notion of cultural preparedness to provide an operational definition for cultural preparedness in higher education. Through a qualitative research paradigm (Cresswell, 2016; Cresswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), insights into educators' cultural preparedness revealed a complex interplay of individual perspectives, systemic gaps, and collective responsibility. The findings uncovered hidden barriers and opportunities for supporting faculty and students in an increasingly globalized higher education landscape. What is referred to as internationalization at home (IaH) brought attention to the mobility of students (Wächter, 2003) and the home campus's "intercultural and international dimension in the teaching learning process" (Leask, 2005, p. 17). The significance of collaborative communities and support infrastructures was highlighted by focusing on educator reflections, perspectives, and experiences. In this research, I offer an updated dimension to our understanding of internationalization at home (IaH) that extends beyond current definitions and insists on a culturally prepared community.

Using Mezirow's theory and working with the concept of IaH (Beck, 2012b; Leask & Carroll, 2011), I uncovered that transformative learning phases did not have to be linear in nature. A disorienting dilemma was open to interpretation and more widely viewed than a prescribed version of a disorienting dilemma to trigger transformative learning. The definition of culture I used in my study emphasized a fluid and dynamic notion of this term, as described by Nagel (1994) and Barth (1998). Cultural preparedness is conceptualized as extending ourselves out to others, inviting them in, and reframing assumptions to be more inclusive. It involves self-reflection to challenge biases and presumptions. These tenets related exceptionally well to transformative learning through reframing and reflection. This extended abstract is organized by purpose and methodology, a discussion of the findings, and concludes with implications for practice.

## **Purpose and Methodology**

My study aimed to explore educators' understanding of cultural preparedness in settings with international students. The main research question was, *What does cultural preparedness mean in an adult learning environment in a higher education context?* Following an iterative three-phased research design involving focus groups and interviews, I analysed the data using a Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In addition, I conducted a secondary, latent coding data analysis to uncover deeper meaning using Mezirow's theoretical framework. Mezirow described habit forming and a point of view. Using this lens, I worked to discover how educators might better prepare to make the best pedagogical contribution to their students' learning from other countries. This work extended and informed a living theory of transformative learning, given a nuanced understanding of culture (Arulmani, 2018; Barth, 1998; Nagel, 1994) and teaching (Gay, 2018) related to diverse university settings and in my research design, which

allowed for the expression of understanding from my participants in this qualitative research study.

### **Findings and Implications for Practice**

The three key findings were as follows: Cultural Preparedness begins with understanding educator positionality; Cultural Preparedness occurs alongside our students, and Cultural Preparedness grows in community. A fully engaged higher education context of Cultural Preparedness (CP) occurs at the centre of these interrelated findings - when all three relationships are present. The importance of transformative learning is evident in the research findings. In contrast, however, transformative learning was not found to be linear or include all aspects of the theory, making this theory a living and evolving theory. When I applied the ten phases of transformation and framing and reframing references, I saw evidence of four of the ten phases in the data. I noted that transformations could be “epochal or incremental,” as described by Mezirow and Taylor (2009, p. 23). What was clear is that four of the ten phases of the adult learning theory emerged; however, these four phases were also not linear, suggesting other less direct pathways to transformation. Western higher education adult learning institutions must recognize that our student demographics have changed, and educators need leadership that embraces caring, engagement, and culturally competent approaches to academic leadership, research, and scholarship. Participants in this study recognized they are privileged persons in that social inequality is pervasive in all social relationships, and those with more privilege may have more power. Practicing a Pedagogy of Care” (Melling & Pilkington, 2018; Motta & Bennett, 2018), faculty unions and university administrators can work together to recruit educators who bring culturally diverse, international, racial, language, and Indigenous backgrounds to the academy to address severe institutional underrepresentation (Pirbhai-Illich et al.,2023). Recognizing our responsibilities to act against modern racism (Hogarth & Fletcher, 2018) and being partners through creating diversity action groups is only a beginning point to act against inequalities. As this research identifies, our cultural preparedness comes from a place of caring and remains underwhelmed when not all of the community partners are engaged. By illuminating the nuances of cross-cultural teaching experiences, we will significantly foster more inclusive and equitable learning environments.

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## **Radicalization in Everyday Life. Cultivating Informal Learning Practices**

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**Abstract:** The research moves from the idea of “microradicalization” (Bailey & Edwards, 2016; Fabbri & Melacarne, 2023). Adult educational theories will be used to explore the potentiality of informal learning to prevent radicalization processes. Four practices differing in level and context (individual/institutional/social/work) are analyzed: the story of a person who becomes radicalized but does not adopt violent behavior (individual); the organizational practice of a school reflecting on how to manage the challenge of multiculturalism (institutional); the narrative practices of a neighborhood grappling with law-and-order phenomena (social); and business practices in a small neighborhood (work).

**Key Words:** informal learning; radicalization; microradicalization

### **Adult Learning and Radicalization**

Studies on the processes of generating radicalized perspectives and practices have grown in recent decades (Neumann, 2015). This happened initially in the wake of socio-political events that rewrote the international agenda and questioned the scholarly communities on multiple levels (Schmid, 2011): how to understand the onset of radicalization phenomena, how to measure radical thinking and what individual or societal factors concur in generating radical thinking, and how to prevent radicalization leading to violence.

Radicalization is a process whereby people adopt an extreme belief system - including the desire to use, encourage or facilitate violence - in order to make an ideology, political project or cause triumph as a means of social transformation (Kundanani, 2015). These beliefs have a multifactorial origin; they are the outcome of individual and social processes. They can arise and radicalize in response to poverty, discrimination and poor material conditions but also within life paths not necessarily of marginality or educational poverty (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2011; Khosrokhavar, 2014). The emergence of radical beliefs does not necessarily generate violent behavior or actions, and it is precisely for this reason that it is possible to intervene as early as the preventive stage with psycho-socio-educational actions.

### **Cases from Everyday Life**

In order to reflect on how Transformative learning theory concepts can be applied to Radicalization studies, case studies based on qualitative design research is presented in the next paragraph.

#### **Jack and the Boundaries of Radicalization**

Jack goes through several critical moments in his life and one of them is his arrest. It is a kind of ‘critical incident’ that he narrates. Jack’s informal network shrinks and moves more and more within a group that shares the same worldview, practices of social struggle and lifestyles.



Jack begins to find even more spaces within which his thinking is radicalized, supported in becoming increasingly impervious to positive dialectics.

Participation in a community center and Jack's ability to manage people and projects provide him with a further opportunity to reinforce the idea that this path was an interesting one to follow. Jack makes his perspectives on the use of violence to impose an idea explicit; he declares himself opposed to it like many of his peers. However, the context he inhabits is in some ways ambiguous, offering potential spaces to transition from the status of radical militant to terrorist.

Jack's perspectives do not change over time, they remain the same. Even when this story was collected, Jack reaffirmed his belief that 'housing is a universal right' and if there are vacant spaces it is only right that they are occupied by those in need.

What makes Jack's thinking radical is not just the ideology, it is the practice in which he participates that reinforces his perspective. This practice has an implicit message: either you are in and share the cause, or you are out. So far, the story told is to some extent what Mezirow (1991) would call a process of assimilating new knowledge into old patterns of meaning. There are no events that are not read within the ideological perspective.

Jack becomes more aware of the implicit rules that guided his life and activism practices. On the one hand, it is experience that prompts this reflection. His need to have a free space for action, which was being restricted by the explicit and implicit rules of the 'Leoncavallo' community center. The awareness that many of his friends were embarking on a dead-end road, mixed with violent actions, including the use of weapons and drugs. Jack says he was to some extent always open and even intrigued and fascinated by the 'worlds of marginality'. He himself chose to live with them. His perspectives of meaning remained stable until two assumptions were challenged, two perspectives of meaning that were important to Jack: to maintain an autonomy of judgment and to be able to carve out spaces to grow personally and professionally. The moment his environment of reference became too exclusive, potentially violent and criminal, implicitly 'clan-like' and threatening, the time came for Jack to abandon that path.

It's the famous point of no return when you basically can't go forward anymore, because on one hand you are so compromised on the other hand it's the others who prevent you from going back. Being inside radicalization means being able to understand not the point from which you cannot escape but the point of no return and violence towards people, that is that cold moment when you say, well let's go shoot this guy's legs, that is: on one hand there is a story that tells me, "you all think alike" but usually inside, so this mechanism, there is always someone who manipulates or tries to manipulate is actually the one who has one foot in and the one who sometimes gets saved because he leaves.

This story tells us of a small but important transformation. It is not about redemption. Even today, Jack does not totally disown his choices, he vindicates them like many of the ideas he held as a young man. He feels more consciously that what saved him from undertaking criminal actions was his need to continue reading and informing himself, even on subjects contrary to his ideology. But, above all, his words seem to emphasize that in his case the strongest resilience factor was his constant need to have autonomous space for action, realization and thought. Ultimately, Jack found himself in a space that was very unstructured formally (social center) but with very structured and hierarchical implicit dynamics. His radicalization process is in fact a process of validation first and accommodation later.

## **Empty School**

In field investigations (Melacarne & Fabbri, 2020), we have encountered case studies where schools are emptying out due to the presence of students with migrant backgrounds exceeding a certain “threshold” level.

Parents withdraw their children from a school where that “threshold” level of presence becomes intolerable for them, as “foreigners” are perceived as a threat and obstacle to their children’s path of education. The children, in turn, translate this assumption with a perspective of discriminatory meaning and action. The partner with whom they play soccer suddenly becomes a danger to their own future careers.

Looking at this situation from the perspective of learning processes, it emerges that the fears, conflicts of interest and encountered values focus in on a sense of threat which is felt in the face of visible and intrusive forms of difference. Parents’ depictions are built on the data of increasingly exponential growth and presence of students with migrant backgrounds. This example is significant because it highlights how, in the face of conflicts of interest and value, reductionist processes and instrumental logics are activated rather than processes of collective inquiry through which new views can be perceived, de-ideologize arguments, find data and evidence to found different points of view and open up to processes of knowledge building.

Schools, therefore, become one of the terrains that magnify (Piette, 2003) the issues running through and characterizing multicultural societies and, on the other hand, confirm the convergence toward national models of integration, albeit historically created and conceived as different. School also turns out to be the ideal arena in which an illustration of how the interactions that occur there organize and define teaching and its transmission, sometimes formally, sometimes informally (Hirsch, & Amiraux, 2016). How do teachers take ethnic-cultural diversity into account in their pedagogical actions? Are the parents who withdraw their children from schools that have, in their opinion, become too multi-ethnic aware of the educational implications this decision has on their children?

## **Shop**

When you walk through the streets of the Italian scene you observe a composite commercial fabric. What emerges immediately is the heterogeneity of the set of human and non-human elements that are positioned in this space. The eye (but also hearing, sometimes smell) is captured and constantly stimulated by diversified inputs: lights, colours, sounds, settings that refer to a multifaceted painting. The puzzle of historic shops, ethnic restaurants and Italian cuisine, artisan shops and clothing stores flanked by minimarkets, emporiums, fruit and vegetable shops, phone center services and car washes, some of which have clear references to affiliations different cultures, can be constituted as the material reification of the construct of multiculturalism. These spaces indicate that different commercial traditions exist and that these can coexist; customers will decide how to visit them, making use of shops linked to their own ethnic-cultural background or even entering those that deviate from them.

Around small shops and ethnic shops it is not uncommon to come across groups of people standing in the spaces in front of the entrances to the premises. Beyond their instrumental function, people meet, discuss and exchange useful information around shops. The border of the shop extends and the space of the threshold gives rise to new places for daily micro-socialisation. The informal conversations that originate from these moments of aggregation can be read as those devices that facilitate access to networks in which one recognizes oneself as resources for building bonds in support of inclusion processes. These relationships allow us to address the

complexity of a daily life that is multi-ethnic (and sometimes marginalizing) through the exchange of knowledge and experiences. You rely on your family network or on the network of knowledge generated within the various communities you belong to in the area.

Thus, the ways in which the thresholds of shops and sidewalks are inhabited and engaged in can be taken as emerging constructs that represent a metaphor for the resignification of some spaces in the neighborhood. What seems to be emerging is an emerging model in which places of small business become cultural laboratories where people can socialize their knowledge. The open question that remains is how to give prominence and relevance to these forms of knowledge that arise from the bottom, from daily socialization, and which rewrite some of the coordinates of the use of urban spaces? How can we valorise that set of practices emerging from the pool of unexpected interlocutors and which can relaunch the life of the neighbourhood? How to intercept the possible internationalization trajectories that informal networks of traders with a migratory background can generate, in order to build potential strategies to renew commercial arenas and remain competitive?

### **A Neighborhood Like Others. The Case of Retail That Brings Together and Divides**

As anticipated, the neighborhood studied is one of many that make up the population of a medium-sized town in central Italy, in which foreign residents amount to 12,536, compared to a total population of 99,179 inhabitants (ISTAT data as of 01.01.2019). It is a widespread photograph, which immortalises those places which have long incorporated processes of multiculturalisation (Catarci & Fiorucci, 2015) and which are struggling with the search for ways of managing diversity, which are ultimately learning to build a new way of inhabiting the same space. Foreign citizens represent 12.6% of the total population of the provincial territory of reference and, from a demographic point of view, there has been an increase in the foreign population of 186.26% from 2000 to 2016.

As in many other urban contexts, in the neighborhood in question, in a few years the composition of the population has radically changed, a phenomenon which in some cases has become a reason for conflict on various fronts: the quality of the environment in which one lives (one's neighborhood, one's own street), the social control of space, the relationships between different communities, the perception of cultural diversity within commercial establishments.

A background fact of this reality concerns the economic structure of the neighborhood. It expresses an economic fabric made up of small and medium-sized commercial businesses, restaurants, bars and retail shops. Historic and luxury shops still remain open on the main road that runs through it, selling clothing and medium-high range household products. Alongside these, ethnic restaurants coexist and small shops selling textile repairs and artisanal products have been reborn. The economic fabric has also incorporated many clear signs of the increase in cultures present in this urban space. The narrative that remains predominant has described the neighborhood as degraded, dangerous and dirty in many areas. This is certainly to the detriment of a retail culture which instead claims a different history, fearful on the one hand of the 'bad reputation' that can settle and which could consequently reduce the volume of business, but also aware that the complexity with which the neighborhood has evolved is an unstoppable and, for some, promising trait.

The shop is a free zone from a cultural point of view, in which an implicit rule applies: here we do not exchange culture, we do not negotiate an identity, it is not legitimate to enter into personal choices. Interactions between different people become possible, easier to manage, because they are excluded from the order of public discourse. It is the place, its commercial

configuration that excludes it a priori. Outside the shop everything can go back to how it was before. Citizens can hold firm to some beliefs while remaining customers. Others revise their patterns of meaning. Traders are clear that a multi-ethnic neighborhood is neither an advantage nor a disadvantage, it is the new arena to deal with. It is the new condition of practicing the profession, which presupposes different management, which requires attention and new management methods (Mantovan, 2016). How to talk about the development prospects of an evolving neighborhood that doesn't fit into a framework of security gossip and that wants to preserve the soul of commerce?

### Conclusions

Without ignoring or underrepresenting the persistent marginalizing positionings, the dichotomous and polarizing visions, the cognitive blindness that does not take into account the structural presence of ethnic-cultural differences in the life and work contexts that we inhabit every day, in this contribution we have attempted to focus on the spotlight towards that undergrowth of processes that swarm, sometimes underestimated, in everyday life. Hence, shops, workshops, thresholds and sidewalks can be seen as informal learning contexts (Marsick & Watkins, 2018; Marsick & Neaman, 2018; Fabbri, Bracci & Romano, 2021). It is starting from some relational instances and the need to manage contradictory and complex situations that traders with a migratory background have opened trajectories of re-signification of urban spaces linked to small-scale commerce. The production of situated knowledge also derives from the possibilities for comparison that originate from frequenting neighborhood shops, which is socialized within the coordinates of the informal aggregations that gather in front of the shops. Traders with migrant backgrounds learn through experience-sharing processes and through experience itself (Marsick & Watkins, 2018; Marsick & Neaman, 2018). These forms of informal learning are linked to the challenging processes posed by settings characterized by a high multi-ethnic rate which fit within broader monocultural landscapes, are intertwined with the norms that regulate daily life and doing business and are collective and social. In this trajectory, it is possible to think of a system based on informality in which shops and workshops become places of micro-socialization of knowledge, practices and action strategies. A bond of trust, the sharing of divisions and objectives and that of previous experiences constitute elements that seem particularly relevant to facilitate these learning processes. This is how shopkeepers with a migratory background mobilise, organize themselves, experiment with new working practices, transform the context in which they have entered and produce new ideas and perspectives.

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## **Educating For a Sense of Community. Ex-Post Reflections from a Research Study**

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**Abstract:** The contribution critically reflects on the space for change engendered Sars-Cov-2 pandemic crisis as potentially rich with new perspectives beginning from a study conducted by the Graduate School for Environmental Studies (ASA) of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart that considers the civic activism triggered by a fundraising drive activated primarily to respond to the health emergency in the territory of Brescia, as a province among the most affected by the lethal effects of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, as an emblematic phenomenon.

Assuming that the culture of sustainability today represents a form of social capital that indicates the degree of civic cohesion, institutional collaboration, and bonds of solidarity (Malavasi, 2017), the study of Graduate School for Environmental Studies (ASA) highlights the critical and transformative contribution of education to foster bottom-up management of “the commons” and processes of community engagement in an emergent phase of social distancing.

Moving from a mix-method research approach, the study aims to carry out an exploratory inquiry with regard to the role played by organizations in an area in overcoming a condition of paralysis and inanity induced by the pandemic crisis and as a contribution to the formation of social consciousness.

**Key Words:** Processi Trasformativi, Comunità, Dono, Organizzazioni

### **From Research Findings, a Reflection for Adult Education in Covid-19 Emergency to Enable Emblematic Participation Processes**

In some territorial contexts, the space for change engendered by the pandemic crisis has urged the development of active citizenship practices even in the time of social distancing. In order to concretize “from below” participation in community life from an ecological perspective (Malavasi, 2007, 2019), it is necessary to activate the transformation of perspectives of meaning that, by conferring a common horizon of meaning, substantiate so-called communities of practice (Wenger, 1998).

Interpreting in a transformative way (Mezirow, 2003) the participatory processes that gave rise to an unprecedented form of community dwelling in one of the provinces most affected by the lethal effects of the Covid-19 emergency, the research conducted by the Alta Scuola per l’Ambiente (ASA) investigates the role of learning involved in a fundraising model activated to respond primarily to the health emergency, but also proving to be an emblematic “training model” that increased the resilience (Vaccarelli, 2017) of the territory through a hybridization of local skills and a rethinking of collective identity. Emphasis is placed on the human capacities that at the time of the impoverishment of human contact have made it possible to restore a community biography (Cadei, 2022) in which the expertise of the organizations present on the territory have converged in an ecosystemic logic. For an understanding of the phenomenology of giving, it was intended to privilege according to a mix-method perspective (Trincherio, Robasto, 2019) the case study research strategy (Stake, 1994) in order to different reasons: firstly, because

the processes of a participatory nature that determined the emancipation of the local community from the pandemic emergency are investigated; secondly, because of the “extraordinary” and highly contextual character connoting the nature of the phenomenon investigated; and finally, because of the concreteness that distinguished the territorial experience in terms of responding to organized social needs by reversing directional, mainly top-down logics with which the health system had to measure itself in order to cope with the emergency (Botti, 2020). The research, in fact, examines fundraising in the processes that go beyond the mere activation of a collection and subsequent disbursement, but in the ability to effectively translate the generosity of citizens into goods and services through collaborative territory-hospital coordination. The urge to “make system” induced by the social-health emergency urges the learning of relational knowledge nurturing new organizational principles, which draw inspiration from the desire to rewrite the histories of community relations by treasuring memories, but likewise, by overcoming the boundaries drawn by the narcissistic tendencies of today’s culture.

In order that community practices are not reduced to mere sporadic responses pressed by emergencies, the research helps to highlight the educational-transformative factors that respond to the need for a new outlook aimed at building hybrid organizational logics open to bottom-up active participation. It is a matter of understanding how to give life to participatory communities nourished by a non-separatist, but rather integrated and systemic vision of the relations that can be established in an intense way between economic, social, educational and territorial processes, without ever eluding from the specific territoriality that together constitutes the premise, from which the generation of an intangible value that materializes in “scales of value” attributed to the different forms of knowledge construction moves (Fabbri, 2022, p. 120).

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## **Collaborative Autoethnography as a Way to Negotiate, Survive, and Thrive in Academia**

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Higher education is a microcosm of society where diverse populations are cohabiting. In that environment, positionality impacts how one lives and works, and it influences professional decision-making processes. Faculty of color can be situated in that environment as unique agents because they are usually identified as underrepresented minorities, and conventional higher education has been White, patriarchal, and heterosexual. Their experiences in higher education are very different from faculty who are White and/or male. The authors of this work are a Black woman and an Asian man who have been working in predominantly white institutions in the southeastern region of the United States, and they have often met and discussed their own academic experiences to confirm and reconfirm understandings in their lives. This research examined their educational practices including how their shared narratives help them learn to negotiate their academic culture.

Across twenty years two faculty members have used collaborative autoethnography as a research process to examine and transform their educational practices. Autoethnography is a qualitative research methodology that focuses on deeply understanding one's own culture, beliefs, and practices (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2015) and is a useful tool to also explore one's own identities and positionalities in unique social contexts. The authors of this work used collaborative autoethnography, which focuses on exploring a phenomenon and culture from the perspective of the self through concurrent or sequential systematic research by two or more scholars. In this case, the authors of this work collaborated and reflected on their own academic and teaching experiences using various data collection methods such as face-to-face meetings at their national conferences, discussions over zoom, and phone conversations during weekly commutes. These faculty of color had two major areas that they faced and discussed during their academic careers: learning to facilitate during classroom teaching and managing their careers.

While individual reflexivity is crucial to the process of autoethnography, the act of recalling takes on a more structured path when doing a collaborative autoethnography (Johnson-Bailey, 2021). The method used in this study consisted of examining the researchers' individual academic lives and finding areas of harmony and difference. The researchers found common ground regarding the role that gender and race played in their academic lives. As co-researchers, a Black woman and a Japanese man, they agreed that their gendered and racial differences were parts of their daily interactions (Misawa & Johnson-Bailey, 2019). Although they admittedly carried invisible knapsacks of privilege and disenfranchisement (McIntosh, 1995), the researchers found the commonality in their journey of transitions, similarities, and differences.

In the process of collaborating in discussions, the researchers examined two areas: their teaching, and how they learned to negotiate the academic culture. The faculty members used reflexivity to explicitly present and explore their connections to career dilemmas in higher education (Pillow, 2003). The pair experienced significant transformative learning experiences as they managed the promotion and tenure process, survived bullying, and transitioning through the faculty ranks and progressing into administration (Misawa, 2015; Phelps, Thomas, Ray, & Johnson-Bailey, 2020). These scholars used autoethnographic methods to explore the dilemmas

with the intent to make explicit any inherent biases that they brought to the research, hoping to lay bare the power dynamics. Using journals, teaching reflections, interviews and personal communications with students and colleagues, they critiqued problems that occurred in their teaching praxes and in their careers and used their positions on the margins to not only speak truth to power, but to open up a dialogue in the field that would engender future research and transformative learning.

As scholars of color in the field of Adult Education in the United States, the scholars used their theoretical frames of Black Feminist Thought and Queer-Crit Theory, which focus on the intersectionality of race, gender, and sexual orientation, to develop their pedagogical praxes. As former teaching partners, they have successfully blended their lived experiences and used their theoretical frames to design classrooms in adult education that are safer spaces for adult learners from the margins to the center (hooks, 2000, 2015) and classrooms where they deploy tools that are grounded in social-justice and that possess a race-based and gender-consciousness.

The two Adult Education professors taught together for two years and have continued their separate practices at different universities. Collectively the researchers have over fifty years as university professors: thirty-three for the Black woman professor and twenty years for the Japanese male. Looking back across their experiences, they found common themes. Over their semesters together they made space to critically reflect (Brookfield, 2018) on their experiences and the dilemmas that occurred in the process of what they called “teaching while occupying the margins” as they considered themselves as living on the periphery.

During the decades as the professors labored in academia as students and faculty, they also realized that their academic lives and careers as a Black woman and a Japanese gay man were playing out differently than the lives of their White male counterparts. Independently and concurrently through their collaboration, they realized their academic lives were encoded by race and gender or more precisely by racism and sexism and homophobia. As they discussed their teaching practices, they invariably discussed their careers against the backdrop of their classroom existences.

These two adult education faculty developed their shared testimonios or testimonies (Beverly, 1993) and constructed their autoethnographic narratives (Johnson-Bailey, 2021; Malorni, Diaz, Spencer, & Jones, 2023). Their collaborative autoethnography has become more than a telling among colleagues because the doing and performative nature was an empowering and transformative act of resistance. Autoethnographic work necessitates that they each talked and talked back in this collaborative effort (Chang, Longman, & Franco, 2014). The researchers’ body of work helped them to understand and survive in the ivory tower, and in the act of creating the autoethnographic work, Johnson-Bailey wrote in her journal, “We resisted, thrived and were transformed.”

The considerations on the critical incidents from their practice were essential to assessing and understanding the cultural context, which includes the social and political setting. Foremost in their classroom practices, the adult education professors took a humanistic approach to teaching --- rejecting instrumentality (Knowles, 1977; St. Clair, 2002) as a way to operationalize the teaching/learning exchange with their adult learners. Therefore, the students’ experiences and knowledge were essential in driving discussions (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). Since adults are autonomous, the concept of self-direction was essential to creating a setting where the students were motivated to learn. Indeed, the resulting transformative learning (Mezirow, 2018) claimed to be experienced by a few of the adult learners only occurred because of the deep dialogues that became a regular occurrence. The lifelong learning concepts, adult education

tenets, and transformative learning were compatible with the theoretical frames of the two adult education faculty members.

However, the transformative learning of the professors that the researchers noted across the years was spurred by the disorienting experiences they had across the decades of teaching and living as academics who are in the minority in their workplaces---as a Black and Asian at the Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). The Adult Education professors taught together and over several semesters made space to critically reflect (Brookfield, 2018) on their experiences and the problems that occurred in the process. Their considerations on the critical incidents from their practices and in their academic careers were essential to assessing and understanding the cultural context, which includes the social and political setting.

The Black woman scholar brings tenets from Black feminism and feminist pedagogy (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997; Elwell & Buchanan, 2021; Fisher, 2001; hooks, 1994; Maher & Tetreault, 1994; Misawa & Johnson-Bailey, 2019), which employs a political framework that involves consciousness raising, activism, and a caring and safe environment (Lee & Johnson-Bailey, 2004). Implicit in this perspective is an understanding of the universality of gender oppression and a critique of Western rationality, male-centered theories, and unequal social power relations. In addition, there is an emphasis on connected teaching (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997), in which teachers and students jointly construct knowledge, engage in self-reflection, and practice self-revelation.

The queer scholar of color situated his teaching practice in Queer-Crit Theory and Queer-Crit pedagogy, both of which stem from Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) and focus on social justice to include the intersectionality of race and sexual orientation which assumes that conventional education has been White/Eurocentric and heterocentric where queer people of color are silenced, ignored, and marginalized (Kumashiro, 2001; Misawa, 2010, 2015, 2022). Queer-Crit pedagogy focuses on bringing critical perspectives to examining power dynamics and equity in sociocultural environments (Misawa & Johnson-Bailey, 2019).

### **Pedagogical Praxis Shaped by Collaborative Autoethnographic Teaching Narratives**

The duo's teaching praxes was linked to their research. Therefore, their classroom experiences inspired their research and their research supported and shaped the development of their praxes. These scholars identified reoccurring disorienting dilemmas that were connected to their students' hostility and their antagonistic reactions to the readings, wherein the political agendas and credibility of the authors of the readings and the data were questioned regarding their authenticity. Teachers usually talk to each other to share their educational narratives and try to understand what is going on in their own teaching practice (McNiff, 2017). Oftentimes, they use their narratives as a way to explore their own journeys as educators. As an Asian male professor and a Black woman professor, the authors discussed how being non-White professors in predominantly White research institutions influenced their teaching practice using personal and teaching journals and notes from their various conversations. The teaching journals contained the researchers' thoughts on their teaching experiences in class and on their strategies to handle the classroom dilemmas. They followed Brookfield's (1995) reflective strategy, *teaching logs*, to capture what they thought was important in their teaching and planning processes each week, in an attempt to address the incidents or events that were surprising or distressing.

Incidents in class, such as the confrontations, and hostility and resistance with the students over the readings that some of the students called "radical" and "one-sided" were aimed towards the professors of color that the students considered interlopers (Delgado & Stefancic,

2017; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1998; Misawa & Johnson-Bailey, 2019). The professors found these occurrences disorienting dilemmas that made them feel anger or fear in their classroom and they discussed how their self-examination and collaborative examination of the event was a critical assessment of their praxes that led them to recognize what was behind the students' reactions and the classroom incidents. In response, they planned a course of actions, adjusting their praxes and developing strategies for classroom management. In analysis, the researchers moved through stages one through six in Mezirow's ten stages of transformation: 1) experiencing a disorienting dilemma; 2) conducting a self-examination despite the fear and anger they were experiencing; 3) critically assessing what was occurring in their classroom; 4) dealing with feelings of fear and anger and realizing that things have to change; 5) exploring options; and 6) creating a plan of action (Mezirow, 2000).

### **Negotiating Encrypted Places in the Academy Using Autoethnography**

The collaborative autoethnographic conversations about the researchers' academic lives began unintentionally when the junior faculty member, who was a student, was experiencing bullying and subsequently turned to the senior faculty member for advice. As their conversations deepened about the phenomena it was realized that bullying was a common occurrence for these disenfranchised faculty members (Johnson-Bailey, 2015; Misawa, 2010). As their talks progressed, they assessed that the racism, sexism, and homophobia directed many of the negative occurrences around bullying. In separate writings the researchers produced narratives on being bullied: *Academic Incivility and Bullying as a Gendered and Racialized Phenomena* (Johnson-Bailey, 2015) and *Racist and Homophobic Bullying in Adulthood: Narratives from Gay Men of Color in Higher Education* (Misawa, 2010). Although the narratives were written unconnectedly, the two were enabled in the development of their collaborative narratives through their discussions and the painful testimonies (Beverly, 1993) that they shared. In recounting their stories and simultaneously coming to comprehend that they shared a bullying narrative, they assessed that bullying manifested differently in their lives than what they had observed in the experiences of their White colleagues. For example, the bullying against them was not necessarily performed by a person who possessed more power, like a senior colleague or an administrator. But in their experiences, bullying could come from a student or a similarly situated colleague or from a student if that person functioned with a system that privileged that person by virtue of their membership in the dominant White majority (Johnson-Bailey, 2015; Misawa, 2010, 2015).

While bullying prompted the researchers' foray into examining their careers, their exchanging of stories over the years have been dominated by what was happening in their careers; therefore their most intense consideration were around significant career markers, particularly the promotion and tenure process. As first-generation students and first generation academic professionals, the two faculty of color had limited social capital and role models in regards to negotiating their careers (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2008). Additionally, they also understood that the path to achieving promotion and tenure was different and less successful for faculty of color (Bronstein, Rothblum, & Solomon, 1993; Diggs, Garrison-Wade, Estrada, & Galindo, 2009; Guillaume & Apodaca, 2022; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2008; Menges & Exum, 1983).

Since the two professors both have research agendas that in part center on their positionalities (race, gender, sexuality), they often explored how their intersectional identities shaped their workplaces (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2008; Misawa, 2015). One recurring experience that the researchers share is the reaction to their research, which ranges from passive

resistance to hostility. In response to their struggle to conduct and to publish their research, a requirement for career success, the two carried an understanding they needed to make the challenging and difficult subject matter of their manuscripts accessible and digestible. In endeavoring to render provocative research as apolitical, the researchers used strategies that they honed as part of their classroom management practices, such as being discerning about the materials cited to support their research and deliberately deconstructing and constructing arguments holistically. Additionally, the momentous and vital promotion and tenure process provided lessons for the two professors on how to manage difficult circumstances---which led to numerous discussions about the process of publishing research on race, gender, and on personal critical incidents.

### Conclusion

These two faculty members of color, a Black woman and a Japanese man, were transformed into activists during their academic sojourns. Individually, each of the academics experienced disorienting dilemmas (Carter & Nicolaidis, 2023; Mezirow, 2000) at their PWIs because of their race, gender, and sexuality, encountering and addressing their dilemmas initially by researching how race, gender, and sexuality impacted the lives of other academics of color. Firstly, the researchers separately engaged in narrative analysis of their academic incidents that caused them distress. To make meaning of their lives, they recalled, reflected, and reviewed the stories that comprised their lives, grouping occurrences to find patterns and to understand what was happening (Johnson-Bailey, 2021), progressing through self-examination and a critical assessment of their assumptions (Mezirow's phases one and two). The researchers initially used narratives and subsequently collaborative autoethnographic narratives as intimate expressions, a way to reveal, and a way to build a connection and a way of deciphering the surrounding world. Over the course of attending educational conferences and working collaboratively on social justice research, the academics began to work together on their shared ethnographies. Their autoethnographic collaborations were essential to their transformative learning, as they progressed through the phases outlined by Mezirow (2000) and their shared narratives centered on teaching experiences and critical career incidents

Firstly, these researchers believe that the intersection of their perspectives provides a subtext that led to transforming the way spaces for teaching and learning can be created. Their work together encourages student participation and student empowerment. For them, teaching and learning is not just about the content but also about the people who are and will be affected by what is taught and understood. Like Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) stated, this approach is “about a collective transformation” (p. xi) that occurs with and between teachers, students and those who will be impacted by their emerging knowledge and gained skills in what Gay (2013) refers to as culturally responsive teaching and what is cited in the *Handbook of Race and Adult Education* (Sheared, Johnson-Bailey, Colin, Peterson, & Brookfield, 2010) as holistic teaching.

Secondly, the career dilemmas experienced by the researchers led them to develop strategies to manage their careers that can best be described as ‘different’ than the patterns and paths of their White male colleagues. However, the two professors went beyond sharing stories and constructing collaborative autoethnographic narratives and developing appropriate tactics. One case to that point is that in 1993 the Black woman faculty member, in reaction to understanding the difficulty of conducting and publishing research on race, took on the leadership of a national academic research pre-conference on race, the *African Diaspora Pre-Conference*, which is attached to the national Adult Education Research Conference. The

purpose of the conference is to provide a forum for graduate students who research issues of race and culture and to provide a platform that has consistently led to publication. Similarly, the junior faculty member's work and interest in bullying that came from the disorienting dilemmas that occurred in the classroom and in his career, led to his development of a recurring national pre-conference in 2016, the *Bullying, Incivility, and Violence in Adult, Higher, Continuing, and Professional Education Pre-Conference*.

While progressing through Mezirow's ten phases, of particular note is how their plan of action (the pre-conferences, phase six), became a forum for transformative learning. As a way to challenge and make space in their disciplinary fields of adult education and leadership studies, these education scholars created pre-conferences attached to their national association's annual meeting that would provide a place for cutting edge research that addressed social justice issues regarding racism (and other intersecting positionalities) and bullying. They endeavored to use their positions on the margins to not only speak truth to power, but to open up a dialogue in the field that would engender future research and transformative learning. Their impact and success can be gauged by the many publications generated by their conference participants.

By developing the pre-conferences to impact and promote research on race, gender, sexuality, and bullying, the dyad took on new roles and were deliberate in planning a course of action to make change --- Mezirow's six, seventh, and eighth stages of transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000). Furthermore, the fact that their research endeavors (the pre-conferences) have lasted under their leadership for extended periods has predictably built competence and self-confidence that is based on developing a new perspective, phases nine and ten of transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000), thus completing and/or reaching self-actualization as regards Transformative Learning Theory.

In summary, it is important to assert that the individual narratives of the researcher, which led to them developing their collaborative autoethnographic narratives, served the dual purpose of being a qualitative method and a means to promoting transformation. Ultimately, the two researchers found in their experiences and struggles to teach and to progress through academic careers ways and strategies to help them negotiate, survive, and thrive in academia.

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# How Japanese Managers in the Information Technology Industry Experience Cultural Diversity in the Workplace: Host Culture Perceptions in Light of Constructive-Developmental Theory toward Transformation

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**Abstract:** This paper is an abstract of a qualitative study that investigated how individual managers on the cultural host side experienced emerging cultural diversity within the workplace in their home country of Japan in light of their epistemological capacities, i.e., *orders of consciousness* as defined within constructive-developmental theory (Kegan, 1994, 2000). Data was collected through two types of interviews with eight Japanese managers in the information technology industry: in-depth interviews to learn about their experience in workplace cultural diversity, and Subject-Object Interviews to learn about their orders of consciousness (Kegan, 1994, 2000; Lahey et al., 2011). The eight managers demonstrated self-authoring capacity in three variations and reported the effects of linguistic and cultural differences about their working experiences with non-Japanese (i.e., “foreign”) colleagues. They also described newly acquired perceptions about their own cultural assumptions. Furthermore, how they perceived the differences and/or how they acted with the new cultural awareness varied; and their orders of consciousness appeared to be one of the factors that influenced those perceptions and actions.

**Key Words:** Constructive-Developmental Theory, Orders of Consciousness, Workplace Cultural Diversity, Host Culture Perceptions

## Introduction

In recent years, building a society that welcomes and accommodates the cultural others has become an increasingly important social and economic interest in Japan as well as many other countries. Many countries face the need to cast a new eye toward relevant diversity that has been inherent in their own societies but formerly overlooked. Furthermore, some face the additional need to find ways to create a new social order and to re-examine values in the face of rapidly changing multicultural demographics. This multifactorial situation can be experienced by different stakeholders, and to differing degrees, as a “disorienting dilemma” (Mezirow, 2000) that is difficult to endure. Yet, such circumstances may offer a unique opportunity to critically reflect on their cultural assumptions, i.e., a culturally formed *frame of reference* (Mezirow, 2000), to positively transform individuals, and eventually society itself.

Of course, such transformation as a result of cultural diversity does not occur unconditionally but depends on a variety of factors. At an individual level, Kegan (1994) discussed that one’s epistemological capacity is concerned with how to perceive and deal with cultural differences. Nevertheless, little research has empirically investigated this correlation (Postier, 2015). At a social level, transformation should be promoted by the interaction of culturally diverse players. In this regard, it is important to involve those on the cultural host side, given their influence as a social majority. However, there are few studies about how individuals on the host side experience the cultural diversity emerging within their home country.

Against this backdrop, this exploratory study was initiated in Japan, one of the so-called homogeneous countries—where, nonetheless the ratio of foreign residents has increased in recent decades and is expected to continue to do so: It was about 0.8% of the population in the late 80’s; it is about 2.5% today; and it will possibly exceed 10% by 2070 (Immigration Services Agency, 2024; Kikuchi, 2023).

This study was guided by three research questions: (1) How did eight Japanese managers in the information technology industry describe benefits and challenges of the cultural diversity that foreign colleagues brought to their workplaces; (2) how did they describe their actions and guiding values for working successfully in a culturally diverse workplaces; and (3) if/how their respective epistemological capacities explain any patterns in their formulation of such descriptions?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was primarily guided by Robert Kegan’s constructive-developmental theory (C-DT; 1982, 1994, 2000). A distinctive feature of this theory is that it seeks adult development not in the content of *thinking* (what one thinks), but in the epistemological *structure* (order of consciousness) that organize one’s thinking, feeling, and social relating (1994). In this regard, an individual’s development means to have more complex structures (1994). The theory defines four orders of consciousness in adulthood: instrumental, socialized, self-authoring, and self-transforming (1994) as well as four transitional positions between each order (Kegan, 1982; Lahey et al., 2011).

Kegan (1994) discussed that culture is concerned with different values and styles, whereas C-DT is concerned with an increasing degree of autonomy and self-regulation in exercising such values and styles. This argument suggests that, with more developed epistemological capacities, people are likely to become more aware of their cultural assumptions and more autonomously choose to act upon them or to temper them.

### **Research Design**

This qualitative study was exploratory in nature as cultural host perceptions toward cultural diversity in light of C-DT is a little-studied area. Eight Japanese managers in the information technology industry were recruited as study participants according to specified criteria. Data was collected through two types of interviews: in-depth interviews were conducted by me, the primary researcher, to learn about their experience in workplace cultural diversity; and subject-object interviews (SOIs) were conducted by another Japanese certified SOI expert to assess their orders of consciousness (Kegan, 1994, Lahey et al., 2011). The data analysis was also twofold: The first phase focused on the in-depth interviews about the subject experiences in workplace diversity to answer the first and second research questions; and the second phase cross-checked both sets of interview data to answer the third research question.

### **Findings**

The SOI identified that all eight managers who voluntarily participated in this study had self-authoring capacity in three variations: (a) five with both socialized and self-authoring structures; (b) two with firm self-authoring structures; and (c) one with both self-authoring and self-transforming structures. All of them recognized the effects of cultural differences on their working experiences with foreign colleagues and their newly acquired awareness on their own

cultural assumptions. They also reported their efforts and guiding values to include and/or build a team with their foreign colleagues.

Meanwhile, there were variations in their experiences that were suspected to be related to their order of consciousness: how they perceived the differences, how they acted (or did not act) on their newly acquired cultural awareness, and/or their focus in terms of including cultural others. For instance, participants with more complex epistemological capacities (variation-b and -c) seemed to be more likely to autonomously decide actions in conflicts that cultural difference brought about guided by their internal values. It was also suspected that affective responses to the ambiguity and new situations that linguistic and cultural differences brought about were somewhat influenced by the epistemological capacities (variation-a versus -c).

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Findings of this study suggest that the orders of consciousness were effective in explaining some dimensions of the participants' experiences in a culturally diverse workplace within Japan's technology industry. Nevertheless, due to the limited variation in the order of consciousness (all of the participants had self-authoring capacities), the diverse context of participants' experiences, and the small sample size of this study, further research would be needed in order to gain a clearer understanding of what was gleaned from this study.

This exploratory study was initiated to obtain clues about how to shape a societal educational milieu that facilitates society-wide learning to welcome and integrate—rather than resist or avoid—cultural differences introduced by the entry of cultural others into a presumed homogeneous society. Learning Japanese managers' perceptions in light of their epistemological capacities provides insights as to how to design developmentally appropriate supports for those who lead multicultural teams.

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## Decision Making Process: The Case of Judiciary

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**Abstract:** Preventive measures are legal restrictions on an individual's freedom, detached from prior criminal responsibility assessment, designed to fulfill the State's preventive needs. The institutions are required to make prognostic predictions never certain only based on probability. While criminal predictions can be acceptable in the criminal law, in the context of preventive measures, the margin for error becomes more delicate because operate both before and after offense. The contents of this doctoral research, embraced within the paradigm of intersectionality and transformative-learning theory, consider the interrelationships between technical rationality and reflective rationality in the thinking of judges, to read the interdependencies between social systems, categories and thought. Emerge that the prediction of dangerousness is developed through an intuitive method, driven primarily by prudence, sensitivity, and experience. This method lacks a scientific foundation as it can be influenced by deeply variable personal beliefs, liable of judgment bias. The risk is that of a logical distortion of facts, incompatible with the constitutional guarantees and the principle of legal certainty. Becomes useful to ascertain whether sector-specific knowledge and implicit knowledge are sufficient to address complex issues, or if in a transformative-learning perspective, it is possible to propose an interdisciplinary approach based on reflective thinking.

**Key Words:** intuitive judgment, technical and reflective rationality, transformative learning

### Introduction

Personal preventive measures constitute legal constraints on individual liberty, imposed absent an evaluation of prior criminal conduct, to address the state's preventative imperatives (Menditto, 2019). The vague and broad categorization of targeted individuals, as critiqued by Vigano in 2012, has incited allegations of an emergent "suspicion-based jurisprudence". Moreover, these measures often disregard indicators recognized by the social sciences as predictors of future criminal behavior. Agencies tasked with enforcing these restrictions are compelled to assess potential hazards. Yet, such forecasts are inherently uncertain and rely predominantly on probabilistic assessments. Although personal assessments may be justified with concrete evidence, such as a documented offense, the scope for inaccuracies expands under preventive mandates, which are applied before and subsequent to any criminal activity (Jeschech, 1996, Marinucci et al., 1991).

The assessment of danger often resorts to an intuitive approach, primarily guided by caution, perceptiveness, and past experiences. This approach is devoid of empirical validation and is susceptible to the influence of fluctuating personal convictions and emotional states, thereby elevating the likelihood of factual misinterpretation. Such practices stand in contradiction to the foundational constitutional rights and the principle of legal certainty in our

judicial framework. Therefore, in a legal environment where practitioners are routinely involved in complex adjudications, integrating intersectionality and transformative learning could potentially refine decision-making practices, making them more relevant to the evolving legal and societal landscapes where adjudicators function.

### **A Possible Safeguard: Interdisciplinarity**

From an epistemological vantage, there exists a consistent discourse advocating for legal science to engage in interdisciplinary exchanges, especially with the social sciences. This collaborative stance facilitates a more comprehensive grasp of the legal “phenomenon,” encapsulating not just its formative and interpretive elements but also the wider milieu in which laws operate and their effects on those governed by them (Blengino et al., 2021). Within this framework, critical reflection emerges as a pivotal mechanism enabling legal practitioners to circumvent precipitate judgments swayed by cognitive biases (Kahneman et al., 1974).

Although legal professionals possess robust training in technical-legal realms, their expertise in psycho-socio-anthropological and educational dimensions is frequently deficient. Augmenting their education in these areas would equip them to navigate situations extending beyond strict legal boundaries.

Fostering interactions and integration among these disciplines would encourage the development of interpretive models that resonate more closely with the aims of the legal system and its constitutional tenets. Such an approach would shift from a sole reliance on normative paradigms to a more focused consideration of the individuals being evaluated.

### **Decision-Making Processes and Transformative Learning**

This investigation provides an exploratory examination aimed at delineating the factors impacting the decision-making framework of legal practitioners who perform adjudicatory functions, especially in relation to enforcing preventive measures.

The complexities of this domain, transcending mere statutory guidelines, pose a potential for considerable discriminatory practices. Studies on preventive actions, underpinned by the theoretical and conceptual scaffolding of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; McIntosh, 2012; Bello, 2020; Fabbri et al., 2023) and transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991), have evolved through a qualitative hermeneutic-pedagogical methodology, in conjunction with legal-normative analysis. This has fostered a focused exploration into the evolution of professional epistemologies, revealing insights into the essential development of educational tools, curricula, programs, training methods, materials, and evaluative standards that support legal practitioners in enhancing their reflective capacities and critically examining the underlying assumptions influencing their decisions (Mezirow, 2003; Fabbri, 2017; Fabbri et al., 2017).

Judges often face decisions amidst substantial normative and methodological ambiguities, underscoring the urgency for customized professional development programs equipped with specialized training resources. Such initiatives are crucial in scenarios demanding swift decision-making. Emphasizing thorough reflexive engagement typically yields more effective outcomes than reliance on mere anecdotal experiences or instinctual reasoning (Fabbri et al., 2022).

### **Reimagining the Profession**

Field investigations, preceded by an extensive literature review, were undertaken through semi-structured interviews with legal professionals engaged in preventive measures, complemented by participant observation in court settings. It has been observed that certain

judicial decisions rely exclusively on experiential evidence, under the erroneous presumption that this, when combined with normative technical reasoning, suffices to mitigate biases and misconceptions. Initial findings suggest that Italian judges acknowledge the value of reflective thought as a mechanism to enhance the quality of judicial rulings; yet, the practice they deem reflective is actually considered reflective consideration rather than genuine reflective engagement, as the referential frameworks and underlying assumptions are deeply entrenched (Mezirow, 2003). This is of particular concern given that the indoctrination of newcomers into the legal profession is predominantly governed by its more experienced members.

Literature indicates that as individuals assimilate into a professional practice, they are integrated into the traditions of the professional community to which they belong, adopting its conventions, norms, language, and systems of evaluation, together with a spectrum of experiences, semantic awareness, and procedural knowledge. (Fabbri, 2014). This process bears the risk of mimicry without a reflective analysis of action development or reconstruction, the rationale behind actions, and their real-world efficacy. A more authentic learning process would markedly diminish the risk of perpetuating flawed premises and succumbing to cognitive biases.

Echoing Schön's insights, there is a pressing need to supplant static, routine-based interaction models with a dynamic process of continual research and experimentation, informed by complexities and guided by "Reflective Rationality". Consequently, the results reveal that judges frequently rely on what is termed 'technical rationality', which, although crucial for certain procedural elements, fails to capture the full complexity of judicial decisions amidst the diverse social, legal, and moral landscapes, as well as the impacts these have on individuals. The strict adherence to a disorienting, universal technical mindset risks conflicting with a judicial system that no longer views formal and substantive justice as dichotomous, but rather as complementary facets of the same entity.

Therefore, it becomes imperative to critically re-evaluate the educational structures within the legal field and cultivate communities of practice where "novices" and 'seniors' collaborate genuinely to forge new, more enlightened modes of professional practice. This, alongside continuous training and cross-disciplinary cooperation, would facilitate a more sophisticated understanding of uncertain and ambiguous scenarios that demand judicial discernment, and mitigate the reliance on mere experiential judgment, inherently fraught with the danger of bias distortion. This method could also potentially fortify the linkage between law and societal norms, which in numerous cases appears precarious.

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# Digital Transformation: A Catalyst for Transformative Learning for Employees

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**Abstract:** Digital disruption is pervasive yet evasive in its complexity (Kane et al., 2019). Our digital lives change often, and innovations in technology and data permeate all industry sectors. Organizations use digital transformation strategies to adapt to a changing business environment, evolve the customer experience, realize efficiencies, and launch new product offerings. As organizations digitally transform, so do the employees within the organization. Employees and leaders of these organizations are experiencing not only a change in how their work is done but also a shift in the culture and values they are operating within, as well as the expectations of their roles (Murray, 2023; Riordan, 2023).

**Key Words:** Digital Transformation, VUKA, Transformative Learning, Employee Experience, Transformation

## Examining the Experience of Digital Transformation Through the Lens of Transformative Learning

A reported 70% of digital transformation strategies fail to meet the intended business objectives (McKinsey, 2018). While much of the literature regarding digital transformation focuses on the technology and data strategies, the people and organizational aspects of digital transformation are rising in significance. This extended abstract focuses on the employee experiences with digital transformation through the lens of Transformative Learning (TL) theory. Reciprocally, it will also examine Transformative Learning theory in the context of digital transformation and explore the extension and evolution of Transformative Learning theory to today's digital, volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (dVUCA) world.

### Digital Transformation

Digital transformation strategies refer to the shift of organizations to incorporate innovations in technology and data to realize growth, operational efficiencies, and evolve customer experiences (Zaoui & Souissi, 2020; Schallmo et al., 2017; Kane et al., 2019; Leonardi & Neely, 2022). Disruption impacts all facets of the organization, including the technology and data infrastructure and the policies, processes, culture, power dynamics, and people (Kane et al., 2019). While digital transformation strategies are devised and implemented at the organizational or departmental level, the individual employee learns and adapts to the shifting work context. At a minimum, transactional learning occurs with the employee learning to use a new tool or dataset; however, given the fundamental shifts of the workplace and industry context, the employee will experience the transformation of their belief systems about their work and ways of working, values associated with decision making, and encounter increased complexity.

### Transformative Learning

Transformative learning can be considered a metatheory encompassing various learning theories in which individual transformation occurs (Hoggan & Finnagan, 2023; Hoggan & Higgins, 2023). Initially, transformative learning was proposed as a learning process outlined by the ten steps of Mezirow's theory of learning, which began with a disorienting dilemma. Then,

the individual moved through stages of critical reflection and engaged in dialogue to arrive at a new perspective (Mezirow, 1978; Mezirow, 1991). Since its introduction, scholars have explored the learning process Mezirow proposed and explored the meaning of transformation and what transforms adults (Gunnlaugson, 2008; Dirkx et al., 2006; Hoggan, 2016). Another way of examining transformative learning is outside of the learning process to focus on an individual's learning from an experience that fundamentally shifts their meaning-making perspective and transforms them in essential ways.

### **The Employee as a Learner**

Most studies focus on the leaders of digital transformation or the technology and data side of digital transformation. Research is emerging on the employee experience of digital transformation. In a narrative research study, Murray (2023) interviewed and examined the experiences of 25 U.S.-based professionals who had experienced role disruption due to workplace digital transformation. While there were many reported experiences of learning, employees also experienced transformations. Employees exhibited a shift of perspective in their worldview, self-perception, understanding of their locus of control, and mental models of their worldview. The digital transformation experience presented a disorienting dilemma for employees and often increased their capacity for complexity. The study participants were not part of a formal learning experience to support their transformation. Another recent study focused on nonmanagerial employee experiences and emotions regarding digital transformation. Riordan (2023) found that grief and loss were the primary emotions employees experienced, and over 50 expressed emotions were cataloged. Although Riordan (2023) used The Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) as the conceptual frame for understanding their phenomenological study, transformative learning theory also provides a context for analysis. Emotions play an essential and integral role in the transformative learning process (Dirkx, 2008; Mälkki, 2019).

### **Examining Transformative Learning Theory in the Context of Digital Transformation**

From a more rigid perspective, transformative learning theory has been applied to formal learning contexts such as higher education and adult development programs (Hoggan et al., 2019; Ensign, 2019b). However, non-educational environments such as workplaces, career journeys, relationships, and cultural experiences are essential conduits and catalysts for shifts in meaning-making perspectives (Ensign, 2019b). At a minimum, these non-educational experiences create a disorienting dilemma for individuals who need the needed support and practices to shift their perspectives should they choose to do so. There is an opportunity for transformative learning scholars to examine the learning process resulting in a transformation in the experience of shifting circumstances, such as digital transformation, outside of the formal learning environments.

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# **Unearthing Transformative Learning Experience with Autoethnographic Approach: Reflecting on Professional Identity and Lifelong Learning Through Horse-Assisted Coaching**

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**Abstract:** In this autoethnographic study, the role of reflection in professional identity development and lifelong learning, particularly concerning the migrant experience of the researcher, is explored. Anchored in Mezirow's transformative learning theory, which posits that significant life events can induce deep reflection and potentially shift perspectives, this research centers on horse-assisted coaching as a method for reflection. As an experiential learning tool, horse-assisted coaching offers real-time feedback on human emotions and intentions, deepening our understanding of non-verbal cues and fostering self-awareness, empathy, and leadership skills. The researcher, an Asian woman who built her career in the United States, investigates her personal transformative learning processes during the coaching, using data from personal journals, videos, and other materials collected over six months. The study sheds light on the potential of horse-assisted coaching to bolster transformative learning and critical reflection on professional identity and lifelong development, offering valuable insights for diverse professionals in a global context.

**Key Words:** Professional Identity Development, Horse-Assisted Coaching, Transformative Learning, Autoethnography

## **Background**

As a scholar specializing in leadership learning and development with a particular focus on reflection, the researcher has actively engaged with a variety of leadership programs over the years. Recognizing the profound impact of reflection – and sometimes critical reflection – as a key driver of leadership learning and development, the researcher acknowledges the power of reflective practices. Such practices may lead to transformative learning pathways (Mezirow, 2018). Born and raised in Japan, the researcher migrated to the United States to advance her professional career. As she continues to navigate her life, she has often contemplated the evolution of her professional identity. The discovery of horse-assisted reflective activities sparked her curiosity about the potential role of horses in facilitating her identity development (Bilginoğlu, 2021; Stock & Kolb, 2016). This setting is notably unique compared to her previous scholarly and practical experiences in leadership development because it involves interaction with animals – horses that do not communicate in human language. Yet, these horses possess their own will, intentions, sensitivities, and communities, requiring the researcher to engage in non-verbal interaction. Such encounters may facilitate transformative learning experiences, leading to changes in the learner's identity (Illeris, 2014; Mezirow, 2018). Identity is viewed as an adaptive and developmental process that shapes an individual's self-perception from an individual perspective and the perceptions others have of them from a social perspective concerning one's role and societal expectations (Sawatsky, 2018).

### **Problem, Purpose, and Questions**

Limited research exists that examines professional identity development using horse-assisted coaching to support the transformative learning processes. The purpose of the study is to explore the understanding of self in one's identity in the professional means, and the horse-assisted coaching support in the process. The overarching questions are:

- 1) What makes the researcher who she is as a leadership learning and development scholar?
- 2) How have her lived experiences influenced her learning and development in her professional journey?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study employs transformative learning theory, focusing on professional identity in the context of horse-assisted coaching. Transformative learning involves significant cognitive, affective, and social change (Illeris, 2014). Focusing on its emotional dimension, exploring embodied, somatic, spiritual, and unconscious ways of knowing and being can facilitate introspective and transformative change (Baldwin & Motter, 2021). Engagement with symbols, movement, metaphor, and imagination triggers a deep holistic awareness, revealing unexamined feelings and meanings (Baldwin & Motter, 2021; Yorks & Kasl, 2006). This interaction supports a reflective space that facilitates a critical examination of experiences (Lawrence, 2012). Ultimately, transformative learning reshapes identity and self-concept, promoting new narratives of self-understanding, hence supporting professional identity development (Dirkx, 2006; Johnson, 2003; Karpiak, 2003).

As a hands-on learning approach, horse-assisted coaching utilizes interactions with horses to foster personal growth and enhance leadership, communication, and teamwork skills (Kelly, 2014; Meola, 2016). Working with horses provides instant feedback on an individual's behavior, allowing them to understand how they are perceived by others (Meola, 2016). It promotes critically reflective practice by boosting self-awareness and highlighting states of doubt, dilemmas, or re-confirmation (Bilginoğlu, 2021; Stock & Kolb, 2016).

### **Methods**

This study employs autoethnography, which involves drawing from and examining the researcher's personal experiences to connect insights about her identity to broader themes. These themes include cultural norms, communication methods, traditions, symbols, emotions, values, and wider societal and cultural matters (Poulos, 2021). Horse-assisted or equine-assisted coaching is a method in which the researcher collects data through video recordings and reflective notes while participating in the activities (Meola, 2016). The site for the horse-assisted coaching was in the researcher's home country, allowing engagement in activities within her home environment and in her mother tongue. This setting enabled her to step away from her professional sphere established in the United States. Journaling occurred before and after the coaching program to reflect on experiences by reviewing recordings; thus, the total duration of the study spanned over a year.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

The preliminary findings suggest that engagement with horses not only evokes deep emotional and unconscious awareness but also fosters a reflective space for re-examining personal experiences and narratives, ultimately contributing to self-understanding and identity

development (Baldwin & Motter, 2021). During tasks such as walking with horses around the stable, the researcher was compelled to deeply reflect on how she thinks, feels, and behaves. This interaction, devoid of spoken language, allowed the horses to “speak” to the researcher’s inner self through non-verbal cues. The absence of verbal communication meant that rationality and structured conversation were replaced by immediate sensory, emotional, and physical responses, offering a pure form of interaction. As the researcher stepped towards the horses and they moved away, it mirrored her own actions and reactions in a non-verbal dialogue.

Surrounded by the stable environment, the occasional chirping of birds, and the feeling of the breeze under the sunlight, she was removed from her daily professional routines, immersed solely in the moment with the horses. This connection to the outer world explores what it means to be part of a community, how to navigate obstacles, and how the researcher values harmony while working towards goals with others who are significantly different. These experiences challenged her to confront and address moments when assertiveness was necessary to direct the group toward specific goals, ultimately forcing her to reconsider her role as a scholar dedicated to enhancing the field of adult learning and leadership, as well as every interaction with her peers and students. Figure 1 illustrates how the researcher’s reflections on the horses’ unresponsiveness during tasks, where she was instructed to walk with them without using treats or a whip, influenced her non-assertive style and its impact on building a community of practice concerning group dynamics and interpersonal interactions.

### **Figure 1**

*The reflective moments through (non)reaction of horses*



This study underscores the potential of horse-assisted coaching as a powerful tool for exploring and enhancing professional identity through transformative learning processes, suggesting avenues for further research in this innovative area of professional development.

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## Portrayal of Personal Transformation in Indian Feature Films

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**Abstract:** This study explores the educational potential of Indian feature films as immersive case studies for fostering transformative learning in classrooms. Drawing upon transformative learning theory and media studies, the research examines thirty-nine select Indian films spanning eight decades and four languages, depicting journeys of personal transformation. Utilizing a grounded theory approach, the study identifies thematic patterns and constructs an explanatory model of personal transformation. Through systematic analysis, the paper demonstrates the efficacy of using Indian cinema as a pedagogical tool for inspiring reflection and growth in learners. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, educators can leverage the power of cinematic narratives to create engaging learning experiences that promote self-awareness and social change. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on transformative learning and underscores the importance of incorporating diverse cultural perspectives into educational curricula.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Indian Cinema, Personal Transformation, Pedagogical Case Studies, Grounded Theory Approach

### Introduction

Films are strong cultural products that tend to contextually influence the audience with strong narratives (Elinwa, 2020; Rufer, 2014). They have been a source of entertainment, disseminating information and education worldwide (Butler et al., 2009; Hong, 2021; Kubrak, 2020). Focusing on the educational aspect of film consumption, this paper emphasizes on transformative journey of fictitious characters in Indian cinema from the lens of personal transformation.

This paper explores the potential of Indian feature films as case studies for teaching transformative learning in educational settings. It traces the evolution of transformative learning theory and highlights the challenges educators face in implementing transformative methods. Films, particularly Indian cinema, are recognized as powerful tools for facilitating personal growth and reflection due to their ability to depict complex human experiences and societal issues.

Indian cinema offers a diverse range of narratives that resonate with audiences, reflecting the socio-cultural fabric of the nation. Drawing from media studies, this paper argues that films play a significant role in shaping attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, fostering personal growth and transformation.

Building upon existing research on the use of films in transformative learning, this study aims to uncover common thematic threads in select Indian films and construct an explanatory model of personal transformation. The methodology outlines a systematic approach for selecting and analyzing films, leading to the identification of thematic patterns and the development of a processual model of personal transformation.



Through interdisciplinary exploration, this paper seeks to bridge the gap between transformative learning theory and cinematic narratives, offering educators valuable resources for incorporating Indian feature films into transformative learning curricula. By leveraging the power of storytelling, educators can create immersive learning experiences that inspire personal growth, reflection, and social change.

### **Conceptual Background**

Since the appearance of Mezirow's (1978) early work on perspective transformation, the Transformative Learning theory has seen a fair amount of discussion, criticism and extension (e.g.: Fleming, 2022; Hoggan, 2016; Newman, 2012). Further, from a utilitarian perspective, the theory has travelled far and wide. The theory has been applied in areas like tourism, pedagogy, and sustainability (e.g.: Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Rodríguez Aboytes et al., 2020). Quite unsurprisingly, Merriam (2018) holds Transformative Learning theory as one of the three foundational theories in the area of adult learning.

### **Fostering Transformative Learning: Some Pedagogical Considerations**

Mezirow (1991) and Cranton (2006) have provided elaborate advice for fostering transformative learning. However, educators' needs may not be completely met by adapting popular traditional methods like lectures and group activities. Moreover, considering the inherent constructivism, comprehensive longitudinal empirical observation and measurement have been a challenge for transformative learning researchers (Melacarne, 2019; Negi, 2021; Savicki and Price, 2021). Therefore, it may not be convenient for educators to find situationally relevant teaching cases that describe transformative journeys in their entirety (see also Kroth and Cranton, 2014).

Noting this, recent studies have identified novel ways and avenues to improve learning effectiveness. For example, Minnes et al. (2017) advised the usage of reflective writing to foster transformation. Sprint et al. (2018) made a case for art-gallery visits to inspire consciousness-raising. Onosu (2020) recommended the use of cultural immersion for transformative learning. Chalmers University of Technology went to the extent of setting up the Challenge Lab to transform the university towards sustainability (Holmberg, 2014).

Interestingly, nuanced examples of personal transformation are aplenty in fictional literature (Cardon, 2016; Hoggan and Cranton, 2015; Oatley, 2011). Hence, for a more "immersive" experience, it may be a prudent decision by educators to use fictional feature films that depict transformative journeys as case studies.

### **Feature Films as a Medium of Learning**

Media content has been recognized as a great educator in the modern world, inspiring and drawing inspiration from daily life (Fearing, 1947). Particularly, films, whether fictional or dramatized, use stories drawn from lifelike experiences, acting as a mirror of society (Morley, 1992).

Likewise, Indian cinema has always explored and showcased an assortment of stories, reflecting the socio-cultural issues and joys of India. Ranging from the celebration of the collective win of the "White Revolution of India" in *Manthan* (Patel et al, 1976), commenting on rampant corruption through satirical comedy in *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro* (Shah and Shah, 1983), to showcasing the struggles of a homosexual son in a dysfunctional family in *Kapoor and Sons* (Kapoor & Batra, 2016), Indian cinema has faithfully catered to the storytelling tradition in the domestic market.

Consumption of such, media may lead to perceptions of characters and promote self-change (Balabantaray, 2021; Eppler and Hutchings, 2020). Finding its theoretical underpinning in media studies, the Cultivation theory of Gerbner suggests that the higher frequency of consumption of audio-visual media tends to shape our attitudes and beliefs (Gerbner et al., 1973; Morgan et al., 2014). Additionally, guided by a need to assess one's personal and societal worth, drawing comparisons to our own social network, influencers, and celebrities is created and further cemented by the omnipresence of media in the modern world. A desire to mimic the opinion leaders and disregard our own rationales is amplified due to parasocial relationships formed with fictional and non-fictional characters in media (Rosaen et al., 2019) and loose personal ties and weaker familial environments in society

Films are often employed by educators and cinema therapists to demonstrate ethical and moral dilemmas to promote resilience and positive changes (Eppler & Hutchings, 2020). The concept is further investigated in the field of self-learning and personal growth derived from character transformation on the screen (Wolz, 2006; Bal & B, 2021). Films allow watchers to view the situation consciously, observe characters objectively, and learn from characters' strengths (Niemic, 2020; Oliver et al., 2012). For example, *12 Angry Men (Lumet, 1957)*, *Lagaan (Gowariker, 2001)*, *The Devil Wears Prada (Frankel, 2006)*, *The Pursuit of Happyness (Gardener, 2006)*, *Rocket Singh: Salesman of the Year (Amin, 2009)*, and *Inside Job (Ferguson, 2010)*, are some of the popular commercial movies employed by formal educators to demonstrate the concepts of effective business strategies and leadership skills to their learners in a classroom setting (Ayikoru & Park, 2019; Jarvis, 1999).

### **Films as Opportunities for Studying Transformative Learning**

Esmail and Matthews-Roper (2022) discuss the role of films in understanding intricate and layered content. More specifically, their study focuses on the role of six elements of transformative learning in effectively depicting and teaching complex subject matters. For this, they have employed a quantitative approach to examine the role of films with environmental themes in shaping the attitudes and beliefs of degree-level students and the emotional engagement it invokes, inspiring action and deeper engagement with one's natural environment and climate change.

Similarly, Spirou's work (2016) delves into actor Robin Williams' films, where he notably portrays the character of an ideal educator who ultimately transforms his students. This analysis explores the interactions and engagements of characters, depicting their transformative experiences through the lens of Transformative Learning. Specifically, Spirou highlights the formal relationship between learner and educator, emphasizing the role of an effective educator in the learner's evolution and underscoring themes of personal and emotional growth, as well as self-improvement through reflection (Spirou, 2016).

### **Opportunities Presented by Indian Films for Studying Transformative Learning**

The Indian film industry has been the largest producer of films across the world, with more than 1,500 full-length films across 20 languages certified for broadcasting every year (CBFC, 2023). Indian cinema is as old as the first cinema in the world. Contemporary cinema in India comprises mass entertainers, parallel and art cinema in different audio-visual formats, in addition to foreign films. With a revenue of \$1,200 billion, cinema in India caters to one of the most complex audiences in the world (EYIndia, 2023). The medium is a powerful storyteller and cultural influencer for its audience (Balabantaray, 2020; CBFC, 2017; Hong, 2021).

Personal transformation is not an uncommon theme in Indian films. For example, Hosen (2022) analyzed a Hindi commercial film, *Taare Zameen Par (Khan, 2007)*, through the lens of

Transformative Learning to comment on the pivotal role played by an authentic educator in reshaping the life of a troubled young school student (see also Cranton, 2006).

In Indian films, personal transformation is often depicted as a latent narrative requiring critical reflection for observation and consumption. For example, *Lakshya* is a fictitious Hindi war drama film revolving around a young man who undergoes a profound transformation, becoming a dedicated soldier through self-discovery and determination in the face of adversity (Akhtar, 2004). Similarly, *777 Charlie* is a fictitious Kannada-language comedy-drama narrating the story of a stray dog named Charlie whose presence brings about positive changes in the empty life of a man named Dharma (Kiranraj, 2022). *Anand* is the narration of Dr. Banerjee's experience with one of his critical cancer patients who transformed Dr. Banerjee's pessimistic view of sufferings in the world to positive and live life to the fullest attitude (Mukherjee, 1971).

### Objectives and Scope

This research aimed to uncover common thematic threads in select Indian films depicting the personal growth of adult character(s). Additionally, the intention was to utilize these identified themes to construct an explanatory model.

The decision was made to restrict this investigation to fictional movies created by Indian film production companies, without any constraints on language or release year. Furthermore, the scope of this research was narrowed down to comprehend the evolution of adult protagonists' character transformations, viewed through the perspective of transformative journeys.

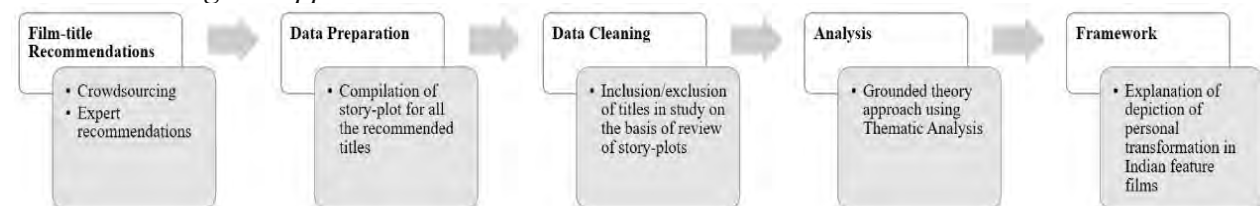
Lastly, movie narratives presenting a group's journey of transformation [*Chakde India* (Chopra and Amin, 2007)], magical or supernatural transformation [*Kaviratna Kalidasa* (Sharma, 1983), *Bulbul* (Kapadia, 2020)], negative transformation in personality of the character [*New York* (Chopra and Khan, 2009)], transformative journey of a child and limited representation of the transformation of a character [*Udaan* (Kashyap and Motwane, 2010)] were not considered for the purpose of analysis.

### Methodology

A multi-step, methodical approach was used to collect and analyze relevant data (see Fig. 1). In the first step, film-title recommendations were sought using the crowd-sourcing method through Internet-based tools like social media websites and social messaging apps. Some Film Studies experts were also invited via email communication to provide recommendations. Afterwards, story plots were compiled for all the recommended films.

**Figure 1**

*The Methodological Approach*



The initial list of films comprised sixty-eight mainstream titles from six languages. Then, publicly available story plots of these films were critically reviewed for shortlisting purposes. Based on the scope of the study, the final list of movies comprises of thirty-nine movies. The movies considered are a diverse collection of Indian movies spanning across eight decades and

four Indian languages namely Hindi (31), Kannada (4), Telegu (3) and Tamil (1). It also offers insights into different genres like romantic, drama, action and thrillers. Interestingly, most of the film recommendations received focus predominantly on the male protagonist, suggesting inherent bias in the film industry. However, even with seven suggestions, there is a notable representation of female narratives in the data for analysis. The movies considered particularly focus on positive transformation of an adult throughout the film, still nine movies from the list were observed to have a sad ending such as death of the protagonist or of a significant other.

Subsequently, a Grounded Theory approach was employed to systematically analyze the shortlisted story plots using thematic analysis (Khan, 2014; Gioia et al., 2012). The study employed an inductive approach where the aim is to develop a working model to understand narratives from Indian cinema through systematic analysis of data, leading to themes emerging from the observed transformative journey of an adult character in the plot setting. The results of the analysis were used to develop the aforementioned explanatory model.

### Findings and Discussion

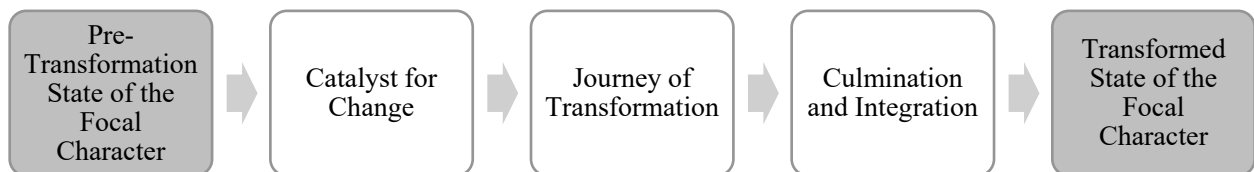
A model outlining a transformative process is suggested, drawing from the themes and sub-themes that arose from interpreting the coding of the transformative journeys of certain fictional characters as portrayed in the identified movies.

#### Processual Model of Personal Transformation

In the cinematic landscape, characters often embark on transformative journeys that resonate deeply with audiences, reflecting universal themes of self-discovery, resilience, and redemption. Through the analysis of various films, we have discerned a consistent processual model depicting the evolution of individuals from states of stagnation or disconnection to states of enlightenment and integration. This model comprises of *two states* and *three distinct phases*, each marked by pivotal events and internal shifts that propel characters towards personal growth and fulfillment. A short commentary on this phase-wise journey is presented below (see also: Fig. 2).

#### Figure 2

*Proposed Processual Model of Personal Transformation as Portrayed in Indian Cinema*



#### *State 1: Pre-Transformation State of the Focal Character*

Focal characters are often depicted to be in their comfort zones, exhibiting traits such as dependency, low self-esteem, and a lack of purpose or direction. Characters begin with traits inhibiting growth, like reluctance, insecurity, or disconnection from their true selves. For instance- “Rani” the female protagonist in the movie *Queen* (Bahl, 2013) seems lost and dejected after her fiancé calls off the wedding days before the ceremony suddenly projecting her to be a wrong match for him due to her conservative habits. Shashi in the movie *English Vinglish* (Khan and Shinde, 2012) is a loving house wife and a dedicated mother but feels lack of confidence as

she is underestimated by her husband and a teenage daughter due to struggles with English speaking proficiency

Notably, most of the characters are found to be comfortable with self, unaware of their potential or their exhibition of negative patterns of behavior as per social constructs of the society they belong to. In the movie, *Munna Bhai MBBS* (Hirani, 2003), portrayal of “Dr. Asthana” is of an authoritarian figure who values discipline and professionalism above all else. He is respected and feared alike due to his no-nonsense demeanor and uncompromising standards towards his profession. “Dharma” is an orphan loner in the film *777 Charlie* (Niranth, 2022), who after the loss of his family in an accident does not socialize with anyone and is feared among the colony people. Similarly, “Karan”, the central character in the movie *Lakshya* (Akhtar, 2004), is a directionless young man who is often criticized for his callous attitude but in turn blames his family and friends for lack of focus.

#### *Stage 1: Catalyst for Change*

A set of pivotal life events disrupt the character’s status quo. Breaching of the threshold of tolerance is observed that shakes the characters’ foundations. This often leads to feelings of betrayal, loss, grief, and purposelessness. These events force the characters to confront their inner turmoil and reevaluate their lives, often pushing them out of their comfort zones. For example, while on her trip to the US, Shashi’s character is publicly humiliated by the café lady as struggles place the order in English language in the film *English Vinglish* (Khan and Shinde, 2012). The incident shakes her beyond the dejections she has been enduring so far from her family members.

In the film *Munna Bhai MBBS* (Hirani, 2003), Dr. Asthana is portrayed as a highly skilled doctor, educator, and senior administrator at a prestigious medical institution in Mumbai, India. His expertise and principles are tested when an unlikely candidate, much older and seemingly unsuitable, gains admission to the medical school. Dr. Asthana’s unease intensifies as this candidate not only excels academically, but also earns the admiration of peers, hospital staff, and patients through their genuine empathy and compassion for the sick and their families. Ironically, the root of Dr. Asthana’s troubles lies in the candidate’s refusal to bow to his authority, stemming from a past personal conflict between them.

Researchers have noted the pivotal role of a key individual who can either motivate or facilitate change in a character who is initially comfortable with themselves, often oblivious to the issues surrounding them. The protagonist may confront their own limitations through a series of disorienting events, typically triggered by the loss or fear of losing this significant person. An illustrative example is seen in the character of Karan in the film *Lakshya* (Akhtar, 2004). Karan, who is often teased in a lighthearted manner by those around him, faces a turning point when he abruptly leaves his Indian army training, for which he had qualified impulsively, due to his nonchalant attitude. His decision leads to rejection by his girlfriend, who had previously been his source of comfort during conflicts, particularly those with his father.

#### *Stage 2: Journey of Transformation*

Transformative Learning journeys may be fueled by various motivations, including vengeance, the desire for redemption, the pursuit of love, or the realization of one’s responsibility towards others. The purpose of beginning a journey of transformation to find the lost self, or as assumed by a significant other or as established by socially constructed norms of the society.

Characters may embrace fresh perspectives, embrace uncertainty, or turn to external sources for guidance as they navigate their personal journeys. For example, in *Queen* (Bahl,

2013), during her solo journey on her originally planned honeymoon, Rani finds herself pushed beyond her comfort zone, encountering the intricacies of unfamiliar cultures and developing newfound insights into love and loss. Similarly, in *English Vinglish* (Khan and Shinde, 2012), Shashi travels to New York where she confronts language barriers. In response, she enrolls in a self-financed, short-term language course, embarking on a journey of self-discovery and empowerment.

In doing so, the focal characters are often depicted initiating introspection, questioning their beliefs and behaviors, and confronting fears and insecurities. Such critical reflection leads to growth and the acquisition of knowledge through experiences and interactions, thereby gaining insights into themselves and others.

#### *Informal Depiction*

Interestingly, most of journey is usually depicted occurring in an informal setting, when the character engages with others learns from others. The observation coincides with less popularity of self-help groups, and lack of institutional setups for adult learning for such individuals. The exception - Shashi's character in *English Vinglish* (Khan and Shinde, 2012) is able to avail that setup in a Western country and not in her home country in spite of the fact that India is a non-English speaking country where it might not be uncommon to find individuals struggling due to same reason. In *Munna Bhai MBBS* (Hirani, 2003), Dr. Asthana observes significant improvements in his patients which were previously considered incurable. He also notices a ray of hope and an approach to celebrate life incase irreversible diseases which were exhibited by his supposedly unfit student. Similarly, we see the character of Rani in *Queen* (Bahl, 2013) confronting her state of dependence and insecurities in a foreign land as she meets a young single mother, a dignified female stripper supporting their families, and a multiracial group of friends raising spirits of one who lost his family to a natural calamity. She evolves as a person who learns to say no, and to trust her risk taking and decision-making potential.

#### *Discourse: A Special Note*

In much of the literature on transformative learning, discourse is recognized as a significant component (Cranton, 2006). However, within Indian cinematic narratives, formal dialogue and communication were observed prominently in only one film, specifically in *English Vinglish* (Khan and Shinde, 2012), where the character Shashi enrolls in an English language course. Through this, she gains insight into the struggles and barriers faced by her classmates from non-English speaking backgrounds, both in their professional and personal lives. It is noteworthy that there is no distinct delineation of stages in the journey of transformative learning within these narratives. Moreover, characters are observed to oscillate through stages of self-reflection, self-discovery, acceptance, negotiation, and the impetus to enact change.

#### *Stage 3: Culmination and Integration*

Focal characters are often depicted integrating newfound insights and values into their lives, achieving personal fulfillment and resolution. This often involves the following elements:

- 1) *Acceptance and Reconciliation*: Reconciling with past, accepting flaws and imperfections.
- 2) *Driven to take action*: Feeling compelled to take decisive steps to bring about positive change in their own lives and the lives of others.
- 3) *Integration and Transformation*: Embracing transformed selves completely, aligning actions with newfound values and priorities.

### *State 2: Transformed State of the Focal Character:*

The concluding stages of the focal characters often depict a positive transformation, marked by heightened self-assurance, joy, and a deeper comprehension of themselves and others. They may have surmounted past adversities, attained a sense of satisfaction, and embraced fresh outlooks on life. The process of personal evolution entails intricate stages of growth and introspection. Each stage signifies a notable milestone in the character's progression, culminating in personal contentment and a defined sense of direction. Through introspection, empathy, and persistence, characters undergo profound internal shifts, ultimately discovering tranquility and fulfillment within their transformed selves. This comprehensive procedural framework offers insight into transformative narratives.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Fictional feature films offer immersive narratives that vividly depict characters' transformative journeys, providing rich insights into human growth and resilience. By engaging with complex and relatable stories, viewers can empathize with characters' experiences, facilitating deeper understanding and reflection on personal development. Moreover, the diverse range of themes and experiences portrayed in films allows for the exploration of transformative learning across various contexts and perspectives, enhancing the applicability and relevance of case studies derived from cinematic narratives.

Based on the analysis of transformative narratives in select Indian films, a comprehensive processual model of personal transformation emerges. It illustrates the evolution of characters from comfort to self-discovery, resilience, and fulfillment. This model offers valuable insights into the complexities of human growth and resilience depicted in cinema, contributing to a deeper understanding of personal development.

In conclusion, the analysis of transformative narratives in Indian films provides a rich tapestry of themes and experiences that resonate with universal truths of human growth and resilience. By examining the intricate stages of character transformation, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in personal development and offers valuable insights for both scholars and practitioners in the fields of education, psychology, and storytelling.

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# Now I See the Colony: A Teacher Educator's Transformative Learning Journey Through Self-Study

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**Abstract:** This study explored the curriculum documents of a teacher educator in response to the demand from South African students for the decolonisation of higher education curricula. We utilised the self-study methodology in conjunction with Mezirow's 10 elements of transformative learning theory to examine the frames of reference employed by the teacher educator, as evidenced in her curriculum documents. While our analysis revealed the inclusion of content presented from a Western context, the teacher educator appeared unaware of this reality. As we grappled with comprehending decolonisation within the realm of biology education, engaging in self-study facilitated ongoing dialogue within and among ourselves. These collaborative exchanges fostered collective transformative learning and broadened our perspectives. However, this transformative learning journey was not without challenges. This is because, engaging with some of the phases introduced new dilemmas which were disorienting. However, other phases were reorienting, thereby getting us into good trouble as they sparked in us, a strong collective desire to explore the nexus between science and our Indigenous practices. Consequently, this study underscores the potential value of integrating aspects of the self-study methodology into the framework of transformative learning theory to extend learning beyond the individual.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Decolonisation, Self-Study, Biology Curriculum

## Introduction

We (the authors) are both high school teachers by training, and are now scholars in science education, and Eunice is a practising biology teacher educator. We both work at a South African University. Our upbringing occurred in rural communities in Masvingo, Zimbabwe. This paper is a self-study in which we reflect on the demand by South African students for the decolonisation of the higher education curricula during the 2015 Fees Must Fall protests. This demand presented a *disorienting dilemma* (Mezirow, 2000) for Eunice who until then understood biology to be objective, factual, and culture-free. Eunice's disorienting dilemma led to our conversation below:

Eunice: *Since the 2015 protests something has been bothering me. The students the decolonisation of curricula. This prompted me to think: "What does decolonising the curriculum entail? What is it exactly that needs to be decolonised in the context of biology teaching? It certainly doesn't mean changing the facts of biology. You can't change hard science which has clear methods and procedures. There are no Indigenous terms for describing biological concepts such as gene, DNA etc. Many debates on decolonisation of the curriculum have taken place but none of them have brought me answers. I am becoming increasingly frustrated.*

Constance: *I understand your frustration. I also feel that the ongoing debates are too philosophical and fluffy with no meaningful pointers to what decolonising the curriculum really*

*means and looks like practically. At times they even sound like turf wars with each side protecting their views while students experience no change.*

As a follow-up to the dialogue provided above, Constance illustrated her grasp of the concept of decolonising curricula by sharing her experiences of a lesson on “jerrymunglums” that she was taught when she was in the seventh grade. This particular lesson had also found its way into her doctoral thesis (Khupe, 2014, p.7). However, during the time she wrote her thesis, which was 28 years later, she still had no knowledge of what a jerrymunglum was and had to turn to the internet for insights. To her astonishment, she discovered that a jerrymunglum is a type of hunting spider known as “dzvatsvatsva” in the Karanga language.

*Eunice: How does your story illustrate decolonisation of the curriculum?*

*Constance: My experience of the jerrymunglum lesson illustrates the need for decolonisation. Although the term jerrymunglum was foreign to me, the actual insect was not. I have known it since I was a toddler. Had the teacher given us its Karanga name, dzvatsvatsva, the lesson would have been more meaningful. This would have been an example of contextualising the curriculum through using students’ first language – a form of decolonising teaching. However, I do not completely blame my teacher because he probably did not know what a jerrymunglum was either, and at that time in colonial Zimbabwe he might not have had the freedom to use any language other than English.*

*Eunice: Oh, my goodness! You won’t believe this, but that is exactly what I do. I mostly use examples of plants and animals from the textbooks when teaching biology. Most of these examples are actually foreign to both me and my students. Until now, I had never thought that my teaching practices perpetuate the coloniality of biology education. I have not made much effort to find and use examples that are within the experience of the majority of my students, many of whom are Indigenous South Africans.*

*Constance: You are not alone. I have also realised that I have done the same thing in most of my teaching. Thinking about it now, I wish I could start all over again!*

*Eunice: So, we have been part in de-legitimising and devaluing our own languages and knowledges?*

*Constance: Sadly yes. And in the process, we have disadvantaged our students.*

This conversation made us recognise a *shared discontent* (Mezirow, 2000) regarding the role of curricula in decolonisation. In addition, we realised that we could have been unconsciously perpetuating the coloniality that students were experiencing in the curriculum. The realisation motivated us to desire to change and marked the beginning of our transformative learning journey. We investigated Eunice’s curriculum documents as a way of *exploring the options of new roles* we could begin to take on in our teaching in response to the students’ demand for decolonisation. The question that guided our investigation was: Where does coloniality manifest (if at all) in Eunice’s biology curriculum documents?

### **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

To guide our reflective process, we reviewed literature on coloniality, decolonisation and the transformative learning theory.

#### **Coloniality and Decolonisation**

The roots of coloniality are in colonialism (the political and economic occupation and domination of one nation by another). However, coloniality comprises the attitudes and values that survive beyond colonialism. Bulhan (2015, pp. 241) defines coloniality as “enduring patterns of power as well as a way of thinking and behaving that emerged from colonialism but

survived long after its seeming demise”. Coloniality manifests through the capturing of ways of knowing, behaving and being of its ‘victims’ (Bulhan, 2015; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015; Wa Thiong’o, 1986). Bulhan (2015) describes it as occupation of the being. As indicated earlier, formal education is one of the ways through which coloniality is established. Curriculum documents (in which values, content, methods and language of teaching and assessment are outlined), are often carefully and intentionally designed to contribute to the shaping of students’ frames of reference (Ajayi, 2023). Therefore, in post-colonial states, education is often targeted for change as new governments seek to disengage the colonial past (Khupe, Seehawer & Keane, 2024). However, as argued by Jansen (2001), such change has been observed to be only political symbolism and not deep enough to have a decolonial impact. In South Africa, students’ demands for a decolonised higher education, twenty-one years after the end of colonialism and apartheid, is testimony to how deeply entrenched coloniality in education can be. Therefore, decolonising education should target those spaces where coloniality abides, such as curriculum documents, with a view to affording students opportunities to gain an education without giving up their sense of being (Eriksen & Svendsen, 2020).

### **Transformative Learning**

Transformative learning was defined by Mezirow (2000), as the process of changing problematic frames of reference, such as mindsets, habitual ways of thinking, and perspectives on meaning. Frames of reference are shaped by many factors including socio-cultural, education, economic, political, and religious. These factors selectively shape and delimit the way we view the world (Christie, et al., 2015). One’s view of the world influences their actions and how they respond to situations. Frames of reference can manifest without an individual being aware of it. As asserted by Christie, et al., (2015), the objective of transformative learning is to encourage individuals to question their existing assumptions and, if they deem them inadequate, to modify them.

Mezirow’s transformative learning theory has 10 phases. The phases are: 1) a *disorienting dilemma* which is a disorientation or confusion that is triggered by an experience or situation that challenges an individual’s existing beliefs or worldview, 2) *self-examination*, which involves a critically reflection on beliefs, values, and assumptions, questioning their validity, 3) *critical assessment of assumptions*, involves individuals assessing their beliefs and assumptions in light of new perspectives and information, considering alternative viewpoints, 4) *recognition of shared discontent and transformation*, is recognition by individuals of the flaws in their current beliefs and acknowledge the need for change, 5) *exploration of new roles*, as individuals consider alternative ways of thinking or viewing the world, considering different perspectives and approaches that may lead to new insights, 6) *planning a course of action*, which involves individuals actively seeking out new knowledge, skills, and competencies relevant to the changes they wish to make, 7) *acquired knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans*, focuses on acquiring the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources to effectively implement the planned changes, 8) *provisional trying of new roles*-individuals begin to implement and practice the changes they have planned, testing out new beliefs, behaviours, or actions in real-life situations, 9) *building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships*, through ongoing reflection and practice, and 10) *a reintegration into one’s life* on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective. We drew on these ten phases as a framework for our study.

### **Methodology**

As indicated in the introduction, we used the self-study methodology which was triggered by the *disorienting dilemma* that Eunice faced following South African students’ call to

decolonise the curriculum. The study was self-initiated and focused on the self, which means that we were both researchers and the researched (Samaras, 2011). The study was aimed at the improvement of Eunice's teaching practice through identifying colonising practices in her curriculum documents. As is consistent with self-study methodology, interaction was on-going and was achieved through continuous engagement with a critical friend. In self-study, critical friends provide validation by posing questions which promote *critical examination* of assumptions and blind spots (LaBoskey, 2004). Constance was the critical friend.

### **Data collection**

Eunice teaches the topic *Genetics and principles of genetic engineering* to fourth-year pre-service teachers. We collected data through examining and discussing Eunice's biology education curriculum documents and journaling insights from the discussions and reflections. The discussions were audio recorded and transcribed. We then used the transcriptions for our reflections. The curriculum documents that we discussed include: the Bachelor of Education (Biology) syllabus, the prescribed textbook, course outline and PowerPoint presentations. The examination and discussion of the mentioned curriculum documents was guided by the following questions:

- What is in the content description of the fourth-year biology syllabus and course outline?
- What is the content in the textbook, and how is the content structured?
- What is the content in the PowerPoint presentations, and how is it structured?

In the process of finding answers to these questions, Constance asked further questions as a critical friend and outsider to Eunice's curriculum development process. Her questions led to deeper reflections and even more questions and disorientations (the hermeneutic process). Below is an example of a question that formed one of our audio-recorded discussions as we examined the documents:

Constance: *I see that the syllabus just lists topics e.g. Genetics and Principles of Genetic Engineering, but in your course outline I see detail of the content. How did you come up with this content?*

Eunice's responses to these questions constituted the data which we reflected on leading to the findings for this study.

### **Data analysis**

We put the analysis section as separate from data collection for the sake of structure. However, analysis unfolded hermeneutically (Samaras, 2011), rather than linearly.

## **Findings**

In this paper we report on our transformative learning journey which was sparked off by students' demand for the decolonisation of higher education curricula. We undertook this reflective journey as an attempt to identify the colonising aspects of Eunice's curriculum documents with a view to work at decolonising them. The following question guided our reflections: Where does coloniality manifest (if at all) in Eunice's biology curriculum documents? To answer this question, we examined and reflected on Eunice's curriculum documents. We present our findings below.

We found out that the *Syllabus* is 'skeletal' i.e. it lists topics to be covered in biology education per year of study with no content details. The *Prescribed Textbook* covers all biology topics. The authors of the book are all from the United States of America. Each chapter begins

with a picture of the author of the chapter and includes historical information about the discoveries associated with the topics in the chapter. The *Course Outline* presents aims of the course, as well as the content to be covered. We found out that the course content was almost entirely based on the prescribed textbook. There were seven *PowerPoint Presentations* which had been prepared for teaching the course. Each presentation covered one topic, highlighting the main concepts and subordinate concepts as well as relevant examples illustrated in diagrams and pictures. The presentations varied in length in accordance with the content detail of the topics that they were meant to cover. Just as with the course outline, the content of the presentations was also almost entirely based on the prescribed textbook.

### **Discussion**

Eunice's prescribed textbook shows content that is based on discoveries, achievements, and examples from a Western context. The examples include descriptions of Gregor Mendel's work with pea plants which led to Laws of inheritance; Robert Hooke's work which led to cell theory, and James Watson and Francis Crick's work on the discovery of the three-dimensional structure of DNA. The historical information presented in the textbook give biology an identity and culture. Therefore, although Eunice had thought that biology is neutral and culture free, it is not. The histories that form part of the biology content are distant from the experience of many of her students who are mostly non-Western thereby making its content impersonal, alienating, and irrelevant for the students (Aikenhead, 1996; Mensah & Jackson, 2018 Nyamupangedengu & Khupe, in press). We, therefore, agree with Aikenhead (1996), that learning science is a form of cultural border crossing from the students' culture to the culture of science. It is students' experience of such alienation which might have led to the call to decolonise the South Africa higher education curricula. Up to this point, Eunice had approached her teaching in a way that replicated how she had been taught and trained which was based on the Western-authored textbooks. This approach contributed to coloniality occupying Eunice's being (Bulhan, 2015), that it needed the radical protest to awaken her. The thought of Eunice's biology education curriculum as requiring decolonisation as demanded by the students was therefore particularly disorienting for her. Beginning to think of how to be inclusive of students' lived experiences (see Khupe (2014) and Msimanga and Lelliott, (2014), demanded a major shift in her perspective. At this point we began to consider the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges as one way of making science more decolonised and relevant to students in the Southern African context. This thinking which reflects our continued transformation and transformative learning, got us into good trouble and motivated us to start looking for and documenting science from our own Indigenous practices (Khupe and Nyamupangedengu, in press).

### **Reflections and Reframing**

Our reflections show that coloniality was pervasive in Eunice's curriculum documents. The 'skeletal' Bachelor of Education Syllabus which is designed to make it a flexible frame from which the teacher educator designs and develops their course outline, provides opportunity for contextualising content. However, because coloniality occupied her being (Bulhan, 2015), Eunice missed this opportunity and failed to choose and develop curriculum documents that speak to students' context and to decolonisation. Through the self-study approach, Eunice realised a new *disorienting dilemma* - that her curriculum documents were not culture-neutral, after all. For example, the prescribed textbook only tells the story of Gregor Mendel, the "Father of genetics". The process of reflection made us to realise that it was not only documents that

required decolonising, but also our minds (Wa Thiong'o, 1986) as those who develop and implement the curriculum. Now our reframed thinking has motivated us to seek relatable local stories for inclusion in Eunice's course outline and in her PowerPoint presentations (*exploring new roles*). The two of us have now delved into our own cultural practices to uncover science-related content (*planned course of action*). So far Karanga<sup>1</sup> beer brewing has emerged as a potential science teaching resource (Nyamupangedengu & Khupe, in press). We have *acquired new knowledge and skills for implementing our plans*. We are now 'seeing' the wealth of relatable science content in Indigenous practices from our lived experiences (*re-orientation*). Our *new course of action* includes consulting with Elders and documenting relevant Indigenous practices to make the *acquired knowledge* available as a teaching resource.

### Conclusion

Unlike Mezirow's presentation of the ten phases of transformative learning theory, where learning is assumed to be linear, our transformative learning journey was not straightforward. The manifestation of some of the phases was not a once-off occurrence, but rather recurring. For example, at some stages, we encountered fresh perspectives, some of which were again disorienting. However, others were re-orienting, providing guidance for our subsequent actions. Keane et al. (2022), describe transformative learning as the expansion and evolution of perspectives. By engaging in this self-study, we experienced the same regarding our perspectives towards decolonisation of the curriculum. We now have a *planned course of action* which involves *implementing and disseminating our acquired knowledge* beyond ourselves to the broader education community. The self-study approach allowed Eunice's assumptions to be collaboratively *examined and critically assessed*. The tenets of self-study approach (focus on self, improvement-aimed and interactive) became helpful. Because self-study research is self-initiated, this allowed Eunice to share her disorienting dilemma with her critical friend for examination and critical assessment of her assumptions even though that would place her in a position of vulnerability. In addition, the interactive nature of self-study promoted collective transformation and learning. Hence, as previously argued by Nyamupangedengu and Khupe (2022) the transformative learning that occurred within this self-study was not individual but collective, thereby again challenging the individualistic underpinning implied in Mezirow's theory.

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<sup>1</sup> Karanga refers to a tribe of Indigenous people who live in the central and eastern parts of Zimbabwe.



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## **Transformative Learning and Teacher Agency: The Center Pull and the Outer End of the Same Ball of Twine?**

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**Key Words:** Transformative Competences, Teacher Agency, Teacher Education, Critical Reflection

Agency, understood as an “emergent phenomenon of actor-situation transaction” (Biesta & Tedder, 2006, p. 11), refers to the ways in which individuals critically model their actions and responses in complex, often unprecedented, situations. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) argue that the only way to fully comprehend the complexity in human agency is to temporally embed this process of social engagement, which is:

informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects with the contingencies of the moment) (p. 963).

This perspective is echoed in the context of teacher agency by Biesta, Priestley and Robinson (2015) who claim that it develops within a “configuration of influences from the past, orientations toward the future, and engagement with the present” (p. 23). This implies that all three temporal dimensions are simultaneously involved in teachers’ choices and concrete actions but the extent to which they contribute varies subjectively and dynamically (Biesta et al., 2015). Bourdieu’s view (1990) further enriches this discourse by highlighting how individuals internalize objective structures such as rules, norms, expectations, and values through a gradual process of socialization. These internalized structures, in turn, define generative predispositions that serve as templates for perception and action. In light of these assumptions, teachers’ subjectivity, encompassing personal and professional values and beliefs, interacts with seemingly objective contexts of the education system regulating both their actions and inactions.

The evolution of transformative learning theory, stemming from Mezirow’s pioneering work in the late 70s which introduced the theory of transformative learning to the global discourse on adult education, has been marked by similar assumptions and reflections. Indeed, Taylor (2008) highlights that Mezirow’s psycho-critical perspective has paved the way to “alternative conceptions of transformative learning theory that address factors often overlooked in the dominant theory of transformation [...], “such as the role of spirituality, positionality, emancipatory learning, and neurobiology” (p. 7).

Freire’s revolutionary view of adult learning, whose goal is to develop critical consciousness necessary for social emancipation, advocates for critical reflection, dialogical exchange and problem-posing approaches in teaching adults to bring about liberation rather than

domestication, has also continued to inspire scholars in the field. While both Mezirow and Freire stress the importance of reflection and dialogue (Dirkx, 1998), Freire's perspective extends beyond individual transformation, considering the broader impact of emancipatory processes on societal contexts and social change (Taylor, 2008). In this dynamic landscape, recent advancements in neuroscience have significantly enhanced our understanding of learning processes, shedding light on the intricate mechanisms behind knowledge construction. These studies underscore the pivotal roles of intrinsic motivation, embodied experiences, self-directed learning methods, and discovery-based approaches.

This process can be viewed as the result of a dynamic interplay that finds support in generative mechanisms of values and meaning intertwined with political, economic, and cultural shifts at macro, meso, and micro levels. It can also be intricately connected to the transformation of one's professional identity when teachers embark on a lifelong journey during which they "critically question and assess the integrity of their deeply held assumptions about how they relate to the world around them" (Mezirow & Taylor, 2010, p. xi).

In parallel, contemporary educational policies within the realms of citizenship and lifelong learning have recognized the vital importance of transformative competencies in fostering an inclusive and sustainable global society. Central to these policies are three overarching competencies essential for societal transformation and the creation of a better future, as identified by the OECD (2019). First and foremost is the capability to "create new value", emphasizing the necessity of innovative thinking and problem-solving. Secondly, there is a focus on "reconciling tensions and dilemmas", highlighting the importance of navigating complexities and finding harmonious resolutions amidst challenges. Lastly, the competency of "taking responsibility" underscores the significance of accountability and proactive engagement in shaping a positive and impactful future for all. These competencies collectively pave the way for a transformative educational approach, equipping individuals with the skills and mindset necessary to shape a better world, thus embodying the essence of true agency in the 21st Century.

Drawing from these reflections, we intend to explore the notion of teacher agency within the context of transformative learning theory and provide new understandings about how this analysis could inform high-quality teacher education pedagogical approaches, policies, and practices. Given the shortfall of literature interconnecting these two fields of study, a Delphi study (Green, 2014) will be carried out to gather the opinions of expert faculty members who are working across different fields and are heavily involved in teacher education in Italy and other countries. We anticipate recruiting ten scholars for this study. The Delphi group members will be asked to identify any key commonalities across the two fields (transformative learning and teacher agency) that may have relevance to teacher education. The themes from the group will be analyzed to identify higher-level meta-themes that have relevance to teacher education to enhance teacher agency and pedagogical skills. The implications of the findings will be discussed to identify new areas of research as well as the practical application to ideas to further enhance teacher education.

Our objective is to initiate a process of critical reflection and provide expert knowledge regarding if and how:

- 1) transformative learning and agency intertwine as experiences are filtered, evaluations are made, and actions are taken (Curran & Murray, 2008);
- 2) teachers gradually develop competence in making informed choices based on their renewed epistemic beliefs (Taylor, 2008), taking principled action and enacting change; fundamental traits of teacher agency (Anderson, 2010).

Transformative learning theory continues to be a thriving area of interest within adult education. Extensive literature contends that professional learning experiences that challenge established practices and contextual norms are pivotal for cultivating teacher agency (Molla & Nolan, 2020). By embracing lifelong learning as the underpinning paradigm, and recognizing agency as the ultimate goal, transformative pedagogy may well emerge as the pathway to establish liberating learning environments fostering a profound sense of self-determination, necessary for teachers and future generations.

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# **Transformative Learning Through the Aesthetic Experience and Beyond, Transformative Learning as an Aesthetic Experience. A “Meeting” Between Mezirow and Aristoteles**

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**Abstract:** The present proposal attempts to contribute to the constructive dialogue that continues to develop around Mezirow’s Transformation Theory, approaching the transformative process, on the one hand through the aesthetic experience and on the other hand as an aesthetic experience. The subject is explored both theoretically and practically, based on the conclusions drawn from three doctoral theses. First, Logothetou (2024) highlights the emotional dimension of transformative learning through the investigation of Kokkos’ method which is based on the utilization of aesthetic experience (Kokkos, 2021). Second, Karakou (2024) reveals how emerged emotions goes hand in hand with critical reflection by using Kokkos’ method in practice. Finally, Papadopoulou (2024), based on the perspective of the great Greek philosopher Aristotle, sheds light on in the way emotions emerge and function in ancient Greek tragedy and, by extension, in contact with any meaningful work of art. Combining the conclusions of the three studies, we argue that the utilization of Kokkos’ method promotes critical reflection alongside the expression and management of emerging emotions. Accordingly, the transformative process can be seen as an aesthetic experience. The identification of points of convergence of Aristotle’s ideas with Transformation Theory, supports the Theory’s timelessness.

**Key Words:** Kokkos’ Method, Critical Reflection, Emotions, Meaningful Art

## **Introduction**

The debate about transformative learning through aesthetic experience is not new. Several theorists propose art as an effective tool to promote the transformative process (Taylor, 2011; Cranton, 2002; Dirkx, 2010; Freire, 1970/1977), while Kokkos has already formulated ‘Transformative Learning through the Aesthetic Experience’ (TLAE), a method based on the utilization of aesthetic experience and founded on Mezirow’s theoretical model (Kokkos, 2021). In this context, given that J. Mezirow’s Transformation Theory is an open and continually evolving theory (Mezirow, 2000; Fleming, 2022; Nicolaidis & Eschenbacher, 2022; Taylor & Cranton, 2012), this proposal aims to contribute to the constructive dialogue developing around it, by approaching the transformative process on the one hand through the aesthetic experience, and on the other hand as an aesthetic experience in itself.

The subject is explored both at the theoretical and the practical level, based on the conclusions drawn from three doctoral theses (Karakou, 2024, Logothetou, 2024; Papadopoulou, 2024), through an interconnection of the Transformation Theory with the ideas of Aristotle. Initially, through Logothetou’s thesis, we will focus on exploring Kokkos’ method (TLAE) and, specifically, the mode through which triggers for emotional expression are given. Then, through

Karakou's (2024) thesis which is based on TLAE, we will explore a transformative learning process through the aesthetic experience and how emerging emotions go hand in hand with critical reflection. Finally, Papadopoulou's thesis, based mainly on Aristotle's ideas, will highlight similarities between a transformative experience and an aesthetic experience.

## Presentation

### Logothetou's Thesis

Logothetou's (2024) thesis investigates Kokkos' method, *Transformative Learning through Aesthetic Experience* (TLAE method, Kokkos, 2021), which is developed in the field of Transformative Learning, as defined by J. Mezirow (1991). This method is notable for acting both as a theoretical cognitive model and as a practically implementable teaching framework. TLAE is internationally recognized as a teaching framework, having been implemented in Greece, Sweden, Denmark, Romania, Germany, Switzerland, and the USA and being taught at the university level and, under certain conditions, in schools. Finally, it has been the subject of numerous journal publications, books, graduate, and doctoral dissertations, as well as discussions in international conferences.

In January 2022, the ITLA organized a webinar covering Kokkos' textbook *Exploring Art for Perspective Transformation* (Brill/Sense), which details his transformative learning method in its latest iteration. The EU Cedefop (2011:4) has highlighted the method as an "essential educational innovation", while UNESCO promoted the e-learning program *Utilizing Art in Education*, which is based on the method.

In Greece, Alexis Kokkos is recognized for his role in transforming the field of Adult Education over his career. He is currently Professor Emeritus of Adult Education and president of the Greek Scientific Association of Adult Education. His research output includes authorship of 24 books and 70 related journal articles on adult education and transformative learning. He is a member of the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame, sits on the leadership circle of the ITLA, and co-coordinates the ESREA Network "Interrogating Transformative Processes in Learning and Education". Finally, Kokkos was recently honored by the ITLA for his exemplary leadership and contributions.

The TLAE method can be used as a teaching framework for any topic of study. It comprises seven key stages (Kokkos, 2021):

- The educator recognizes that the students hold pre-existing biases (either preconceptions or cognitive habits). The educator and students must agree to critically examine these biases together.
- The students express their pre-conceived beliefs about the topic in written form.
- The educator formulates a strategy for transforming the students' preconceptions (points of view) or cognitive habits (habits of mind) and devises relevant critical questions.
- The educator and students identify works of art (of any type) that are of high aesthetic value and are suitable prompts for examining the critical questions devised in the previous step.
- The students systematically analyze the chosen art works. Once finished, they reconcile their observations and feelings from examining the art with the critical questions.
- The students are prompted to consider their own biases and cognitive habits. They are tasked to write down their current ideas on the topic in question, compare them to

their initial beliefs, as documented in step 2, and draw conclusions. The educator then assesses the students' progress.

- Next steps are decided and implemented (e.g., subsequent meetings of the group, self-study assignments, etc.).

At the core of the TLAE method is the recognition that art and aesthetic experience are educationally valuable and can facilitate the development of critical reflection and, subsequently, cognitive transformation. Transformative processes that involve stimulating the participants' emotions are also used in psychology/psychiatry, but their extent and treatment is different from the educational setting.

The final contribution is the further study of how emotions emerge through the aesthetic experience and connect to personal experiences. This process raises questions that lead the individual down a deeper, emotional, reflective path: What does the artwork mean to the learner, personally? What emotions does it give rise to, and what personal experiences do they associate it with? Can the learner insert themselves into the art? Which character in the story would they be, and why?

The TLAE method pertains to the educational use of art, not its therapeutic use. As such, the works of art used in its practical application must hold high aesthetic value, as asserted by Maria Papadopoulou. First, however, we will hear how Maria Karakou links emotional expression with critical reflection.

### **Karakou's Thesis**

Kokkos' method (Kokkos, 2021) - as described by Logothetou - was utilized as a means of promoting critical reflection and emotional expression in Karakou's (2024) thesis. This thesis was based on a two-year longitudinal study of a group of 10 students from a "Vocational Training Institute", exploring the interactional relationship of critical reflection and emotion, in the context of the transformational process.

During the research, 27 meetings were held, in which participants had the opportunity to participate in a series of workshops designed with the TLAE method. We used important works of art fulfilling the characteristics which are described below by Papadopoulou, and made the attempt to answer the questions raised by Logothetou. The ultimate goal was an attempt to transform the dysfunctional habit of mind (Mezirow, 2000) related to gender stereotypes. More specifically, seven mental points of view were approached critically, starting from the points of view that the group showed the least resistance to and progressing gradually to the most difficult ones (Kokkos, 2021).

Three main methodological tools were used. To determine the type and intensity of emerging emotions, we utilized the Geneva Emotion Wheel Rating 3.0 (GEW) (Scherer 2005). Also, the Kember scale (Kember et al. 1999, 2008) was used to capture the degree of development of critical reflection. Finally, we examined the degree of transformation of the points of view under consideration, based on the tools offered by the TLAE, i.e. the comparison of the written evidence collected before and after the respective intervention for each dysfunctional point of view.

The research revealed the following:

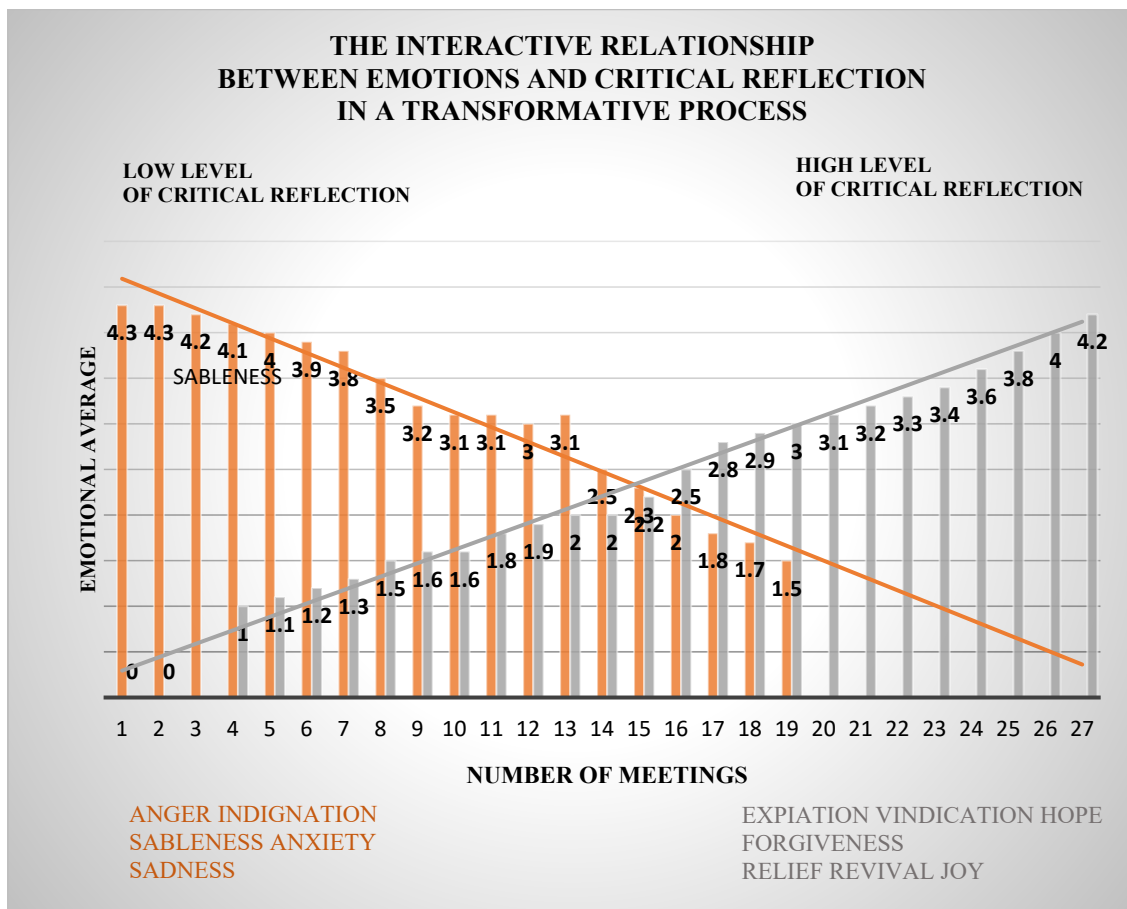
- The development of critical reflection at high levels implies the emergence of strong emotions and, vice versa, critical reflection is needed for the emerging emotions to be managed and for the transformational process to advance.

- In the early stages of the process, critical reflection goes hand in hand with intense negative emotions, such as anger, indignation, anxiety, and sadness.
- Gradually, as levels of critical reflection increase, the intensity of negative emotions decreases, while positive emotions such as joy, expiation, vindication, hope, forgiveness, relief, and revival emerge and intensify.
- In the later stages of the process, developing critical reflection involves focusing on the positive

All the above are captured in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*The interactive relationship between emotions and critical reflection in a transformative process*



It is of great interest - as we will see below - that emotions emerge and function in approximately the same way when watching a tragedy, that is, as Papadopoulou reveals to us (Papadopoulou, 2024), an aesthetic experience.

**Papadopoulou’s Thesis**

The theoretical framework of Papadopoulou’s research (2024) approaches Aristotle’s work. Scholars of Aristototle, such as Sykoutris (1991) and Mandilaras (1992/1995), claim that



his work does not exclusively concern tragedy as an art form, but refers to all forms more broadly. Therefore, from the work of Aristotle, the following features can be drawn, that make a work of art meaningful and suitable to be used in the context of a transformative education: moral dimension, truth, holism, unconventionality, timelessness, universality, insight, and comprehensible content. It is worth noting that the above conclusions are enriched or repeated by later philosophers such as Dewey, 1934/1980; Greene, 1995; Nussbaum, 1990, 2010; et al. Finally, the aforementioned findings of the Philosophy of Aesthetic theory are confirmed and presumed by the science of Neuroaesthetics (Papadopoulou, 2024).

In this regard and considering the conclusions of Papadopoulou's (2024) bibliographic study, a meaningful work of art with the above characteristics evokes particularly strong emotions (Adorno, 2000; Marcuse, 1978/1998) in the receiver, promoting their critical reflection (Greene, 1995; Nussbaum, 2010) and prompting them to possibly reframe their biased assumptions (Marcuse, 1978/1998). Toward this direction, Aristotle's work clarifies the way a tragedy works: the viewer, seeing the "suffering" of the heroes, makes critical connections with personal experience. Through this process, emotion is stimulated alongside critical reflection and, subsequently, "by mercy and fear", catharsis occurs.

### **The Example of Euripides' Electra**

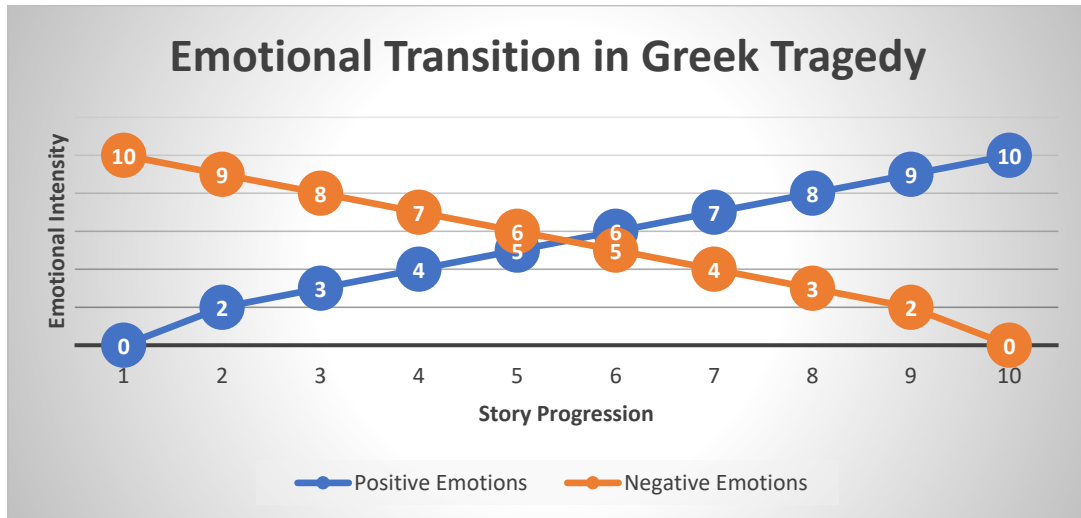
Analyzing the emotions of the characters in the tragedy "Electra" by Euripides reveals that, initially, they are predominantly negative. For example, Electra is filled with grief, mourning, and anger over the murder of her father, Agamemnon. Accordingly, Orestes carries with him the sense of injustice and the burdensome legacy of revenge.

As the plot develops, these feelings begin to escalate and become more intense, reaching a climax where the characters are at their limits. In particular, the emotional climax refers to the moment when Orestes and Electra plan the revenge of their mother, Clytemnestra, and her lover, Aegisthus. Then, through a series of events and revelations, the resolution of the tragedy begins: negative energies and emotions are gradually eliminated, and order is restored.

Finally, positive emotions, such as relief from the fulfillment of justice, a sense of vindication, and the restoration of order (catharsis), begin to prevail toward the end of the play. From the emotion display in figure 2, there is a gradual decrease in negative emotions (red line) and a gradual increase in positive emotions (green line) as they become more dominant.

**Figure 2**

*Emotional transition in Greek tragedy; Transition of Emotions in the Tragedy “Electra” by Euripides*



### Discussion

Combining the conclusions of the three studies we argue that:

- The utilization of works of art that meet the criteria mentioned above, in the context of TLAE, promotes critical reflection within in the transformative process, alongside the expression and management of emerging emotions.
- The interactional relationship of critical reflection and emotion, in the context of a transformational process triggered through TLAE, is similar as in an ancient Greek tragedy. As observed, it resembles the way tragedy works in terms of the interplay of critical reflection and emotions, and by extension the way the dialogue within an important work of art affects the individual. As levels of critical reflection increase, self-awareness also increases and subsequently, negative emotions decrease, as the person focuses on the positive. From this point of view, the transformative process itself works as an aesthetic experience. Dewey himself (1934/1980), argued that aesthetic experience is not only that related to art, but any holistic, integrated experience.
- The identification of points of convergence of Transformation Theory with the Aristotle’s ideas could be an element of timelessness, given that his philosophical work is the cornerstone of all later philosophy, and contains essential truths (Kalfas, 2015).

All the above is vividly captured in the example of Euripides’ tragedy Electra. The tumultuous life of the tragic heroine leads the spectators to identify with her, as a result of which they themselves deeply experience the qualitative aesthetic experience in question.

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## New Spaces and Educational Communities for Citizens: The Case of *Viceversa*

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**Abstract:** The Covid-19 global emergency has had a magnifying effect on both pre-existing socioeconomic inequalities and the ever-deepening cracks within Western welfare systems; as families, institutions and individuals found themselves in a state of increased vulnerability and uncertainty for their futures, new educational needs also arose. It is now clear that the responsibility for meeting those needs cannot (and should not) fall upon our school systems alone. Rather, we are bearing witness to a plurality of grassroots projects that aim to integrate the school into the surrounding community; and, in order for the boundaries between the classroom and the outside world to blur and merge, the community must recognise itself as a chief educational agent. *Viceversa Project* is one example of such an *educational community*, where a group of citizens has been cooperating with researchers to design and activate transformative processes.

**Key Words:** Educating Community, Transformative Learning, Recognition, Critical Reflection

### Introduction

In 2018, the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) published a document titled *Una politica nazionale di contrasto del fallimento formativo e della povertà educativa*<sup>1</sup>, which attempted to both portray the characteristics and national scale of early school leaving, and outline possible counteracting measures. In order to mitigate the crisis befalling the educational system, the authors advise, schools should rely on a wide support net comprised of a variety of local actors, ranging from students' families, to sports centres, to non-profit associations and informal groups of volunteers, who may share in the responsibilities of nurturing and educating younger generations, effectively breaking through the boundaries of the classroom as the exclusive site of teaching and learning.<sup>2</sup> Such a redistribution of commitments among individual citizens and collective social actors is what broadly defines an *educating community*, a construct which, since the 1970s, has been entwined with the principles of

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<sup>1</sup> [Translation]; the full text is available in PDF form at <https://www.miur.gov.it/documents/20182/0/Rapporto+sul+contrasto+del+fallimento+formativo/7575f155-63f9-479a-a77f-1da743492e92?version=1.0> (last accessed: 06/04/2024).

<sup>2</sup> For further information, see the concept of “educating community” as defined by Con I bambini - Fund to Combat Child Educational Poverty Project at <https://percorsiconibambini.it/comunita-educante/>.

permanent, “diffuse” education and horizontal subsidiarity (Zamengo & Valenziano, 2018; Faure, 1973).

Educating community projects have been flourishing throughout the country over the past decade, but the need for cooperative, mutualistic relationships was intensified by the Covid-19 pandemic (Labsus, 2022). Each initiative has shaped itself to address the specific, often unique challenges presented by the township, neighbourhood or locality where it is based; nevertheless, reviewing their internal reports and manifestos, we can extrapolate a number of common methodological and programmatic elements: expanding opportunities for education is, obviously, the primary goal pursued by all participants, who describe themselves as bound by a kinship of interests, aims, and values, converging toward a shared resolution to build a better future for those around them; the communities seeks to centre and support society’s most vulnerable, particularly children and teenagers who experience social, economic, and cultural marginalisation, and are thus at high risk for school dropout and intergenerational poverty; they are informal and open to dialogue; and, most significantly for our study, they are committed to concrete, transformative actions.

What does it take for a community that revolves around education to *transform* itself? What kind of change should occur at an individual and collective level, in order for such a project to be deemed successful? How may single communities spearhead transformative processes that will uphold social equity and impact democratic practices? Similar questions have been posed by academics who consider Mezirow’s transformative learning theory (TLT) an optimal theoretical lens through which to examine and conceptualise community-based learning, its potential for cultivating social development, and the role of critical reflection in kindling a greater sense of social responsibility among people (Formenti, 2023).

Our proposal for this paper is to employ transformative learning as key to interpreting the cognitive and relational dynamics taking place within one incipient educating community—the *Viceversa* project, which officially began in September 2023 in the township of Certaldo, near Empoli; it is endorsed by the social enterprise “Con i Bambini”, and stems from the collaborative effort of cultural associations and nonprofits operating around the Val d’Elsa region, schools, and volunteering residents of Certaldo and its surrounding areas. Because *Viceversa* is an ongoing experiment, whatever conclusions we may draw at this point in time should be considered provisional. It is indeed on the basis of TLT that we, as researchers, are compelled to keep the unpredictability of educational and community building processes in mind throughout our analysis (Alhadeff-Jones, 2012).

### **Theoretical Grounding**

Critics of Mezirow’s articulation of transformative learning have generally regarded the theory as excessively rational, abstract, and individualistic, with little explicit interest for social justice and the dialectic subversion of oppressive power structures (Fleming, 2018, 2022; Formenti, 2023); this, however, has been concluded to be an unfair assessment by those commentators who display a keener interest in critical theory. As Fleming (2018) notes, Mezirow’s work on adult education “is grounded in and infused with a sense of the social”, owing to the author incorporating ideas from both pedagogist John Dewey and Frankfurt School philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who concerned themselves with the cultivation and expansion of democratic participation through the exercise of free, critical inquiry, self-reflection, and dialogue.

As acknowledged by Mezirow (1991), Habermas's model of communicative action "provides the social theoretical context for transformation theory"; this model is synonymous with *dialogue*, which requires testing the validity of statements made, as well as of their premises, by means of rational argumentation. Here, we may recognise a cardinal principle of transformative learning; by rationally assessing validity claims, we can "not only revise errors in prior learning but challenge and revise inadequate meaning schemes and perspectives by critical reflection on the formerly unexamined assumptions that led us astray in earlier interpretations"; it is therefore possible to surmise that the conditions necessary for adult learning are the same conditions required to ensure "free, full participation in reflective discourse" (Mezirow, 1991). The concept of *lifeworld* is also lifted from Habermasian social critique: this is the prereflective, "prestructured world of everyday life", consisting of "a vast inventory of unquestioned assumptions and shared cultural convictions", and is translated within the frame of TLT as the wider set of one's *meaning perspectives* (Mezirow, 1991). These perspectives not only filter our interpretations of experience, but they also limit our perceptions, insofar as "we allow our meaning system to diminish our awareness of how things really are in order to avoid anxiety", caused by either an overload of information or by the possibility of cognitive dissonance with respect to what we already believe (Mezirow, 1991).

The process of validating assumptions, then, enables us to recognise distorted presuppositions steering our thinking, emotions, and behaviours; once this consciousness is achieved, the learner can restructure their meaning perspectives (i.e., their lifeworld), so that they may become "more inclusive, differentiated, permeable (open to other points of view), and integrated" (Mezirow, 1991). In other words, engaging in discussion—*decentering* ourselves by realising how partial and contextual our understanding might be—allows us deeper insight into the cultural, political, economic, and even psychological structures that have shaped the way we conceive the world and our own positioning within the mesh of power systems at play. What the individual undergoes during the transformative learning process is akin to Paulo Freire's idea of *conscientisation*, or conscience-awakening, which entails a movement from merely passive, "received" or "internalised" cognitions about self, others, and society, to active and critical understandings (Lawton, 2022, Freire, 1974); also like Freire's critical pedagogy, "perspective transformation is a group process" that provides a sense of empowerment for participants, along with "more functional strategies and resources for taking action" (Mezirow, 1991).

Transformative learning is thus qualified as an inherently collaborative praxis, carrying profound epistemological and ethical implications for educating communities: in order to replace their irreflexive, dysfunctional, and constricting schemes, one must willingly engage with other people, their life stories, and the different ways in which everyday experiences can be signified; dialogue, employed as an educational device, may disclose opportunities to probe what has been taken for granted, to extend the boundaries of our worlds, to develop a sense of civic responsibility in the face of all the ways in which people are made vulnerable and dispossessed by apparatuses of power in which we all, to some extent, partake. According to Mezirow, "a false consciousness may stabilize and legitimate dominion, hinder social progress or material production and also disguise social contradiction" (Fleming, 2018); hence, "facilitating transformative learning must include facilitating both individual and collective action" (Mezirow, 1985, quoted by Fleming, 2018), in an emancipatory effort that can only be authentically fulfilled at an intersubjective, communal level. However, it is not altogether plain under what conditions individual transformation effectively leads to social change (Auretto, 2001; Fleming, 2016). Nor, with regard to our current purpose, can we preemptively determine

what it might take for community-based education to transform and liberate. Both these outstanding questions will direct our observation as the *Viceversa* project unfolds in the months to come.

### **The Case of *Viceversa***

*Viceversa*'s main objective is to stretch the boundaries of education by calling upon the residents of Certaldo to debate, plan, and act for the good of their community. But what does this *common good* consist of? Is it a preexisting feeling that binds people together, requiring, at most, to be “unearthed” and made explicit? Or is it something that has to be constructed, validated and re-negotiated in a continuous dialectical motion?<sup>3</sup> Coherent with the transformative model, the project's initial phase was designed to give participants the opportunity to substantiate and/or dispute their respective ideas of what may be values as common good—that is, what the educating community should strive for in terms of grounding principles and actions most suited to convey them.

From September to November 2023, *Viceversa* hosted two roundtable events, open to the general public, and the first section of a learning course aimed at those intending to participate in the later co-planning and implementation phases; the activities that took place over these first few months were curated by the Department of Social, Political and Cognitive Sciences (DISPOC) of the University of Siena, in collaboration with Narrazioni Urbane, a cultural association focusing on urban renewal. Aptly, project activities take place at what used to be a slaughterhouse and has now been renovated into a cultural hub. The expected outputs of the project include activities that participants will design and develop with local schools, and a “Values Charter”: a document attesting to the identity, intent, and substantive deontology of Certaldo's educating community.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Recognition and its Dilemmas**

One pivotal topic at this stage was that of recognition: a Hegelian contribution to postmodern critical theory, it has been put forth as the missing link between the subjective experience of transformative learning and commitment to social change (Fleming, 2016). According to official introductory materials, *recognising* themselves as (potential) educating community represents a crucial step for all who spontaneously converged around the project; it is through such a community that, as *Viceversa*'s proponents maintain, tomorrow's citizens will achieve self-realisation. Habermas (1992) expressed something analogous when he defined individuality as “intersubjectively mediated self-understanding”, and Axel Honneth—who studied under Habermas—finally tied in the concept of self-realisation with that of recognition, encompassing both Freire and Mezirow in the process.

The sense of our identity is, according to Honneth, mediated by our being recognised by another; we see ourselves as we are seen through their eyes, that is to say, we internalise their perspectives about ourselves, which are at once moulded by socio-cultural narratives and infused with personal life histories (Fleming, 2016). When our needs are not met, our rights are disregarded, when we—as individuals or communities—feel mis-recognised or disrespected by others, including the systems that encroach upon our lives, we are compelled to reexamine these perspectives, which appear to us distorted and dysfunctional, fostering disparity and humiliation instead of uplifting people into becoming their best selves. This is, in Fleming's (2016, 2018)

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<sup>3</sup> On this debate, see Tramma, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> For more information on the project and its developments: <https://percorsiconibambini.it/viceversa/scheda-progetto/> (last accessed: 30/04/2024).



view, how individual internal conflicts about identity and one's place in the world can transfer to the socio-political dimension, starting with the desire to associate with others to tackle a common grievance. Modern communities, then, are not merely a revival of preexisting allegiances, but rather "intentional acts" originating from "differentiated critical stances toward the present state of things" (Tramma, 2009).

The uncertainties and crises of an atomised, disillusioned societal landscape, where traditional forms of democratic participation appear to be short-circuiting and the welfare state is being inexorably eroded, compound the disorienting dilemmas arising from each person's relationships and everyday experiences. Most of the residents of Certaldo who volunteered to be part of the *Viceversa* project either have or have had an active involvement in education and care: some of them work in formal education, or are training to do so; some are employed in the field of social and community services; others are retired family doctors, dance instructors, or simply had to brave the challenges of rearing children of their own. Eventually, the frustration at the inability of institutions to provide adequate support systems and fulfil an educative, conscience-stirring role morphed into an intensified need for community. Since the very first meetings with DISPOC professors, participants voiced their restlessness to "do something", to reshape the world around them so that it may finally match the ideal blueprint each had in mind. It was essential, then, to start off by problematising both this *urgency for action* and the very notion of *communality*; to reflect on whether a place to belong was something sought and found, or constructed via the recursive negotiation of values, interests, and objectives.

For the entire duration of the course, *boundaries* have been an overarching, albeit often tacit theme. They recurred in the examination of the many ways in which our unquestioned frames of meaning narrow the scope of our perception; they called forth discussions about the physical and/or symbolic spaces inhabited by the community; they have been evoked whenever we dwelled on the relationship between the individual "I" and the collective "We", between the educating community the might spring from *Viceversa* and the "outside world". Finally, the issue of boundaries, charged with epistemological and ontological ramifications, allowed us to delve into the equally laden problem of centering and decentering, of acknowledging context without neglecting the irreducible uniqueness of every human being.

### **Transformative Workshops: Deconstructing and Decentering**

The second half of the learning course, which took place from December 2023 to April 2024, was divided into four units, each led by a different educator affiliated with three local nonprofits: Polis Social Enterprise, dedicated to promoting a variety of cultural and artistic activities; Spazio Ipotetico A.p.S., which organises circus and dance workshops; and Circo Libera Tutti A.s.d., also engaging participants in juggling and other circus disciplines, conjoining educational, expressive, and recreational aspects.

While the first section was eminently discursive and theoretical, these meetings were meant to involve participants in a number of practical experiences, provoking self-reflection through simulation and play. The two units designed by Spazio Ipotetico focused on the topic of normativity, challenging the community to rethink their assumptions about gender and (dis)ability, along with the identities and sets of expectations that derive from these categories. Meanwhile, Polis and Circo Libera Tutti emphasised aspects pertaining to group dynamics and communication, making use of musical instruments and body language, respectively. Throughout, the educators' role was that of facilitators, proposing activities and moderating the critical reflection phases that punctuated each meeting.

*Listening* was fostered as both disposition and methodology from the outset. It has been variously qualified (listening to oneself, listening to each other, etc.), and practised with a multitude of “languages”: body motions, postures, feelings, music, eye contact, and even silence. All of these elements allow people’s life stories to transpire. Contexts do matter for transformative education (Dirkx, 1998), and recognition would be farcical if we refused to acknowledge how we fall into categories that are socially and politically constructed, and what spaces and opportunities become either accessible or restricted to us as a result. Participants were encouraged to map their own positioning within the intersecting planes of gender identity, ability, race and class; but, at the same time, a “decontextualising” or decentering process was set in motion by drawing attention to life stories. These biographies<sup>5</sup>, which were either narrated through anecdotes or conveyed in body language and sound, were received and appreciated in their complexity, contradictory aspects, and singularity; while undoubtedly shaped by internalised representations and biases, they also attest to the uniqueness of the individual human experience.

Play, including musical improvisation, juggling exercises, and performance techniques readapted from Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed, created ways for participants to meet each other without necessarily having to speak. The core purpose of these experiences was to reevaluate what they might have taken for granted about one another and themselves, including needs, degrees of capability and comfort, openness to novelty. They also required that special attention be given to the emotions awakened by each session: questions such as “how did it feel?” typically introduced discussions following the activities.

Rational argumentation has not been the sole mode of democratic, generative learning engaged in by *Viceversa* participants, even while negotiating the contents of their Values Charter. Present emotions were acknowledged as testament to life histories; to brush them aside in the quest for theoretical coherence would amount to mis-recognition, which would in turn disqualify any educative actions the community might undertake toward itself and the world beyond its ever-permeable, shifting boundaries. Valuing human dignity—upon which the very concept of recognition is predicated—requires that one not be “mutilated” of either their emotions, inner conflicts and contradictions, or vulnerabilities; and, as *Viceversa* is learning, we cannot hope to transform what we do not love and esteem.

### **Conclusion**

As of mid-April 2024, *Viceversa* is entering its co-planning phase, aimed at systematising the community’s identifying principles and sketching ideas for future educative actions. There is plenty about this project that remains to be seen: whether paths of self-reflection will in fact lead to resignifying experience; whether individual transformations will converge into a concerted, sustained effort for change and keener understanding; how fruitful the community’s impetus will be, and how long it will last. Participants themselves have had to grapple with the unpredictability of outcomes and the unresolved tensions pervading educational praxis.

What we have hitherto tried to articulate is the possibility—yet to be fully explored—that TLT may provide compelling theoretical frameworks to help decode, evaluate, and cast a critical eye upon contemporary educating communities, assessing their structures, methodological choices, relational modes, and the processes they promote.

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<sup>5</sup> On the concept of biographies and their relevance within TLT, see Cunningham, 1998.

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# Perspective Transformation through the Arts: Creating an Educational Method and Conducting an Extensive Application

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**Abstract:** While the emancipatory potential of aesthetic experience has been extensively explored in the transformative learning (TL) literature, there has been little discussion so far on how to harness it in educational settings. To address this gap, this paper presents the method *Transformative Learning through Aesthetic Experience* (TLAE). Serving as a roadmap for exploring artworks in educational programs, TLAE includes seven stages, each of which responds to an operational question guiding educators from formulating appropriate art-based strategies to meet their learners' TL needs to evaluating TL outcomes and building upon them in future endeavors. As a way of illustration, the paper also discusses how TLAE was implemented within a three-year educational intervention, including a follow-up study on the long-term effects on the participants.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Aesthetic Experience, Operational Questions, Long-term Effects

## Introduction

Several scholars of TL have highlighted the role of contemplating art toward perspective transformation. For instance, Mezirow (2012) mentioned that contact with art is one of the main means of challenging taken-for-granted assumptions. Dirkx (1997) argued that aesthetic experience acts as a gateway that leads into the unconscious experiences of the soul. Lipson Lawrence (2005) focused on how the exploration of artworks, as well as the artistic expression, including visual, written and performative arts, may evoke imaginative perspectives, intuitive sensibilities, and intellectual capabilities. Clover (2022) highlighted that art, and especially art exhibitions, can be a means to stimulate radical imagination and critical consciousness on social issues, such as gendered social dynamics, activism, and culture.

The aforementioned perspectives illuminate important aspects of the process whereby individuals might explore art for perspective transformation. That said, facilitating this process in educational settings presents a distinct set of challenges, as there are several context-specific parameters affecting the way in which TL through aesthetic experience may occur. Such parameters relate, among others, to the relationship between the educator and the participants, the learning climate, the time constraints of the educational program, and the strategies through which learners are actually involved in the educational process. A range of operational questions thus emerge, representing the foundational considerations for creating educational practices conducive to TL through aesthetic experience:

- 1) How can the TL process be activated within the classroom?
- 2) How can the educators identify the learners' assumptions that need to be re-examined?

- 3) How can a transformative teaching strategy be formulated within the limitations of a given educational program?
- 4) What kind of artworks will be employed and based on what criteria will they be selected?
- 5) How could the exploration of the artworks take place in practice?
- 6) How may the insights that emerge from the artworks' exploration eventually contribute to the reconsideration of learners' initial assumptions and how can this process be evaluated?
- 7) What could happen after the educational intervention?

This paper provides a detailed examination of the method *Transformative Learning through Aesthetic Experience* (TLAE) developed by the lead author (Kokkos, 2021), focusing on how the operational questions above are interpreted within its framework. Additionally, the paper explores the application of TLAE within the doctoral research of the second author (Raikou, 2016). This involved a three-year transformative educational intervention implemented with students from the Pedagogical Department of the University of Patras, Greece. To investigate the long-term impact of that intervention, a follow-up study was also conducted six years later (Raikou, 2019), illustrating the significant transformative potential of TLAE.

### **The TLAE Method And the Example Of Application**

The TLAE method is situated within the theoretical field of TL. In addition, where necessary, the formulation of the method drew elements from the work of emancipatory scholars who conceive aesthetic experience as a means for perspective transformation (e.g., Adorno, Castoriadis, Dewey, Greene). Especially regarding the exploration of artworks, the method is informed by techniques developed by theorists of the cognitive school of art (e.g., Perkins' practical approach, as well as the *Project Zero* thinking routines developed by the Harvard Graduate School of Education).

The TLAE method is structured in seven stages, each of which directly addresses one of the operational questions outlined previously.

#### **First Stage: Determining the Need for Transformative Learning**

This stage responds to the first operational question and, to that end, it draws from the relevant pathways suggested by Cranton (2016) and Taylor (2000). In particular, when an adult educator realizes that the members of the learning group share problematic assumptions on a certain topic, he or she may help them experience a disorienting dilemma. This could happen through various techniques seeking to encourage learners to question their previously accepted knowledge. According to TLAE method, at the end of their discourse, the educator asks the participants whether they are willing to systematically reflect on the topic at hand in future meetings, paving the way for the following stages.

#### *The educational intervention*

The application of TLAE at the University of Patras commenced at the beginning of the second year of the participants' studies, involving a series of workshops. The first workshop aimed at exploring the need for reviewing the students' assumptions concerning their professional identity. It began with an introductory discussion on the topic, during which an attempt was made to surface the assumptions the students had formed thus far through their experiences in formal educational settings. The educator noticed that her students' views were fundamentally teacher-centered, probably because they had not been familiarized with

participatory, critically reflective, and student-centered forms of education during their school years. The need for a deeper re-examination of those beliefs soon became apparent, which raised students' interest in reviewing their assumptions more systematically. After a presentation of TLAE, they were explicitly asked whether they wished to participate in its application, to which they unanimously consented (Raikou, 2016).

### **Second Stage: Participants Express Their Assumptions**

This stage corresponds to the second operational question. To identify the exact problematic assumptions that the learners need to re-examine, the educator asks them to reply to an open-ended probing question about the topic under critical examination. In this regard, Cranton's suggestions can be highly useful in terms of determining the characteristics of such questions: "Be conversational", "Do not ask questions that can be responded to in a simplistic 'yes-no' way", "Ask questions that draw on learners' experiences and interests in relation to the topic" (Cranton, 2016, pp. 107-108).

#### *The educational intervention (continued)*

After the first discussion, the students were asked to respond individually and in writing to the open-ended question "What is your educational perspective?"

### **Third Stage: Constructing a Transformational Strategy**

Corresponding to the third operational question, this stage involves analyzing the learners' answers to identify an appropriate, in each case, transformative strategy. To achieve this, the educator is suggested to take into consideration Mezirow's conceptualization of the two diverse forms of TL (Mezirow, 1991, 2012). The first form lies in the transformation of a *habit of mind*, namely, a set of orienting predispositions that act as a filter for interpreting the meaning of experience. The second form refers to the transformation of *points of view*, that is, clusters of beliefs, expectations, feelings, attitudes and judgments that result from a habit of mind. The transformation of a habit of mind is much more demanding, since, as Mezirow (1991) warns, it requires premise reflection, rather than simply content and process reflection, as is the case in the transformation of a point of view. That said, a series of cumulative transformations in related points of view may indeed lead to a transformation of a habit of mind. Therefore, identifying the breadth and depth of transformations of the various points of view can reveal whether transformation takes place in the habit of mind articulated through them.

On that basis, an educator needs to consider the taken-for-granted assumptions the participants expressed during the second stage not only in relation with Mezirow's suggestions about the forms that TL may take, but also in relation with the learning climate in the classroom and the availability of time within the given educational program. This may, in turn, help provide accurate answers to the following crucial questions in order to eventually determine the transformative strategy that needs to be adopted:

- What is the learners' problematic habit of mind and which are the resulting points of view on the topic at hand?
- Will only certain points of view be sought to be transformed? Which ones and based on what criteria might they be selected?
- Will the educator seek to transform a whole habit of mind? In what order will the transformation of the points of view be attempted so that a gradual transformation of the habit of mind will come as a result?

Afterwards, according to X method, the educator identifies, with the involvement of the participants, a number of critical questions that will serve as triggers for promoting TL.

*The educational intervention (continued)*

The habit of mind identified in this case referred to the role of the teacher. Bearing in mind the assumptions expressed by the students, a number of resulting problematic points of view were discerned, including: The teacher must guide the students who are not considered mature enough to participate actively in the educational process; the teacher imposes discipline on the students; the teacher should keep distance from the students; closer relationship with students is dangerous for the learning process; the teacher must identify and transmit 'right' values.

The educator designed her learning strategy in a way that every workshop would include consideration of one or more points of view, depending on the dynamic shaped during the learning process. Those workshops followed a spiral process, enabling the participants to revisit the same points of view year after year, this way gaining a deeper understanding of them. In this regard, at the beginning of each year, the educator, in cooperation with the students, determined the critical questions the following workshops would concentrate on, such as (Raikou, 2016):

What do you think about the relationship between the teacher and the learners?

How do you conceptualize discipline? Is discipline a necessary element of the educational process?

What is your opinion on transmitting values? What led you to come to your own inference on this topic?

**Fourth Stage: Identifying Works of Art**

This stage corresponds to the fourth operational question. The educator, ideally in collaboration with the learning group, selects works of art that may serve as incentives to explore the critical questions developed during the previous stage. In terms of identifying the criteria for the selection of works of art, the TLAE method draws on the considerations of Adorno (1977), Castoriadis (2008), Dewey (1980) and Greene (2000), which have affinities between them regarding this issue. The artworks should include a large number of components (multidimensional meaning content, as well as rich morphological elements) that may offer learners multiple opportunities to critically wonder about the essence of crucial personal and social issues. Moreover, as Greene (2000) and Perkins (2009) have suggested, the works of art should be emotionally and intellectually accessible to learners who do not satisfy any particular academic prerequisites. In order for this to be fulfilled, the artworks' meaning content should be relevant to the frame of reference and life experiences of the learners.

*The educational intervention (continued)*

To facilitate the process, the educator suggested works of art that were culturally relevant to the participants. These included works of fine arts, poetry, literature and movies, while every critical question was related to one or more artworks each time. The works of fine arts chosen initially, namely, until the students began to familiarize with the process of contemplating art, were representational, in order for them to be accessible enough (*The School of Athens*, by Raphael; *A scholar seated at a table with books*, by Rembrandt; *Narcissus*, by Caravaggio; *The thinker*, by Rodin). Later on, the educator suggested works by Chagall (*Over the town*) and Picasso (*The lesson*), as well as works of literature and poetry, which refer to Greek culture (Kazantzakis, Vretakos). Furthermore, the learning group selected the film *The class*, by Cantet.

**Fifth Stage: Exploring Works of Art**

Moving on to address the fifth operational question, the participants explore the artworks and associate the resulting insights with the identified critical questions and their life experiences. In order to achieve a fulfilling approach of the artworks, TLAE suggests, in this

respect, the use of methodological tools created by the cognitive theorists of art, such as Eisner (2002), Gardner (1999) and Perkins (2009), who deal with the exploration of a wide range of symbolic codes (e.g., linguistic style in poetry, handling of color and lighting in paintings, rhythm and melody in music), through which it is possible to articulate delicate meanings and feelings, and capture various understandings of the works of art. Additionally, the educators are advised to work with Project Zero's 'thinking routines', which are sets of questions that can be used flexibly across various issues to urge learners make their own interpretations of the artworks.

#### *The educational intervention (continued)*

During the workshops, the group explored the artworks using Project Zero's techniques and attempted to correlate the emerging ideas to the critical questions. Each workshop focused on some of the points of view. Initially, the educator posed the critical question the learning group would work on. A presentation and analysis of the works of art followed, while their meaning content was gradually connected to the critical questions and the learners' life experiences.

#### **Sixth stage: Reconsidering the Initial Assumptions**

Focusing on the sixth operational question, the participants are urged to reflect on the insights resulting from the exploration of the artworks and the critical questions, to empower them to start reconsidering their initial assumptions. To this end, the educators are advised to choose from a range of techniques fostering TL that have been suggested in the literature (e.g., Brookfield, 2012; Cranton, 2016, Taylor, 2009) and, of course, at the end, to evaluate the TL outcomes that may have been achieved. In this regard, they need to consider whether the various evaluation strategies presented in the literature (e.g., the *Learning Activities Survey* by King, 2009; see Melacarne, 2019 for a review) could potentially be adopted in their own case or whether the formulation of an original evaluation tool is necessary.

#### *The educational intervention (continued)*

Besides constantly evaluating them during the workshops, the participants' points of view were also assessed at the end of each year, after the last workshop, so that a comparison could be made with those they had initially expressed and, this way, detect possible changes. This process offered clear indications that some participants had indeed experienced transformative learning (Raikou, 2016).

In the case of 10 out of the 15 students of the group, a deep change was observed in at least two of their initial points of view. Four students showed clear awareness of the need for further critical investigation of some of their points of view, while one student demonstrated a small-scale change. In addition, at the end of the three-year intervention, the educator compared the views of this group to the views of three control groups of students of the same educational level/department/year of studies. It was found that the students who participated in the implementation of the method demonstrated more detailed and deeper understanding of the issues examined than the control groups.

#### **Seventh Stage: Defining and Applying Next Steps**

This stage corresponds to the seventh operational question. The learning group discusses certain actions aiming at the continuance of the transformative pathway, entailing, for instance, further reflecting within peer groups or setting up common projects. Ideally, a feedback research study might be conducted in order to evaluate the long-term results of the transformative endeavor.



### *The findings and implications of the follow-up study*

The follow-up study was conducted through semi-structured in-depth interviews. The findings highlighted five dimensions (Raikou, 2019). Firstly, the shifts in the participants' points of view that had taken place during their studies remained stable and, in many cases, their assumptions seemed deepened and expanded. Secondly, the professional teaching experience gained by some of the participants after graduation contributed significantly to making the transformation of their views more profound and meaningful in terms of their role as teachers. Respectively, those who had gained no teaching experience thus far continued to perceive the educational and aesthetic concepts through the theoretical knowledge they had acquired from their studies. The role of acquiring experience in deepening the initially transformed assumptions has not been thoroughly examined within TL literature and could be a field for further investigation. Third, in the course of the research, it appeared that transformations took place into points of view that are part of habits of mind beyond the one on which the original research scope had focused. For example, transformations emerged regarding an epistemological habit of mind (familiarity with the intuitive and emotional way of meaning making), a social habit of mind (recognizing the need to build relationships with colleagues and parents), as well as an aesthetic habit of mind (appreciation of art, aesthetic values, relationship of art to learning). Fourth, it appeared that the transformative processes that took place within the various habits of mind are intertwined and influenced by each other – an issue underdeveloped by Mezirow. Finally, the need emerged for a permanent supportive framework that could provide learners with continuous opportunities for critical reflection and feedback after their initial engagement in TL.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The presentation of TLAE method and the description of its implementation within the University of Patras aimed at demonstrating the prerequisites for the transformative use of art within educational settings, which is admittedly an underdeveloped issue within the TL literature. The particular circumstances of this task require that a number of practical issues are taken into account, such as how the educators may formulate a strategy within the framework of the educational program, how the artworks could be processed, how the transformative process can be evaluated, as well as what the next steps of the educational intervention could potentially be.

The process of formulating the TLAE method showed that it is appropriate, when necessary, to enrich the TL literature with other scholarly contributions which are proven to be fruitful. Also, the follow-up study revealed the importance of evaluating the long-term impact of TL. This was found to be particularly relevant to Hoggan's model of evaluating TL outcomes (Hoggan, 2016) in terms of identifying whether a deep and stable change in learners' perspective had taken place, and whether this change gradually extended to areas of their frame of reference which were not included in the initial transformative scope. Finally, the follow-up study highlighted the importance of developing peer TL communities after the experience of a transformative educational intervention, an issue that needs further investigation.

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## **Deliberate Phases of Transformative Learning Theory Applied to an Educational Sustainability Doctoral Program**

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**Abstract:** The Educational Sustainability Doctoral Program at University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point was designed around six core principles: 1. Transformative Learning; 2. Futures Thinking; 3. Systems Thinking; 4. Diversity and Social Justice; 5. Ecological Thought; 6. Ethical Action. The adult learners that enter this program are working professionals that are re-entering higher education many years after launching their professional careers. Herein, we present the design, structure, and processes that target different phases of transformative learning during students' doctoral journey. Through surveys and written reflections completed by current and past EdD students, we explore the students' experiences in the three to four years they are in the program. The preliminary results presented represent six different cohorts from 2018 to 2024. The students that participated in the research are at different phases, including nine respondents that have graduated, and 34 respondents that are in years 1, 2, 3, or 4 of the program.

**Key Words:** Sustainability, Transformative Learning, Holistic, Social Change

### **Transformative Learning in the Educational Sustainability Program**

The Educational Sustainability Doctoral Program (EdD) at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point was designed to foster transformative learning throughout the three to four years students are in the program. This research seeks to explore how and when students experience transformative learning. Students were voluntarily asked to participate in a survey regarding Mezirow's 10 phases of transformative learning, Freire's social-emancipatory theories of transformative learning, and Papastamatis and Panitsides holistic approach to transformative learning (Casebeer & Mann, 2017; Mezirow, 2000; Moore, 2005; Papastamatis & Panitsides, 2014; Sipos et al., 2008). Additionally, students were asked to reflect on their experiences thus far with transformative learning as part of their *Transformative Sustainability Teaching and Learning* course.

#### **The First Year:**

The first year of the Educational Sustainability Doctoral program focuses on "a disorienting dilemma" as described by Mezirow and Associates (2000). The students entering the doctoral program come with an immediate desire to start their research, building off the decades of work experience that frames their current belief systems. However, they are asked to wait to draft their research questions and initial chapters until year two, because the first year is focused

on unsettling and reorienting their concept of sustainability. Students often make assumptions about sustainability having a primarily environmental lens, with a problem-based focus but through required courses in the first year, we deliberately reframe sustainability to include social justice and solutions-orientation. Preliminary results show that 80% of respondents experienced a disorienting dilemma and 74% of those respondents indicate they experienced that during the first year. One first-year student commented, “The first time I signed in to the EDSU 919 (residency) Canvas page in the first week of the semester, I was stunned! One of my classmates had designed an entire e-course on Indigenous epistemologies, and students from Cohorts 5 and 6 were writing thoughtful, in-depth critiques on the virtual discussion board. I had never even heard of Indigenous epistemologies. I felt out of my depth and began to worry about my ability to keep up with everyone else in this program.” Through focusing on solutions and visioning, we shifted the learners from thinking about environmental catastrophes to developing audacious goals for potential sustainable futures that foster social equity. Themes in the survey responses connect to pushing students to expand their view of sustainability. One student wrote, “Realizing that sustainability isn't just about environmental issues would be the first one (experienced in Ethics of Care when I took that as an elective before the program). I think the Social Justice course was also a disorienting situation, as it opened by eyes to the racism embedded within our culture.”

### **The Second Year:**

Year two of the program focuses on personal empowerment through critical reflection, systems thinking activities and developing an action research agenda. Year two aligns with Friere’s Social-Emancipatory Theories of Transformative Learning (Papastamatis & Panitsides, 2014), with an emphasis on transforming communities to be more equitable places to live (Stuckey et al., 2013). Through coursework students critically reflect on biases that arise due to the predominantly White, colonist perspective that pervades U.S. education systems (Adam et al., 2019). We ask students to challenge the social normative constructs of the histories told, prominent authors and books assigned (again, in K-12 typically authored by White males), and knowledge that is codified by our institutional systems, all of which connects to the emancipatory learning process (Dawson & Avoseh, 2018). Students address their implicit biases and engage in writing their positionality statements, which explores their position relative to their targeted problem and solution. As part of the scaffolded systems thinking activities, students design systems diagrams and describe intervention points for fostering social change through their proposed research. Students conclude year two by presenting their research proposals as part of their second in-person residency course. Each of these pieces—the implicit bias curriculum, critical reflection on the dominant paradigm education, creating systems diagrams with intervention points, and presenting a research proposal—builds towards students designing action research projects that effect real-world change in the communities they reside. Student responses, to-date, indicate that 90% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the EdD program supported learning that empowered them to be an actor for positive change, based on a 4-point Likert scale response.

### **The Final Years:**

During the final years of the educational sustainability doctoral program, the students are no longer pupils building a plan for their research, rather they are action-researchers engaging with their communities and impacting change. At this last phase of the program, students deepen their relationships with the dissertation committees and their cohort members as well as attend their final residency. One student wrote, “The residencies were pivotal to developing meaningful

relationships with peers that inspire me and that I will take with me beyond the program.” Many students also commented on the importance of the dissertation committee in these final years. One student wrote, “There are some aspects of the Ed.D. program that were powerful for me, especially tied to emancipatory learning. This primarily occurred in the writing process with my committee Chair, conducting the study, and deeply studying my area of focus.”

### Conclusion

The research demonstrates the importance of deliberately aligning curriculum with transformative learning outcomes to achieve holistic change that impacts not only the heads, hearts, and hands of the students but also extends to positive impacts for the broader community.

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## Healing Our Hearts and Our Planet: The Role of Transformative Learning

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**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Climate Crisis, Adult Development, Ecophilosophy, Social Action

Perhaps the greatest challenge to human intelligence today is not how to accomplish the next technological breakthrough or build the most advanced AI, but how to integrate human ingenuity with our own animate intelligence and that of the natural world.

– *Jeremy Lent, The Web of Meaning, 2021, p. 56*

If we had to make a choice between changing the world and helping learners to transform their assumptions about their world so that they could change it, I would unhesitatingly choose the latter.

– *Jack Mezirow, Transformative Learning and Social Action, 1998, p. 72*

### Extended Abstract

Borrowing a term from Mezirow’s theoretical transformative learning framework, we argue that the state of the planet is the most *disorienting dilemma* that humanity faces in this century. How and whether we transform globally will impact generations far into the future, including humans and all other species. In this paper, we argue that this is both a frightening and an exciting time: frightening because inaction has dramatic consequences for life as we know it; exciting because it opens possibilities for people coming together to achieve positive transformation. Mezirow’s ten phases of transformative learning provide a clear pathway for working on this crucial issue, making it possible to shift one’s perspective from a disorientating dilemma to a process of reimagination. Acting towards healing the planet will demand nothing less than a transformation in the way that humans interact with the natural world and with each other.

At the conference, we presented a paper in which we applied Mezirow’s ten phases of transformative learning to key insights of eco-philosophers, Thomas Berry, Jeremy Lent, Molly Brown, Joanna Macy, Karen O’Brien, Rebecca Solnit, and others, in confronting the climate crisis and moving from emotion to action. Combining research on the climate crisis with Mezirow’s transformative learning paradigm reveals insights and suggests creative ways of taking action to educate people and build their capacities to teach about and to take action in response to the climate crisis.

In our paper, we combined the ten phases into three categories: 1) growing one’s awareness, 2) educating oneself, and 3), reimagining one’s role in the world.

#### **Growing One’s Awareness**

Grief and fear are human responses to loss—loss of social connection, loss of autonomy, and loss of certainty.... When we find ourselves in the grip of fear or in the depths of grief, we can experience these states as a powerful invitation to understand that we are at the threshold that we need to explore.... Each time we turn away from our grief, we might harden our anguish. Each

time that we turn away from fear, we increase the grip of dread. ... [Yet] Hard as it may be to see this, when we are in the thick of the experience of grief or in the grip of fear, both can be deeply humanizing, both can deepen our empathy, and both can increase our compassion for empathy and insight.  
– *Rebecca Solnit, et. al, Not Too Late, 2023, pp. 114-115*

This section was based on Mezirow's transformative learning phases one, two and three (1991). They can be summed up as experiencing a disorienting dilemma, followed by feelings of guilt and shame, and culminating in a critical assessment of existing assumptions.

According to Mezirow, new awareness and learning begins with a collision between the way we have been thinking and acting and the reality we face (Mezirow, 1990; Kokkos, 2020). Following his model, coming to awareness about the climate naturally involves a period of self-reflection, encompassing a range of emotions. We explored these complicated emotions around environmental degradation and the increasing awareness of the state of the health of the planet.

What helps is acknowledging fear and the wide range of emotions people experience when confronted with the climate situation: fear, denial, despair, uncertainty, sense of loss, anxiety, avoidance, anger, sadness, and depression.

### **Educating Oneself**

Beware of making assumptions; find common ground before examining difference; share feelings as well as fact; share your personal experience; trust the other person's ability to learn and change over time; see yourself and the other within the larger context; and remember to hold the other person and yourself with compassion.

– *Joanna Macy and Molly Brown, Coming Back to Life, 2014, p. 195*

Based on Mezirow's phases four, five, six, and seven, this part of the paper mapped out how to help people gain a greater understanding of the situation the planet is in as well as their own reaction to what is happening. These phases were summarized as recognizing we are not alone, exploring new roles, planning a course of action, and acquiring knowledge and skills.

There is enormous relief in discovering we are not alone. The philosopher Thich Nhat Hanh has said that the next prophet to arrive in the world will not be an individual, but rather a community (Hanh in Solnit et al, 2023, p. 184). This is an opportunity to remind people that only a small portion of the population is needed to change the system for the better. There is already a range of communities learning about and designing actions around the climate crisis (Habitatpoint, 2024).

Educating oneself is characterized by reading, attending seminars, teaching oneself, and engaging with others who are interested in these issues. Planning also necessitates using current skill sets and building additional intellectual capacity. This involves researching and writing before moving to action.

### **Reimagining One's Role in the World**

Responding to climate change with clarity, coherence, and most of all, wisdom, requires a strategy that transcends the urgency of the moment and compels us to engage with new ways of thinking, being, and doing.

– *Karen O'Brien, You Matter More Than You Think, 2021, p. 17*

One response to climate says all we can take care of is our own feelings ourselves, but it's the connections—to places, people, movements, ideals—that fortify us to face the situation and make it possible to change that situation.

– *Rebecca Solnit, et. al, Not Too Late, 2023, p. 188*

This section is based on Mezirow's transformative learning phases eight, nine, and ten, which are summarized as trying new ways of working, building competence and self-confidence, and integrating new learning into one's life and work.

In these phases, people begin to move from feelings of helplessness and inaction towards self-empowerment and engagement. This is an iterative process, a spiraling through between self-reflection, and new learning. This necessitates being skillful in conversation about climate change and letting go of absolute convictions, as well as experimenting with new ways of working and taking care of yourself when you feel discouraged.

When the work begins, you need to acquire information, practice in the field, and learn from other members of the community. This often moves you beyond acting as an individual, to engaging with other like-minded people, and even joining or helping to create a community of practice.

Reintegration, as Mezirow envisions it, or reimagining as we apply the term, provides some of the deepest, most profound learning. We argued that while much can be done at the structural level, it is impossible for global transformation to occur unless individuals accept fresh ways of feeling, thinking, and acting in response to the disorienting dilemma we all face.

These connections provide the basis for an urgently needed framework that enables adult learners to confront their disorientation around planetary suffering, to reflect critically, and to overcome social and psychic barriers to action.

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# “See the Unseen”. Is Transformative Learning an “Inclusive” Theory? Towards an Intersectional Antibleist Approach to Transformative Research

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to trouble the notions of “inclusion” and “participation” in transformative learning research. In the first part, it examines the literature on transformative learning (TL) and inclusion of people with neurodiversity and disabilities. Based on a critical literature review from major journals and conference proceedings, it offers an assessment of the significance of “inclusion” within the wider field of TL theory (Clark, 2006). Then it investigates how disability and neurodiversity inclusion is envisaged and approached theoretically, methodologically, and thematically in the reviewed publications. In the second part, the paper describes one action-research experience with groups of adult people with neurodevelopmental disorders and intellectual disabilities in two cities of the European Mediterranean countries. Through this presentation, the paper points to potential strengths and limitations of antibleist research on this topic (Kofke, et al., 2018). While certainly provocative, this contribution pushes the community of TL researchers to “get into good trouble” with inclusion and participation as *non-innocent concepts* (Rautio, et al., 2022) and to radically question our understanding as researchers of “*for whom*” and “*by whom*” of the TL research.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning Research, Intersectionality, Antibleism, Inclusion, Participation

## Introduction

This paper aims to trouble the notion of “inclusion” and “participation” in transformative learning research (TL). It investigates theoretically and empirically how neurodiversity and disability inclusion is envisaged and approached theoretically and methodologically in TL theory and research. Embedded in this discussion is the reflection on potential strengths and limitations of antibleist research (Kofke, et al., 2018) through the presentation of an action-research with people with neurodiversity and disability.

## The Literature Gap

The rationale of the research moves from the recent critiques advanced in the field of the TL theory (Finnegan, & Hoggan, 2023; Hoggan, 2023): there’s a double gap in TL theory, where the topic of neurodiversity and disability inclusion remains under-researched (Finnegan, 2023). Moreover, even when TL theory is adopted for research with disabled people, most of those studies are based on narrative case-studies, characterized by a common “plot”: a person with (physical) disability has experienced a disorienting dilemma when he/she had his/her physical impairment which impeded his/her life as before (see at this regard Kroth, & Cranton, 2014; Singer, 2016). In most of these studies, TL is used as a theoretical lens to investigate the

disability experience within an adult education context. “Although it is important to understand how an onset of disability can trigger a transformative and/or emancipatory experience, what is absent [in TL Research] are the power issues inherent to living within the sociopolitical culture of ableism, structure of disability, and disablism” (Clark, 2006, p. 312), according to a sociomaterial and intersectional perspective on TL. This is a paradox if we consider that “transformative learning calls for opening up boundaries, inviting diversity, engaging in perspective taking, and revising beliefs and assumptions to grow views and mindsets” (Marsick, Kasl, & Watkins, 2022, p. X).

### **Research Methodology**

The paper promotes the reflections to explore the “ambiguous and exclusive side” of TL theory and research. A critical narrative review (Grant, & Booth, 2009; Sukhera, 2022) of the articles and publications on TL and disability is provided first, along with an assessment of the significance of neurodiversity and disability inclusion in the wider field of TL theory, its tenets and critiques. Embedded within this discussion are presented two experiences of action-research with adult white people with neurodevelopmental disorders, analyzed according to an intersectional anti-ableist perspective (Kofke, et al., 2018). Intersectionality is a huge “umbrella term” originally derived from black feminist lawyer Crenshaw (1989). Intersectional perspective is here intended as a metatheoretical construct which represents an implicit critique of exclusion and erasure of difference: it argues that oppression and privilege can shift depending on the context, social identities are not independent ‘but multiple and intersecting’, people from historically oppressed and marginalized groups are the focal point of transformative research (Kelly, et al., 2021).

### **Data Sources and Analysis**

For the critical review, we chose to review material from three different data sources:

- Journals that have been most important to the development of TL scholarship, such as *Adult Education Quarterly* (AEQ), *Journal of Transformative Education* (JTED), and *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults* (RELA);
- Conference proceedings of 11 of the 14 *International Transformative Learning Conferences* (ITLC) that have been held since 1998;
- Collective volumes about TL theory from 2000 to nowadays.

The keywords for the review were: disability studies in TL, inclusion and TL, inclusive TL, ableist/disableist TL research, anti-ableism in TL research, neurodiversity and TL.

The selection criteria were as follows:

- a) Papers and/or articles should have been published between 2000 and 2023.
- b) Language of the papers and/or articles should have been written in English.
- c) Papers and/or articles should match the keywords listed above.

Several factors informed the choice of the sources for critical literature. First, we claimed “well represented” perspectives on transformative learning and disabilities, including diverse and current perspectives from emerging scholars who are exploring the field of transformative learning theory. Second, we wanted to rely on recent publications in the last few years to convey a state-of-the-art view about anti-ableist intersectional approaches in TL (Kofke, et al., 2018). Third, we found in the publications common elements about implications of using an anti-ableist perspective in transformative research that we would synthesize in the next paragraphs.

**Table 1***Table 1, Synthesis of the Critical Literature Review*

<b>Database</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Google Scholar</i></li> <li>• <i>EbSco</i></li> <li>• <i>PubMed</i></li> <li>• <i>Web of Science</i></li> </ul>
<b>Source</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Journals: AEQ, JTED, and RELA</i></li> <li>• <i>Conference Proceedings:ITLC Conference</i></li> <li>• <i>Collective volumes</i></li> </ul>
<b>Keywords for the search</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>disability studies in TL, critical disability studies in TL</i></li> <li>• <i>inclusive transformative learning</i></li> <li>• <i>antiableism TL research</i></li> <li>• <i>neurodiversity and TL</i></li> </ul>
<b>Criteria for selection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Temporary Span: from 2000 to 2023</i></li> <li>• <i>Language: English</i></li> <li>• <i>Pertinence: coherence with the keywords</i></li> </ul>

### Findings and Discussions

A total of 74 articles, papers and chapters over the past 23 years were collected. Emerging evidence from the review shows that studies focusing on groups of men and women with disabilities, especially with intellectual or neurodevelopmental disabilities, are in their early stages of scholarship in TL theory and research. Most of the empirical studies are single case-studies of an individual experience (Singer, 2016; Kwon, 2022). Discussions targeting BIPOC women with disability or neurodiversity remain undeveloped. Studies that prove to radically question about disentangling ourselves as *able-bodied TL scholars* are hesitant.

Our review of the literature suggests that the discussions upon antiableist perspectives on transformative research lie at the conceptual level. Researchers who claimed transformative learning is a white-centric, north-west, ableist and male dominance theory (Kofke, et al., 2018), brought an antiableist perspective in transformative education by connecting transformative learning as intended by Mezirow (2001; 2009) with more activist and affirming fields like critical disability studies (Clark, 2006; Kofke, et al., 2018; Ferri, Connor, & Annamma, 2023) and intersectionality research (Hanson, & Fletcher, 2021).

Moreover, this positivistic ableist approach to disability in TL is limited in its capacity to explain the notion of intersectionality and the ongoing agency exercised by groups of people with neurodiversity and disabilities in resisting a dominant culture that marginalizes them (Kwon, 2022). The application of intersectionality perspectives in transformative research would be most helpful for researchers who are willing to apply antiableist, antiracist and antisexist informed approaches in their empirical study.

Based on our synthesis of the heterogeneous body of contributions on neurodiversity and disabilities, TL theory and research would benefit from exchanging an ableist lens on transformative learning for a new one at least in two ways:

- 8) re-imagining pathways to socio-materially transform contexts to make them more *inclusive and accessible* for “disabled bodies” and “neurodivergent minds” (Kofke, et al., 2018);
- 9) striving to capture the processuality of these systemic transformations in their fullness and complexity, by not imposing the limitations of TL rational and individual-centered lenses.
- 10) Table 2 graphically represents an integrated conceptual framework emerging from the critical review for inclusive antiableist research in TL theory, inspired by Kelly and colleagues (2021).

**Table 2.**

*Table 2. An integrated conceptual framework for inclusive antiableist research in TL*

<i>Conceptual Categories</i>	<i>Practical Steps for Doing Antiableist Research</i>
<i>Adopting an intersectional antiableist theoretical framework</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positioning research theoretical background</li> <li>• Building a shared emerging definition of intersectionality and antiableist positioning</li> <li>• Incorporating feminist studies, critical disability race studies, neurodiversity studies in intersectional paradigm</li> <li>• Leaving open pathways for generating anew research perspectives</li> </ul>
<i>Defining disability, neurodiversity as research field</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negotiating research questions with multiple identities actors</li> <li>• Developing a team that represents diverse intersectional identities</li> <li>• Including people who live experiences of systemic oppressions: researchers do not act as <i>epistemic colonizers</i></li> <li>• Making accessible research tools, including assistive and facilitative technologies</li> <li>• Acknowledging the importance of multimethod, multidisciplinary and multisectional research design</li> </ul>
<i>Commitment to social justice and equity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considering knowledge useful for social change and combating all forms of systemic oppressions (based on intersecting identities and belonging)</li> <li>• Practicing advocacy and affirmative pedagogies through research</li> <li>• Denouncing direct and indirect ableist, racist, sexist multidiscriminations</li> </ul>
<i>Poliphonic and multicentric participation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assuming emic perspectives and <i>in-within/in-between</i> viewpoints in every step of the research</li> <li>• Respecting epistemic legitimacy and representational agency of people with neurodiversity and disability</li> <li>• Adopting an accessible language in all the research steps</li> <li>• Cultivating research reflexivity and unpacking experiences of individual/systemic privilege and oppressions</li> </ul>

### **Research Experiences Within an Intersectional Antiableist Perspective**

The paper enriches the discussions of the findings with the presentation of an action-research conducted with groups of white adult people with neurodevelopmental disorders in two European Mediterranean countries. Through this example, the paper points out potential strengths and limitations of antiableist research on this topic. It provides a concrete illustration to demonstrate an intersectional analysis of neurodiversity, race, and ableism in transformative research and to imagine how transformative learning can potentially be aware of injustice for

marginalized neurodivergent people. In this case, the researchers adopt an analytic framework based on intersectionality perspective (Collins, & Bilge, 2016), as we describe how adult female and male white disabled people have multiple identities that shape their experiences and compound the levels of systemic oppression, racism, and ableism in their social and educational contexts. An intersectionality-based perspective on TL research takes into consideration key axes of power, inequality, and injustice in society, research and in all sites of knowledge production that create oppression (Hanson, & Fletcher, 2021; Romano, 2023).

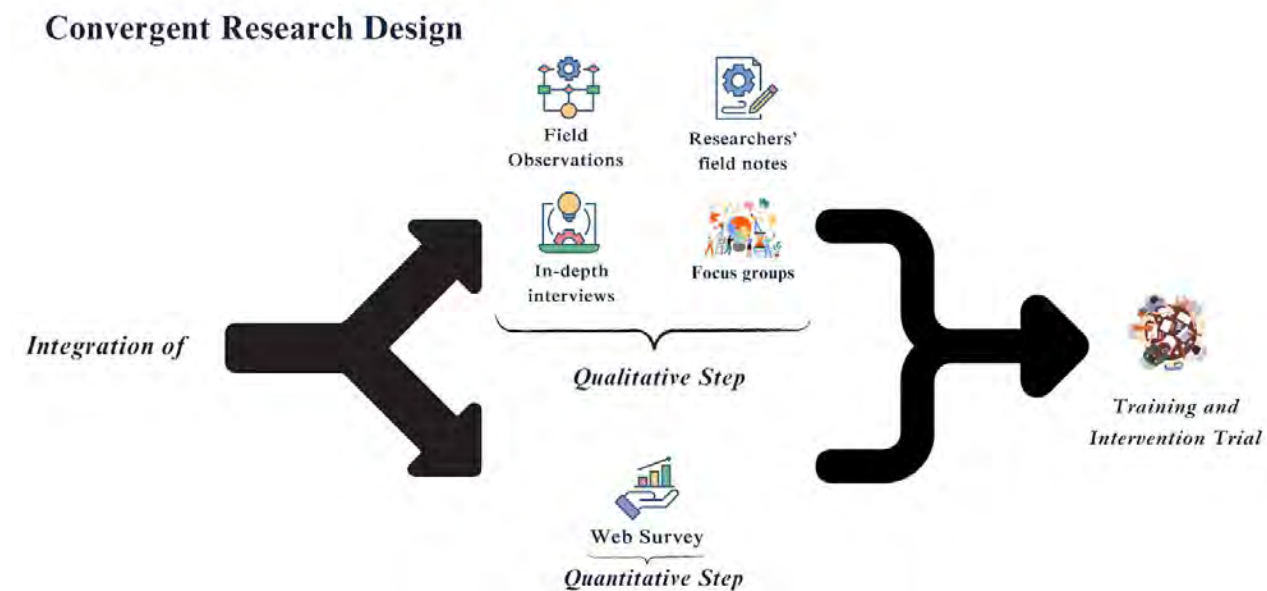
*The “ALL Inclusive” Action-Research*

The action-research here described is “ALL Inclusive”, a two-years long project carried out with groups of young adult male and female people with autism (ASD), neurodiversity and intellectual disabilities. The aim of the research is to build training programs to support adult people to have access to the labor market and to develop their professional identity. The research team had people with no-binary gender identity, diagnosed neurodiversity and non-western ethnic background. This heterogeneity was the first criteria to ensure that a plurality of intersecting dimensions of diversity found epistemic legitimacy in the research team and awareness of the privileged position of the researchers with respect to participants in the action-research.

The action-research employs a mixed methods intervention design that embeds a convergent design (Hirose, & Crewswell, 2022). Figure 1 portrays the research design.

**Figure 1**

*Figure 1, Convergent Research Design for the “ALL Inclusive” Project*



The design framework consisted of an initial qualitative data collection with ethnographic field observations, and interviews conducted with:

- i. 12 parents (8 mothers and 4 fathers) of adult people with intellectual disabilities and ASD;
- ii. 36 secondary school teachers who have the function of support teachers, job advisors and job consultants in their schools;

- iii. 20 professionals from the labor market who are leaders/manager/human resources director of private and public companies where people with autism and intellectual disabilities are highered.

Furthermore, in order to ensure that viewpoints of people with disabilities, autism and neurodiversity were included and had a central epistemological legitimacy, 12 focus groups with secondary students with neurodiversity were carried out and 10 in-depth interviews with professionals with disabilities already highered with full-time or long-term contract. Quantitative data were collected through the administration of a questionnaire composed of four scales (the Efficacy of the Paths for orientation to work Scale, the Perceived safety at work Scale, the Expectations towards work Scale and the Representations about work Scale). 160 questionnaires were collected and descriptive statistics were conducted. Qualitative and quantitative data were confronted and used to inform the development of the training program for the active support to employment of the groups of white adult people with ASD, disabilities and neurodiversity. The training program was codesigned *by* the participants with neurodiversity and disabilities with the help of the researchers. Participants noted that they felt like there were ample opportunities to express their views and hear back from others'. One mechanism to defend against tokenism has been an intersectional ongoing practice of reflexivity and to discard from dominant male, able and white centric knowledge systems in the field of TL.

#### *Reflections on Action-Research Projects*

Other action-research projects offer research activities and training programs aimed at young people with intellectual disabilities and developmental disabilities (IDD in advance), with the goal of developing competencies for social and labor inclusion. Ableism in the workplace is a significant barrier to the full inclusion of people with IDD, as evidenced by the systematic review of Lindsay, Fuentes, Tomas and Hsu (2022), which explore the impact of discrimination and ableism on young and adult job seekers with disabilities. Ableism manifests differently depending on the nature of the individuals' disability, gender and social context (Timmons, McGinnity & Carroll, 2023).

Discrimination factors such as type of disability, gender, education level, and employers' lack of knowledge about disability can be effectively addressed through programs with a focus on work-related learning. By providing tailored training and practical work experiences, work-related initiatives help individuals with IDD develop the necessary skills and confidence for the labor market. Moreover, these programs raise awareness among employers and co-workers, fostering a more inclusive work culture that recognizes the valuable contributions of all employees, regardless of their abilities. As such, work-related learning serves as a powerful tool for promoting labor inclusion and combating ableism, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to participate meaningfully in the workforce. People with IDD should be at the center of research activities: they should be asked about their work experience, their perceptions of the labor market, focusing on their views of their employment potential, perceived obstacles and facilitating factors to job insertion. Research projects in the field should also understand people with IDD expectations of future employability, the impact of their disabilities on employment challenges and the factors that contribute to successful transitions from education to work.

## **“For Whom? By Whom?”: Critical Perspectives of Inclusion and Participation in TL Research**

The paper investigates the strengths and limitations of TL research on neurodiversity and disability and raises critical questions about the “*by whom*” and “*for whom*” of the TL research. The critical literature review demonstrated that there is a paucity of scholarship placing transformative research and critical disability studies, intersectionality and neurodiversity studies in direct conversation (Kofke, 2020). We seek to make meaningful contributions toward upending ableist injustice in transformative learning research through analysis of TL at the intersection of marginalization and ableism with DisCrit’s engagement (Ferri, Connor, & Annamma, 2023) and anti-ableist concepts (Timmons, et al., 2023). Our aim is to create new spaces for TL scholars to utilize this information in practical ways that will support more equitable participatory practices in TL fields and beyond. Additionally, delving into critically questioning the constructs of “participation” and “representations” for people with neurodiversity and disabilities in the TL field ensures that women and men of color, with multiple disabilities and neurodiversity, are kept at the forefront of our collective imagination as a community of researchers. In this direction, the two action-research made the effort to show up an intersectional neurodiversity-affirming praxis that embeds antisexist anti-ableist theoretical foundations to upend oppressive and discriminatory attitudes usually acted towards multiply marginalized neurodivergent groups of participants. Understanding multiple actors’ perceptions and challenges is crucial for refining inclusive research activities to ensure they are effectively responsive to the needs of all the social actors and pursue transformative social outcomes.

As discussed above, we regard “inclusion” and “participation” of people with neurodiversity and disabilities in research as a *non-innocent practice*: it is crucial to interrogate these practices by asking on whose terms people with neurodiversity and disabilities participate in TL research, and by recognizing situations in which participation perhaps do not serve their interest. In this regard, the first critical question points to the importance of *including* people with neurodiversity and disabilities as *knowledge producers* (and not as sources of data) on their own terms: rethinking the means of *participation* to respond to their ways of being and knowing and to unpack the hidden ableist (and able-bodied) assumptions of the TL researchers. The second question influences the scopes of participants and the construction of a *more equitable and inclusive methodology* of research in TL: there are still few and far between approaches in which people with neurodiversity and disabilities are rendered as co-researchers, participating in the consideration of the research designs, the selection of methods and the refinement of research questions.

### ***Implications for TL theory***

We agree with the assumptions that research settings are *never neutral* and present a unique combination of power relations, hierarchical relations, ambiguity, and so far, in which participants occupy and shift between various positions (Rautio, et al., 2022). What is the “*on, to, for, with or by*” space that TL research can leave for participants with neurodiversity and disability? Expanding multiple pathways of participation for neurodiversity disabled people might increase the unpredictability of the research design intended by researchers, but would bring more situated perspectives on the impact of research findings on socio-material transformations and people’s lives.

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## **Narrating Change: Storytelling as a Transformative Practice in the Initial Training of Specialized Teachers**

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**Abstract:** The contribution offers a reflection on teacher training and narration as a tool capable of supporting the generative and transformative learning process, giving value to the continuity of the training path and professional development. Within a qualitative research framework on professional internship activities carried out by students attending the courses at the Kore university of Enna to become support teachers at secondary schools (VI and VII cycles), the contribution explores the transformative value of classroom experience and the tools used to record and document the activities conducted at school by the trainees. The research outcomes suggest the importance of the “diary” as a tool that promotes reflection and intentionality in one's actions, revealing the meaning of the activities designed and carried out during the internship experience. The analysis of documented practices has also allowed for monitoring classroom, laboratory, and school-based training, the actions designed, and the different representations formed and transformed over time.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Experiential Learning, Active Methodologies, Narrative-Autobiographical Approach, Teacher Training

Teacher training represents one of the topics of particular interest and reflection in educational and pedagogical disciplines. The achievement of students' personal and educational success is the result of a complex and articulated process in which the teacher contributes with a set of relational and methodological-didactic knowledge and skills that they are called to acquire and develop during initial training and throughout their personal professional experience. In this sense, the “formation” of the teacher becomes “trans-formation,” that is, the outcome of a change, mostly profound and definitive, of the form and fundamental structures, in a symbolic and concrete act of opening up to the extraordinary by accepting and understanding the “new”.

Not surprisingly, in highlighting the transformative approach to learning, Mezirow (2000) promotes its ultimate goal, which is to make perspectives on problematic references more open, inclusive, and flexible (Cappa, Del Negro, 2016). As motivation is known to be the most variable aspect of adult education, one of its most complex traits involves the search and development of devices that allow those in training to achieve significant changes through critical reflection on underlying assumptions and meanings of experiential knowledge (Fabbri, Striano, Melacarne, 2008).

Only through the definition of supportive, customizable, and adaptive tools does the adult in training become aware of their representations and identify new perspectives to structure, understand, evaluate, and interpret reality. Indeed, a meaningful understanding of new content

fosters and determines personal and vocational growth (Illeris, 2004). On the other hand, as indicated by the perspective on Teachers' Thinking, critical reflection on educational action promotes greater awareness of teaching action and the role of the teacher as a situational agent of change (Romano, Muscarà, 2023).

Giving continuity and meaning to one's educational journey, as well as professional development, reveals the generative and transformative function of learning, paving the way for the identification of new perspectives that allow the redefinition of one's identity by delineating a sense of belonging. In this framework, the contribution presents the results of a qualitative analysis of the internship activities carried out by students of the course to become support teaching in secondary schools at the Kore University of Enna (VI and VII cycles), exploring the transformative value produced through classroom experience. Indeed, the internship - understood as an "active learning methodology" - facilitates the process of meaningful and transformative learning, aimed at creating new knowledge and representations, modifying mental habits, starting from pre-existing concepts in the cognitive structure of the person in training (Muscarà, 2018; 2022).

Internship practices, promoting experiential learning (Di Nubila, Fedeli, 2010), go beyond mere doing and require thinking, elaborating, reflecting, and evaluating what is done and what is experienced. Thus, in a process of synthesis, theoretical reflection finds its support and foundation in experience, and in turn, experience is enriched and transformed by theory (Cambi, 2002). In this regard, the use of the logbook, as a cognitive and socio-emotional tool, appears functional to the understanding and attribution of meaning to the activities designed and carried out during the educational journey. The diary allows recording and keeping a memory of observed and experienced actions and activities and, above all, reflecting and becoming aware of one's practice (Demetrio, 1996). In this specific case, the act of writing itself involves adopting a thoughtful perspective that gives rise to a self-reflective process, which, in educational terms, adds to the processes activated by direct experience. Consequently, through the use of the diary, the act of narrating oneself and the experiences realized during the internship allows the teacher to self-train, reaffirming their role as a professional in education by fostering the development of metacognitive awareness (Romano, Muscarà, 2023).

The involved metacognitive processes enable learning to unlearn, i.e., to correct distortions in our pre-understandings and pre-conceptions; critical reflection thus implies a revision of the assumptions on which beliefs and convictions are based (Kreber, 2012). Acting firsthand in the contexts where professional practice takes place produces reflections capable of generating profound changes. In other words, and the words of the trainees themselves: "learning to act is different from learning to repeat".

The analysis of the dossiers highlights the perceived effects of experiential internship training, which qualifies, in its practical aspect, as a strategy for innovation and change. Direct experience initiates processes of creating revised interpretations of the meaning of the experience, which becomes a space for thinking and, at the same time, establishes ways of operating in reality. Furthermore, it creates a renewed alliance between tutors and future support teachers, both engaged in reflection, making sense, and reinterpreting professional practices (Schön, 1993). Interrogating and analyzing documented practices have allowed not only the comparison of classroom, laboratory, and school-based training, planned and enacted actions but also the different representations formed and transformed over time. In this perspective, the internship and the tools used play a crucial role in activating reflective processes aimed at

acquiring greater awareness of the competencies that characterize (often unconsciously) the professional profile of the support teacher and their modes of (inter)action (Raimondo, 2021).

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# **Aligning Transformative Learning and Action Research to Re-Evaluate Structures**

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**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Transformative Pedagogies, Action Research, Mezirow, Perspective Transformation

## **Introduction**

This extended abstract outlines the findings, insights, and implications of an action research (AR) study within a university system that utilized transformative learning (TL) to explore unexamined administrative practices. The study examined how introducing inclusive and equitable practices in study abroad may change study abroad advisors' perspectives regarding their current practices, which may affect Black students' low participation rates. While most studies involving study abroad practices concentrate on student transformative outcomes, this study focused on staff, faculty, and administrative structures. The study aimed to introduce study abroad advisors to information regarding inclusive practices and then engage in discourse and reflections guided by transformative pedagogies. Engaging in three distinct cycles, this AR study based all interventions on Mezirow's (1994, 1997, 2000) theory on perspective transformation.

## **Study Context, Purpose, and Design**

Black student participation levels in study abroad have historically been below white students. Publicly available data and site-specific numbers were compared to identify the problem. Further, empirical studies were reviewed within the context of higher education, study abroad, and TL. Notable gaps in the research concerning perspective transformation in higher education staff were found, particularly in relation to influencing students outside of the classroom, in study abroad recruitment, program creation, and staffing. This study supplements the literature in these areas.

## **Barriers to Black Student Participation in Study Abroad**

While many studies have addressed intention, implications, and outcomes (Curtis & Ledgerwood, 2018; Fry & Murray; Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015), few exist in transforming study abroad advisors' influence over which students participate in study abroad programs. Many articles examining the study abroad experiences of African American students include a small sample of students who have already chosen to go abroad (Lee & Green, 2016; Perkins, 2020; Yeboah, 2019). While some studies have examined the barriers to studying abroad for Black and other minority students, only Perkins's 2020 article considered the roles of influencers, such as study abroad advisors, as barriers or enablers of study abroad participation.

## **Study Design**

This study was conducted for a doctoral dissertation in an Ed.D. program and was overseen by a university professor serving as the doctoral student's advisor. The study was in a large university system under the pseudonym University System of the South. While the study's goals were individual, the systemic context of the study lent itself to group and systematic changes. All interventions were group-based, facilitating learning in concert with others.

## **Transformation as a Foundation**

Transformative learning theory, specifically Mezirow's (1994, 1997) theory of perspective transformation, guided this study. Transformational learning depends on a change in one's critical self-reflection of assumptions. Mezirow (2000) provided 10 phases of meaning through which a person moves as they work toward perspective transformation. These phases are initiated by a person experiencing a disorienting dilemma that ultimately leads to the "reintegration into one's life based on conditions dictated by one's new perspective" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22). A disorienting dilemma could be "as traumatic as losing a job or as ordinary as an unexpected question" (Cranton, 2002, p. 64). Frame of reference, critical reflection, and reflective discourse, three key components of perspective transformation, were utilized in the study to initiate and measure changes in perspective. Grounded in this theory, an action research (AR) team created interventions based on transformative pedagogy to guide study abroad advisors through critical examination of their current practices.

### **Transformative Pedagogies**

The transformative pedagogies referenced in this study were intervention-based learning opportunities. The interventions allowed study abroad advisors to consider their current knowledge and practices, gain exposure to data and equity-based practices, and then engage in reflective discussion.

### **Methodology**

The methodology used in this study was AR, which uses a "scientific approach to study the resolution of important social or organizational issues together with those who experience these issues directly" (Coghlan, 2019, p. 58). Due to its collaborative premise and exploration of a problem, AR operates differently than traditional research. In AR, the researcher starts with a known problem and takes action, along with an AR team of invested partners, to resolve the problem for the benefit of the organization or society (Coglan & Pedler, 2007). As its name implies, AR facilitates action, achieved through reflective cycles. Coghlan (2019) outlined an AR cycle comprising an initial preparatory step that includes context and purpose framing, followed by "four basic steps: constructing, planning action, taking action and evaluating action" (p. 9).

Utilizing AR, transformative learning theory, and informed by data collected in real-time, the AR team created interventions designed to allow reflection to play as significant a role as possible. This study provided a new way to utilize Mezirow's (1994, 1997, 2000) theory on perspective transformation by engaging at the individual, group, and system levels within a large educational system.

The survey instrument, the Transformative Outcomes and PrOcesses Scale (TROPOS) (Cox, 2017, 2021), created to measure TL quantitatively, was utilized in this study and generated all quantitative data. The TROPOS is a "brief instrument (30 items) divided into four modular subscales" (Cox, 2017, p. 101): *social support*, *attitude towards uncertainty*, *criticality*, and *transformative outcomes*. Cox (2017) defined the first three subscales as learning scales, dividing them into process themes of stabilizing or destabilizing characteristics.

### **Action Research Cycles**

This AR study consisted of three cycles, which took place over 16 months. Cycle 1 consisted of 9 months of defining the problem. Cycle 2 shifted the AR team's focus from encompassing all higher education influencers to a narrower focus on study abroad advisors. The second cycle also included a minor intervention and the planning and enacting of the major study interventions. The final cycle included two brief, small-scale interventions to facilitate deeper reflection on the first two.

### Insights

Learning was realized at the individual, group, and system levels, which aligns with widely accepted insights regarding perspective transformation at the individual level but, notably, deviates from previous findings at the group and system levels. This study found that perspective change can be a shared or group experience and the exposure to new ideas and the support of the participant groups with shared experiences facilitated more transformative outcomes individually and collectively. The study's insights support using AR to develop and enact workplace initiatives to deepen stakeholder buy-in. An alignment regarding perspective transformation theory (Mezirow, 1994, 1997, 2000) with AR methodology goals is substantiated.

### Implications

Using TL in workplace learning and professional development for staff needs further research. Little research exists regarding TL in staff (i.e., nonteaching employees) professional development. Organizations that utilize the critical reflection and discourse created by transformative practices can realize greater connections to and among employees.

Further, more research should be conducted on the structures and assumptions at institutions that determine practices. Nearly all study abroad research focuses on the student but rarely on the staff or institutional culture that creates and administers the programs. A reexamination of traditional practices must occur for real change to happen. Just as a critical component of perspective transformation is critical *self*-reflection, institutions must engage in critical *institutional* reflection.

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# **A Sustainability-Oriented University Beyond the Traditional Lecture. Building A Methodological Framework for Education to Sustainable Mindset in Higher Education**

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**Abstract:** In according to the UNESCO's promotion of the SDGs, Universities are responsible for re-defining the future experts in the labour market. Transformative Learning might contribute to the development of an innovative mindset in sustainability education. This research, related to a case study used in doctoral work, developed a qualitative ethnographic methodological approach that aims to investigate the pedagogical and technological devices used by Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie's professors during their courses, located in São Paulo city, Brazil. The instruments used were: participant observations, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Using a content analysis, the findings showed four interconnected areas: inquiry-based methods, technological media, labour market connection, governance organizational support. These data take on value in the UPM context thanks to CEAT's research in the field. Within the scope of the MackSTLR Program, CEAT has so far trained 677 teachers, developed 404 Transformative Learning Activities, which involved 6036 students. Going beyond the traditional lecture, this scenario can create a transformative learning environment that stimulates students' skills and enables them to approach issues for an embedded curriculum for sustainability.

**Key Words:** Sustainability Education, Transformative Learning, Curriculum, Higher Education, Mackstlr Program

## **Introduction**

A branch of one of the co-authors' doctoral research is oriented to explore the topic of sustainability education by analysing pedagogical and technological methodological approaches in higher education from the angle of the Transformative Learning (TL) paradigm. This research was born thanks to an international mobility at the Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie (UPM) in São Paulo city, Brazil, for a 15-day period between the end of January and the first days of February 2023.

A qualitative ethnographic methodological approach (Scaratti, 2021) was developed with the aims to investigate the pedagogical and technological devices used by UPM's professors during their courses. The valuable opportunity to get close to this university environment, observe its practices, and have the opportunity to get to know many lecturers has allowed me to

establish the beginnings of a mutual knowledge and cooperation with Centro de Excelência em Ensino e Aprendizagem Transformadora (CEAT).

The proposal analyse the process of participative observation of the university life, the conduction of interviews and focus groups and the subsequent analysis of the data collected.

Through this qualitative case study, the research hypothesis is presented: education for sustainability could lead to a real paradigm shift if it created a reflective organisational process to deal with challenging situations and involved teachers and students in a continuous, institutionalised, transformative learning process (Brunstein & King, 2018) and succeeded in redefining curricula by moving beyond traditional lessons.

Although many of the current approaches and research projects on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) are largely focused on individual attitudes, individual teaching units and ways to promote individual learning outcomes, the literature highlights the need to work towards sustainability through innovative teaching formats that involve the community, the community within and outside universities (Singer-Brodowski, 2023).

In according to the UNESCO's promotion of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, Universities, as social institutions, are responsible for imagining and defining the future experts in the labour market. In this context, TL approach might contribute to the development of an innovative mindset in education for sustainability (Brunnquell & Brunstein, 2018; Brunstein, Sambiase & Brunnquell, 2018; Leal Filho, et al., 2018, Silva & Freire, 2023).

### **Sustainability in Higher Education Through the Lens of Transformative Learning**

By reviewing the literature on transformative learning for sustainability is central integrate the sustainable development into higher education considering the three dimensions of the educational process – teaching, program design, and learning (Brunstein & King, 2018).

In learning about the path for sustainability transitions, transformative learning has become one of the key concepts discussed (e.g., Förster, Zimmermann, Mader, 2019; Rodriguez Aboytes & Barth, 2020). Despite the advancement in the number of initiatives to design transformative curricula oriented toward sustainability, it is still extremely challenging for an institution to achieve significant change with a robust and embedded holistic process (Brunstein & King, 2018).

Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) can offer an explanation of the learning process underlying the transition to a sustainable lifestyle. A mental habit finds expression in a point of view, which comprises meaning schemata, i.e. systems of expectations, beliefs, assumptions and feelings that tacitly direct and shape a specific interpretation, determining the ways in which we judge, categorise and interpret the surrounding reality. Such orientations, moreover, suggest courses of action that are automatically applied unless reflexive processes intervene (Mezirow, 2000b).

Overall, frames of reference, mental habits and points of view represent the structural elements of the transformational model and are configured as 'objects' susceptible to change. Learning, in fact, can take place in different ways, “by elaborating existing frames of reference, by learning new frames of reference, by transforming points of view, or by transforming habits of mind” (Mezirow, 2000b, p. 19).

It will consider what this theoretical perspective can offer regarding how to foster learning environments that empower people to contribute more strongly to sustainability activities, enabling collective learning processes through examining the theoretical perspective of transformative learning for sustainability in individuals, organizations, multi-professional

networks between practitioners, and transdisciplinary and transformative research processes (Singer-Brodowski, 2023).

According to Leal Filho and colleagues (2018) the value of the link between sustainability education and transformative learning is in the pursuit of community engagement and the ability to manage complexity and uncertainty. Transformative learning processes within multi-professional networks working for sustainability transitions should actively address these systemic dynamics and try to transform arenas of conflict to spaces of controversial but respectful negotiation. Through this process they may facilitate the process of negotiating the curriculum structure, content and assessing criteria (e.g., Makrakis, Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2012; Romano, 2018; Di Gerio, Fiorani, Paciullo, 2020; Albareda-Tiana, et al., 2020; Santos, Brunstein, Walvoord, 2024). It is necessary to emphasize that, within the daily practice of all these contexts, transformative learning processes do not occur as one completed single and linear process but as continuing reflection and action processes with varying depth and breadth (Hoggan, 2016; Nohl, 2015).

### **Research Design**

The investigation takes a qualitative methodological approach where the specific research questions that guided the construction of the different project phases find empirical concretisation. A first phase of the research, designed before the departure for the mobility, was oriented towards identifying possible teachers and stakeholders who could give their availability for interviews once they arrived in Brazil. Precious was the help of Profa. Dra. Pró-Reitora de Graduação Provost for Undergraduate Education Janette Brunstein who shared the research to colleagues, researchers and alums as experts in the field of sustainability education who work, gravitate and have gravitated to the UPM.

During the mobility at the UPM, the researcher continued going deeper into the research phases and investigated how and under which conditions a training for sustainability education in higher education and in companies can promote the development of sustainable practices. The aim is to investigate what are the most effective methodologies or learning paths to educate to the development of a sustainable mindset (both in formal educational settings and in workplaces).

The main objectives were: (a) to get to know and deepen the organisational culture and university culture of the UPM, (b) to intercept, study and formalise the curriculum courses design, (c) to intercept and deepen how and under what conditions university teaching practices meet the challenges of the work's world in preparing students, (d) to get to know and deepen pedagogical and technological methodological devices used by professors during courses.

Before the arrival at the UPM, 3 written answers had already been sent online. At UPM, 7 semi-structured interviews and 2 focus groups were delivered in approximate 30 minutes and considering the possibility of a double way modality: virtually or face-to-face.

The interview guidelines follow a protocol based on 9 questions. The interviews conducted during the research were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed ad verbatim, with codes used instead of sensitive data. These figures were (a) professors and management figures and delegates of the Rector, (b) professors and staff of the CEAT, (c) former master's degree student with substantial corporative experience in sustainability training (Annex 1). All the materials were transcribed and a content analysis was realised.

From a procedural point of view, the implementation of the thematic analysis involved the search for units of meaning contained in individual words, phrases or entire sections of text

through the identification of codes that capture their meaning. Consistent with the outlined indications, the process was articulated on three levels: 1) the 'free' line-by-line coding of the transcripts; 2) the organisation of the identified codes into overlapping and related areas, for the definition of descriptive themes; 3) and the development of analytical themes. This last step was carried out inductively (Saldana, 2013).

The main steps (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021) are described in the following table (Table 1).

**Table 1**  
*The research protocol*

STEPS	SUB-TOPICS	
1. Assess appropriateness of the semi-structured interview		The research project has been approved by the Ethics Committee for the University of Siena (CAREUS[1]). The research questions were validated by the PhD supervisor and the interview protocol was validated after sending pilot interviews to University of Siena faculty members. [1] Protocol number 00565336
2. Sampling and participant recruitment	2a. Sampling approaches	The selection of participants was through non-probabilistic convenience sampling
	2b. Recruitment	Via email
3. Data collection design	3a. Developing the semi-structured interview guide	Full-time professor Undergraduate course in Materials Engineering
	3b. Collecting participant demographic information	Initial contacts were both through email and in-person meetings where the researcher and professors decided date and time for the interview or focus group

4. Conducting the interview, transcription, and data transmission and storage	4a. Conducting the interview, transcription, and data transmission and storage	Interviews were conducted in Italian or in English. In case of need (professors who spoke only in Portuguese) traduction was facilitated by one or more scientific and linguistic mediators. If required, interviewees may remain anonymous. Data will be stored on a password-protected local or external hard disk. Data will be stored anonymously and will not be shared or disseminated with other researchers.
	4b. Interview modality and recording considerations	All interviews and FGs were recorded, with prior consent. The researcher followed a protocol of 9 questions and took notes of the conversation, specification questions were asked when useful by putting off between 30 and 45 minutes.
	4c. Transcription and checking	The researcher took notes of the conversation, specification questions were asked
	4d. Securely storing and transmitting data	Data will not be collected, transmitted and/or stored via the Internet. Study records, data and signed informed consent will be kept for a minimum of 12 months.
5. Data analysis	5a. Coding and theme identification	Qualitative data analysis is to code the data from transcriptions.

### **Co-construction of an Embedded Curriculum for Sustainability**

Research findings outlined four emerged areas that connect academics and students in the creation of an embedded curriculum for sustainability (Graph 1): 1) teaching can incorporate various teaching strategies such as inquiry-based learning, collaborative learning, 2) innovative approaches to learning through the use of technological media, 3) connection to labour market was essential to deeply explore real-life projects, 4) governance supports the incorporation of interdisciplinary content by teachers in their teaching practices.

## Graph 1

*The embedded curriculum for sustainability*

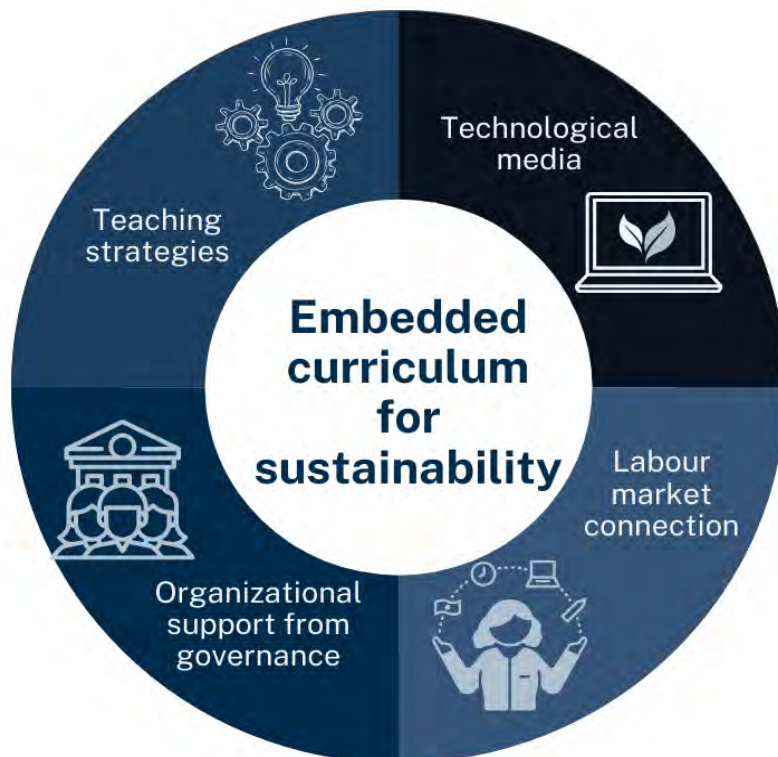


IMAGE CREATED BY THE AUTHORS

### 1. Teaching Can Incorporate Various Teaching Strategies

The analysis of the interviews and FGs revealed a rich variety of approaches used by the teachers during the lessons: inquiry-based learning and collaborative learning, argumentation, decision making, evidence-based reasoning, and problem solving (Annex 2A).

It is possible to emphasise how actions, lectures are students-oriented, seeking the active involvement, participation, critical reflection on real and concrete problems. Teachers should be trained and prepared for these levels of involvement:

*for theory there are regular lectures, videos, reverse classroom strategy, students have a theme and have to present to others, sometimes they are invited to speak, but in general it is nothing from the other world, they are methodologies that the whole world knows (INT05)*

The courses do not explicitly include sustainability issues in their syllabus. However, each discipline approaches sustainability issues from a broad, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary perspective. The importance of group works among different students let them able to create a safe environment in the classroom that supports discussion and critique.

*This helped students to open their minds to different perspectives and break out of their habitual comfort zones leading to transformative learning. (INT01)*

## 2. Innovative Approaches to Learning

Innovative approaches to learning and teaching using technological media are very useful and it influence the promotion of quality and a sustainable learning environments.

From the analysis of the data collected (Annex 2B), professors talk about organising courses that are close to real life, with real universities and companies' problems. This is because it is only by starting from students' lives that it is possible to imagine a change in the way of working in the future.

*first we try to divide the problem, it also depends on the problem [...] but in general we make a reference bibliography of people and design which is called HCD (human centred design) based on design thinking, but which has a specialisation on social work (INT05)*

High-tech tools are a springboard in order to promote a high rate of collaboration and co-operation. With the rise of technology and the increased use of artificial intelligence students are able to research and study on every subject, however, the data show us that theory is fundamental, only when combined with experience and concrete learning.

*So they have to lead with dilemmas that the group that emerged from the group during the process. They have to listen to each other, but they also have to learn how to position*

*So we created we put videos of the Amazon and we conducted a mindfulness experiences and then we asked everybody to have a bowl with water and everybody to put the feet in the water as we are seeing in the in the computer the image of a river. And when we imagine if we were together in this river feel the water in your feet, everybody's feeling it. (INT07)*

## 3. Connection To Labour Market: A Way to Deeply Explore Real-Life Projects

Students who arrive at university need not only practical tools, but also support and assistance in learning by making the proposed courses as concrete as possible (Annex 2C). Sustainability is not a concept and a topic to add to their subjects, but an element that unites them and that acts as a lens to see the world of work.

*The important thing is to think that perfection doesn't exist, but to remember that sustainability only exists when you think about the municipalities and not only about the problems. (INT06)*

It is very important that in studying and in projects students can see what the needs and work emergencies of companies close to them are and plan concrete solutions.

*Each group of students works on a different problem, at the end they have to achieve something in a practical form: you really make the website, you really make the bicycle or the postcard, you do everything as it is to test themselves, to see if in the end the result converges with the solution of the problem (INT05)*

## 4. Governance Supports: Interdisciplinary Content in Their Teaching Practices

Every project conducted by the professors is connected and negotiated with the academic governance (Annex 2D). Teachings offer theoretical and practical knowledge in accordance with the sustainability's themes and actions are closely related to the United Nations' Agenda 2030 with the 17 SDGs that require holistic partnership of all the social actors involved.

*We started by trying to involve all the professors this semester [...] and articulating what are the unique needs of each component, of each discipline, involve everyone to create a single, structured experience for students (INT05)*

*Other professors came and other contributions, a way to measure the individual value and the global value. We developed a worksheet with... many people collaborate and then we created*

*this discipline is until right now, it was elective and then turn into a curriculum discipline and is that, I think is that. (INT02)*

Here emerge that the role of university is to build a space, vis-à-vis with the SDG, that allow the integration of people with strategies to reformulate teaching, learning and social function (Silva & Freire, 2023).

### **The MackSTLR Program at UPM**

During the researcher's stay at UPM, it was possible to learn about the actions of the CEAT and its main program, called Mackenzie Student Transformative Learning Records Program (MackSTLR), which aims to record student experiences, based on the implementation of the principles of Transformative Learning.

The MackSTLR Program is linked to the Educational Policy of the Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie, based on institutional values and beliefs, and ethical, social, and environmental responsibility. The MackSTLR Program was inspired by a similar program developed at the University of Central Oklahoma (UCO) (Cunliff & King, 2018) and implemented in 2020 at UPM. The Program seeks to encourage and record the student's educational journey in the development of socio-emotional skills through Transformative Learning. It defined the institution's five key socio-emotional competencies, and one of them that students can explore is Sustainability and Collective Well-Being.

The MackSTLR Program's Sustainability and Collective Well-being key competency aims to enable students to understand the interconnection between their individual and collective lives, considering the impact of their decisions and actions not only on themselves, but also on others, on community, society, and the planet as a whole. An education focused on socio-environmental issues and collective well-being aims to provide knowledge and skills that encourage students to initiate effective actions towards sustainability in various dimensions: social, environmental, economic, territorial, and cultural.

The Program enabled the development of reflective curricular initiatives, which engage both teachers and students in a transformative learning process that has become an integral and permanent part of the institution. Therefore, to implement the MackSTLR Program, CEAT promotes several training actions to discuss with teachers the concepts of Transformative Learning and the importance of socio-emotional skills in the students' academic journey, such as forums, workshops, pedagogical reflection meetings, study groups, reading clubs, practical communications, training in technological pedagogical tools, as well as specific training to develop reflective pedagogical activities.

Teachers were trained to propose Iniciativas de Aprendizagem Transformadora – IATs (Transformative Learning Activities) to students in curricular and extracurricular subjects, developing reflective activities related to themes linked to the key socio-emotional skills, including Sustainability and Collective Well-Being. The objective is for students to voluntarily participate in these program activities and build an e-portfolio that describes their university education path in relation to the reflective development of their socio-emotional skills to present to the job market and society.

Students are also trained to reflect on the proposed themes and produce meta-reflective texts, evaluating their changing assumptions in relation to their life and career projects, as well as to build up their e-portfolios. To develop their e-portfolios, students must submit their reflective texts to teachers, who will assess their level of engagement in the activity, using four rubrics, which are: not achieved, exposure, integration, and transformation. The desired level of



transformation refers to a profound change in students' values and behaviors in relation to their lives, career projects and interaction with the environment. Through this action, UPM ends up encouraging reflection and promoting critical thinking in its students.

Various pedagogical and technological devices were used by UPM teachers during classes that encourage students to work on real projects that breathe sustainability. To manage the MackSTLR Program, a virtual environment was developed for interaction with teachers and students. In this environment, teachers record IATs and students sign up and submit their reflective productions. In this environment, teachers also give feedback to students, who can build their e-portfolios. In this way, the system records the student's educational path and takes stock of the socio-emotional skills they developed during their journey at university.

Under the MackSTLR Program, CEAT has so far trained 677 teachers, developed 404 IATs, involving 6036 students so far. During 2023, 27 activities aimed at promoting sustainability and collective well-being were registered. These proposals have addressed a wide range of issues, from enshrining water as a fundamental human right to introducing innovative technologies like portable solar panels. Other topics discussed included strategies to increase recycling, encourage responsible consumption, as well as promoting education in sign language (Libras) and financial education. The expectation is that, in 2024, university graduates will have their e-portfolios with their university education paths in relation to socio-emotional skills.

### **Conclusion**

This research resulted from the interest in investigating the pedagogical and technological approaches used in higher education, with a view to implementing Transformative Learning (TL) aimed at promoting education for sustainability. The investigation shows how the university environment can be closely connected and related to students' real lives. Teachings seek to challenge the world of work by enriching theory with concrete practices that can increase awareness of a changing society. From the data analysed it emerges that the SDGs are not taught, but are experienced lesson after lesson.

*I would say it is essential to work with the value of sustainability embedded in our life.*  
(INT01)

From an institutional point of view, it is worth mentioning the MackSTLR Program, in force since 2020, being linked to the Educational Policy of UPM. With a view to recording and promoting the development of students' socio-emotional skills, as well as their reflective capacity through Transformative Learning. Its impacts are broad, ranging from the review of course pedagogical projects, which led teachers and course coordinators to reflect on the Sustainable Development Goals in their training proposals; in addition to training actions aimed at teachers so that they know the principles of TL and implement curricular or co-curricular actions aimed at its implementation. From a technological point of view, the creation of the MackSTLR System allowed the recording of students' reflective activities.

Professors' action is supported by multiple pedagogical and technological devices oriented in encourage students' active participation in the co-construction of an embedded curriculum for sustainability. Issues related to integrating university with learning for sustainability in the service of society and the world of work must focus on curriculum development strategies that equip students with SDG-related skills and capabilities. While it represents a single case study in UPM in Brasil, it is hoped that it will contribute to strengthening the promotion of transformation capabilities, enabling further discussions on the topic and the development of current practices, policies and projects for sustainability actions.

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## Annex n. 1 Description Subjects involved

ID	INSTITUTION	ROLE	MODALITY	DETAILS
INT1	UPM	Professora. Dra. Pró-Reitora de Graduação Provost for Undergraduate Education PRGA	Interview	written answers
INT2	UPM	Assistant Professor Business Management	Semi-Structured interview	27 january h11:00 (37 min) in presence
FG1	UPM	Full-time professor Undergraduate course in Materials Engineering	Focus Group (+ written answers)	27 january 2023 h16:30 (35 min)
	UPM	Professor at the School of Engineering		
	UPM	Professor at the School of Engineering		
	UPM	Professor assistente DR I. biochemistry. industrial biochemistry, science technology and society		
	UPM	Assistant Professor, PhD I, at the Center for Education, Philosophy and Theology		
	UPM (scientific and linguistic mediation)	Excellence Coordinator in Teaching and Transformative Learning CEAT/PRGA		
INT3	UPM	Professor Doutor, Coordinator of the Postgraduate Course in Strategic Business Management	Semi-Structured interview	28 january h10:00 (32 min) Online
INT4	Fundação Getulio Vargas's Sao Paulo School of Business Administration	PhD in Administration Professor of Psychodrama at Potenciar Consultores Associados. facilitator, teacher	Semi-Structured interview	28 january h11:00 (43min) in presence
INT5	UPM	Professor at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism (FAU)	Semi-Structured interview	31 january h13:30 (35 min) In presence
INT6	UPM	Architect and Professor of Landscaping, Professora Adjunta I Membro Comitê MackSTLR FAU	Semi-Structured interview	31 january 2023 h16:00 Online
	UPM	Assistant Professor, teaching Topography, Geoprocessing and Urban Planning		

ID	INSTITUTION	ROLE	MODALITY	DETAILS
FG2	UPM	Architect and Urbanist. Professor of Landscaping	Focus Group (+ written answers)	31 january 2023 h16:00 Online
	UPM	Artist plastic, Architect and Urbanist. Professor of Expression, Representation and Culture		
	UPM	Professor of Proyecto		
	UPM	Excellence Coordinator in Teaching and Transformative Learning CEAT / PRGA		
	UPM (linguistic mediation)	Administrative Assistant Coordination of Pedagogical Development CDP, Pro-Rectorate of Undergraduate Studies PRGA		
INT7	Fundação Getulio Vargas's Sao Paulo School of Business Administration	Coordinator of Integrated Training Program, responsible for the FIS (Integrated Training for Sustainability) projects	Semi-Structured interview	08 february 2023 h15.50 (43 min) Online

## Annex n. 2 Coding process

A - Teaching can incorporate various teaching strategies		
Themes	Categories	Codes
Teaching strategies	collaborative learning	group reflections
		Digital experiments
		The final production is a project
		Activities that can collaborate in the development of complex
		The final project consists of a case study
		Diverse group
		different participative teaching methodologies
		graffiti, the art of the streets
	Art-based learning	psychodrama
		playful activities
		concept of creativity
		paint with water, crayons and different kind of materials
		study trips
	experience-based learning	I go out
		field visits
		The contact with real cases, and technical visits to real companies
		fieldwork, community-based research
		masters to Amazonia in a boats trip
		business debates
	Argumentation, decision making	dynamic theoretical conceptualization
		debated in the group
		discussion boards
		students are exposed to challenging questions, tensions, and paradoxical situations
		conduct thematic research and relate the theory
		research and extension practices
	evidence-based reasoning	encourage students to seek answers
		reading assignments, reflective papers
		critical reflect
	problem solving	a real challenge that they have to solve
		creative problem solving

B - Innovative approaches to learning		
Themes	Categories	Codes
Innovative approaches to learning	technological media	mix of digital
		Instagram
		use some online tools
		Kahoot
		Podcast
		Lego Serious Play®
		Radio
		GIS mapping software, geographic technology
		Mentimeter
		easy device to share for the students
		website, you really make the bicycle or the postcard
	promotion of quality teaching	potential of happiness
		methodology to use in his life
		I mix theory and practice in each classroom
		Collaborations with other professors
		HCD (human centred design) based on design thinking
	sustainable learning environments	global value game
		the environment change, the word change
		cooperation
		“the natural step” methodology
		in a critical way having sustainability as this lens to see the world
		We can learn, hearing from indigenous people, we can learn from a biologist but when we can also learn from an art based activity
		we talk about sustainability in a very practical way
		dealing with the complexity of sustainability in a classroom project
		Sustainability as a value
		be more critical to sustainability regarding
	Transformative experiences	deconstruct the mindset and construct a new one
		consulting project
		we use transformative learning and transdisciplinarity as the pedagogical approach
		to open their minds to different perspectives and break out of their habitual comfort zones
		approach on transformative learning
		solve the problems about the problems of their lives with an expected perspectives

C - Connection to labour market: a way to deeply explore real-life projects		
Themes	Categories	Codes
Labour market connection	real-life projects	It's natural for them
		knowing people
		understanding the problem and deepening it
		doing creative work in design
		to bring out opportunities
		assess the impact
		if it can solve the problem
		about the environmental, social and economic situation of this municipalities
		engaging community
		about the contamination, the environment
		NGOs, government, companies real problems
	close connection with sustainability	You have to preserve, you have to think
		you have to take care
		students would require that
		is a challenge
		is not as a subject but like a behavior of the the professional
	theory supporting practice	the question related to environment, social part
		social impact of the projects
		theoretical thread that unites them within the processes
		give importance to the students' work
	skills for life and work	impact their reality
		give tools to open the mind
		awakening of the student
		be more conscious,
		open about life
		perfection doesn't exist



<b>D - Governance supports: interdisciplinary content in their teaching practices</b>		
<b>Themes</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Codes</b>
<b>Interdisciplinary context supported by governance</b>	interdisciplinary content	a multidisciplinary level
		many people collaborate
		turn into a curriculum discipline
		involve all the professors
		articulating what are the unique needs of each component
		transdisciplinarity comes as a way for us
		biophilic approach and also an artistic approach
	Governance supports	institutional level
		the partnership of companies of cities
		coordination acceptance
		agreement with the city's government
		dimensions of sustainability in town
	teaching practices	Sustainable projects
		sustainability embedded
		it's not an easy thing
		we can't lie to our students

# How to Provide Safe (Enough) Spaces for Transformative Learning to Support Courageous and Decolonial Practices Towards Climate Justice

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**Abstract:** To better understand complex and challenging transformative learning (TL) processes in the context of climate (in)justice, we introduce a decolonial perspective, through the understanding of TL as a process of decolonization, and build on a model of typical phases in TL for sustainability. We argue that it is firstly necessary to analyze the conditions, context, and prerequisites with which learners approach the topic of climate justice. Secondly, it is crucial to examine how the learning objects are taken up by the learners and which specific challenging emotions can occur. Here we plead for safe enough spaces, which are learning environments that encourage learners to constructively address their challenging emotions with the prioritized intent to restore a sense of justice through shared accountability within the community. Thirdly, after successfully mastering emotional troubles, they can engage in courageous practices developed collaboratively and fortified as collective practices in the community of learners. We conclude our thoughts with several questions about the composition of different learning groups and the normativity of TL in the context of climate justice and more generally, sustainability.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Climate Justice, Decolonized Practices, Safe Enough Spaces

## Positionality Statement

Positionality within this group of cis-gender women encompasses diverse backgrounds and experiences. One member identifies as Black, while three others hold white privilege. One lives in a settler colonial society, one in a former colonizing society, and two in a society that supported colonialism and profited from it. They bring perspectives of critical theory, constructivism, embodiment, and pedagogy, though circumspect in our analysis to not posit our interrogations as declarative impositions.

## A Decolonial Perspective on Climate-(in)justice

In face of tremendous challenges, deep transformation processes towards a more safe and just operating space for humanity (Raworth, 2017) are urgently needed. We have already overstepped 6 of the 9 planetary boundaries and thus there is an utmost necessity for practices targeting climate and environmental justice on an intergenerational, intragenerational and interspecies level (Rockström et al., 2023). The multiple crises of unsustainability are

confronting humanity with the need to fundamentally change structures and practices. To reach this, we are challenged to collaborate across diverse communities and cultures and to integrate different ways of knowing as a means to encourage a shift in meaning perspectives and actions on an individual, as well as, on a collective level. Transformative learning (TL) gives a framework for how to understand, design, and navigate these kinds of fundamental change processes (e.g. Mezirow, 2012).

The current state of unsustainability is also linked to the consequences of historically rooted colonial exploitation mechanisms in relationship to power, wealth, control, and privilege. Thus, the countries of the global South, alongside African American, Latina/o/x, and Indigenous communities in settler colonial societies, are already experiencing ecological disparities and will continue to be most affected by the consequences of global climate change and the loss of biodiversity (Bullard, 1993). To address such disparities in sustainability debates, discourses on decolonial perspectives on environmental and climate justice are coming into focus. Decoloniality challenges dominant narratives of knowledge production inherited from colonialism and asks for a de-linking from colonial epistemologies (Mbembe, 2021; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). It invites to embrace indigenous ways of knowing and advocates for a pluriverse of worldviews (Escobar, 2017).

By and large, White people hold societal privileges, often elevating their social positions of access in society, based on the color of their skin and as a consequence of colonialism and imperialism (Williams, 2021). They are involved in ongoing racialization without explicitly reflecting on this or being aware of the racist structures they implicitly reconstruct. For Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour the collective impact and the residual, intergenerational traumatic effects of coloniality needing space for grief, reconciliation or repatriation is pivotal (Tuck & Yang, 2012). For people holding White privilege, the advantages of post-colonial and racist societies (e.g. living in unsustainable societies at the expense of others) can however more easily be suppressed. Both oppressor and oppressed are affected by and implicated in processes of racialization (Fanon, 1961). The implicatedness of the individual in post-colonial structures of the 21st century “consists precisely of those discomfiting forms of belonging to a context of injustice that cannot be grasped immediately or directly” (Rothberg, 2020, p.8). It acknowledges the multiple ways in which humans are implicated in structures of injustice besides the binary roles of responsible criminals or innocent bystanders (Bryan, 2024). For the discussion on TL in the context of climate justice, these perspectives result in a specific and complex configuration of the social and psychological prerequisites for TL processes. They also point to questions of power and structures (Avelino, 2021). The discourse on climate justice leads not only to asking how to overcome the current multiple crises of unsustainability, but to doing so with a sensitivity for different degrees of historical responsibility, current affectedness, considerations for reparation/ restoration, and the potential power to do so.

### **TL as a Process of Decolonization?**

TL processes can be key drivers in terms of overcoming these unsustainable practices, structures and paradigms. For this, another approach to “education” (Andreotti et al., 2021) is urgently needed. It will 1) have to focus centrally on the critique of collectively reproduced structures of unsustainability, climate injustice and colonial/racist continuity (and the implicatedness of the individual within them), 2) the emotional troubles individuals experience during a learning journey out of these structures and 3) address building collectively decolonial

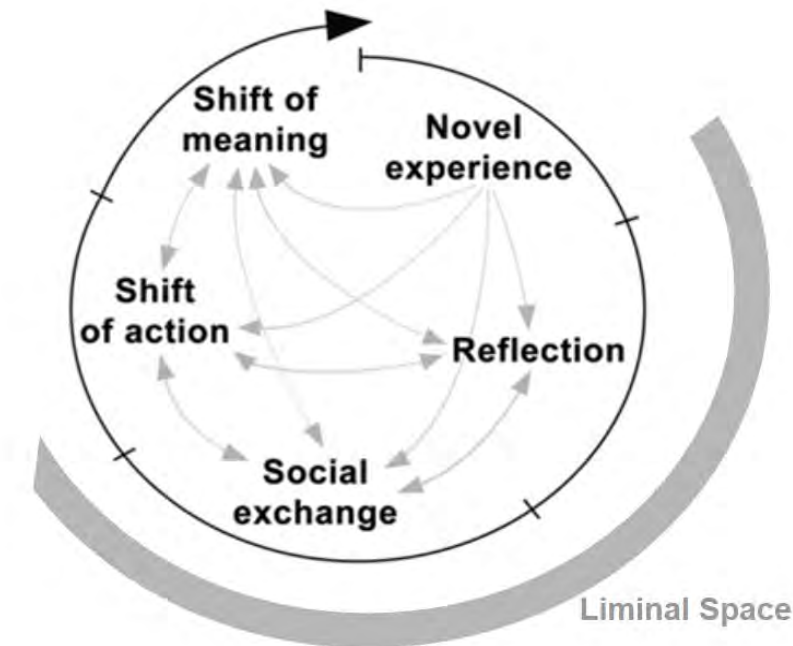
and climate-just practices. TL theory in its recent developments holds the potential to explore these different aspects of learning to advance sustainability.

TL theory explicitly offers possibilities for the collaborative negotiation of collective issues. Mezirow's starting point for theorizing was societal concerns. Brookfield (2000) in particular has worked out the collective nature of societal ideologies, which are reflected in supposedly individual meaning perspectives. Additionally, critiques of Mezirow's cognitivist approach (Taylor, 2001), have led to explore the role of emotions in all phases of TL (Grund et al., 2023). This emotional turn also points to more relational approaches, where individuals are understood as always connected to their human and non-human co-world in the sense of an entanglement (Barad, 2007). Also, Ubuntu as a set of closely related African-origin value systems (Gade, 2012; Wiredu, 1996), emphasizes interconnectedness and interdependence in the belief that one's humanity is defined and fulfilled through relationships with others. TL as a process of decolonization enables learners to recognize their disconnectedness to oneself, other living beings and places, particularly as a consequence of coloniality, and explore ways out of this.

In the following argumentation we build up on the different (non-linear) phases of TL, originally developed by Mezirow. We use a more simplified model of these phases suggested in Grund et al. (2023), in the context of sustainability (see Figure 1).

### Figure 1

*Phases of TL in the Context of Sustainability*



*Note:* Grund et al. (2023) incl. liminal space (added by the authors)

It distinguishes five main phases: 1) novel experience, 2) reflection, 3) social exchange, 4) shift of action and 5) shift of meaning and finally, the shift in meaning perspectives and

habits. We here highlight the start of the liminal space situated between the novel experience and any possible reflection, thus merging it with the model by Förster et al. (2019).

TL as a process of decolonization empowers learners to reflect on the colonial legacy of their own thinking and feeling (permanently reproduced through postcolonial racist structures) through new experiences. Through social exchange (for example about their own implicatedness in these structures) they are enabled to build up new (decolonial and courageous) practices and integrate them in their meaning perspectives.

### **Providing Safe Enough Spaces that Allow to Deal with Strong Emotions**

Emotions play a crucial role in all phases of TL: they can support or impede TL (Förster et al., 2019). When understanding TL as a potential process of decolonization, unpleasant emotions evoked by colonial injustice such as anger or fear must be acknowledged and addressed.

Overall, the primary re-action pattern to unpleasant emotions is - simplified - avoidance and quickly returning to a state of well-being (Siegel, 2020) or comfort (Mälkki, 2019). Depending on how (life) threatening the situation or stimulus is appraised, stress-reactions emerge with automated, biological pre-programmed fast defense patterns up to (re-)traumatization (Porges, 2017). In this defense mode, the liminal space is avoided, critical reflection and creativity are impeded, and we are unable to learn something new. Furthermore, our ability to constructively connect to ourselves and others, is restricted or impossible (Porges, 2017).

This can also happen when entering an intertwined individual and collective TL journey within a diverse group concerning climate-(in)justice. When different structural and individual vulnerabilities and privileges intersect in a complex way, conflict or disengagement in the process may appear.

“Safe enough spaces” (Singer-Brodowski et al., 2022) are key for addressing emotional troubles in a TL process of decolonization towards climate justice. They allow the learner to feel physically and psychologically safe enough, to constructively deal with unpleasant emotions, when meaning perspectives are challenged and a liminal space of not knowing is navigated. Such spaces may support reflection and constructive social exchange towards new perspectives and more just practices individually and collectively leading to courageous action. From a stress-developmental perspective on safe enough spaces, it is important to identify and regulate unpleasant emotions and stress-reactions, address the underlying sources and avoid strong automated defense reactions or re-traumatization. This is supported when subjectively, available resources are sufficient to meet a challenge, so that a situation is not appraised as (life) threatening (anymore) (Singer-Brodowski et al., 2022). At the same time reflecting unpleasant emotions, connected reactions and their sources, like conflicts, are important entrance points for TL (Mälkki, 2019, Singer-Brodowski et al., 2022). They allow us to explore underlying meaning perspectives, paving the way for collective sense-making and more just practices, including restorative ones.

In line with this, Aaro & Clemens (2013) suggest in their framework for providing “brave spaces” in social justice education, to establish together ground rules for handling discomfort and conflict. This is already part of a TL learning journey and helps to make implicit meaning-perspectives explicit, to build trustful relationships on eye level, and common ground and to take responsibility. It also helps to manage expectations and gives orientation contributing further to feel safe enough (Singer-Brodowski et al., 2022).

Particularly, the following specificities must be considered from a “restorative justice lens”.

- 1) TL is fundamentally an embodied process, for which emotional involvement is key and wherein the act of participation holds significant weight. Establishing a safe enough and brave space, one that encourages individuals to share their stories and to show up with vulnerability and surrender to the discomfort of the liminal space, is key. Through a sensitively mediated process, the facilitator creates a brave space ensuring safety for the harmed. This process ideally allows for reparation for the individual who has experienced harm and accountability from those doing the harm, which in turn can rebuild and restore harmony to the community (Suzuki & Yuan, 2021).
- 2) The delinking of epistemologies is both a prerequisite as well as a potential result of a decolonial TL process. Transformative impact is possible when the transgressor becomes aware of the harm caused, desists in advancing harm, and seeks to repair the harm, work toward restoration, and ultimately reintegrate in a harmonious way toward continued healing (Suzuki & Yuan, 2021). Thus, a TL process which aims towards the emergence of decolonial practices requires learning companions who have undergone the shift in meaning perspectives themselves and are aware of the need for decolonization.

### **TL Outcomes: Decolonial Courageous Practices to Transform Society**

Decolonial practices can emerge in the process of TL through a process of decolonizing especially in the later phases as a collaborative meaning-making. The outcomes of such a process should be defined by learners, however decoloniality demands us to consider the following key points:

- 1) **Decolonial epistemological practices:** Decolonial epistemological practices involve cultivating and engaging with diverse forms of knowledge that de-links from dominant Western paradigms. These practices encompass experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical ways of knowledge creation, each deeply intertwined with individuals' lived experiences and cultural contexts (Heron & Reason, 2006).
- 2) **Decolonial ethical practices:** Decolonial ethical practices encompass a profound acknowledgment of the overstepping of planetary boundaries and the inherent injustices perpetuated by coloniality. Embracing border thinking (Zembylas, 2020), decolonial ethics recognizes the contributions of subaltern knowledge producers and emphasizes the emergence of pluriversal values through dialogue and collective meaning making across diverse cultures and perspectives integrating restorative justice. It involves a negotiation of collective shifts and impacts, advocating for a pluriversal approach (Escobar, 2017) that respects multiple cosmologies and worldviews and at the same time allows to build a common ground.
- 3) **Decolonial political practices:** As we change discourses and learn to listen to each other in safe enough and brave spaces, we develop new political practices. Yet it is precisely the awareness of privileges and the search for discourse spaces that are as hierarchy-free as possible that can change power relations and where we adhere to constructive ground rules. From a Power Over to a Power With (Avelino, 2019) is the central figure that helps to create common strategies for political change for example in local activities for climate action or in local communities. In the end this means

that those with resources / power must enter into the collective solution space and take responsibility (as allies). It is necessary that alternative restorative practices can be developed collaboratively by learners and scaled up in the community of learners so that they end up feeling they can make a difference in terms of policy debates and changes. This includes a way of learning that breaks free from conventional norms on gender, race and class (hooks, 1994) and goes across systemic boundaries to induce a societal transformation.

### **Limitations and Outlook: Supporting Courageous and Decolonial Practices towards Climate Justice**

TL as decolonization opens up a collective journey, venturing into the liminal space where old meaning perspectives are no longer valid, and new ones are not yet clear. Together, we can embrace the discomfort and uncertainty, deal with structural and individual vulnerabilities and privileges, co-holding the liminal space as we delve deeper into collective meaning-making. Through this shared process, we undergo a profound shift in our meaning-perspectives, paving the way for the emergence of new courageous practices rooted in harmonious connection and affirmation of interdependent life: decolonial practices of climate justice.

Nevertheless, some questions remain unanswered and offer the opportunity for further theoretical exploration.

- 1) How to deal with the normative stance of climate justice in open-ended TL processes? TL per se is a description of a process rather than a method. It is not to be understood in a linear way and its outcomes remain open. At the same time, we are advocating processes where TL can happen for the emergence of collective decolonial practices for climate justice employing pathways of restorative justice, a deeply normative endeavor. This thus brings us into good trouble with the tension between openness and normativity in TL and needs further theoretical elaborations.
- 2) How to broaden the perspective to non-human beings? Widening our perspective to inquire about the transferability of approach towards interspecies justice, necessarily entails that those species most affected are not in the same way part of a collaborative effort within human deliberative discourses, where TL can take place. The question of how to connect with non-human living beings is an open question. The concept of restorative justice was borne of Indigenous ethos, which recognizes the spiritual domain as a way to know and engage the world. Thus, discourse with non-human species could also exist and occur in a hermeneutical way.
- 3) How to deal with different structural vulnerabilities? It is critical to understand the value of affinity groups in the TL process, as a means to foster intra-communal dialogue and healing among the oppressed (those who have collectively experienced harm). Can such structural vulnerabilities be acknowledged, and learners cultivate trust and promote agency when the whole group - those experiencing oppression and those who hold privileges that oppress - come together? Is it possible to proactively consider structural power dynamics and their effects on agency and safety within an affinity community when the hegemonic reality is still ongoing? The shift toward broader communal restoration only happens when reparative action from the oppressor disrupts the systemic imposition of power imbalance. So how to provide both safe enough spaces and at the same time allow for the collective TL to occur?

- 4) How to deal with different structural vulnerabilities? It is critical to understand the value of affinity groups in the TL process, as a means to foster intra-communal dialogue and healing among the oppressed (those who have collectively experienced harm). Can such structural vulnerabilities be acknowledged, and learners cultivate trust and promote agency when the whole group - those experiencing oppression and those who hold privileges that oppress - come together? Is it possible to proactively consider structural power dynamics and their effects on agency and safety within an affinity community when the hegemonic reality is still ongoing? The shift toward broader communal restoration only happens when reparative action from the oppressor disrupts the systemic imposition of power imbalance. So how to provide both safe enough spaces and at the same time allow for the collective TL to occur?

These questions are too important not to address, even if currently we do not have definite answers, as they each point to major debates.

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# Pre-service Teachers' Transformative Learning During Placement in Underdeveloped Rural Areas of Indonesia: A Living Experience

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**Abstract:** Transformative learning is an experience-based learning that focuses on exploring unfamiliar environments. Exposing pre-service teachers to teaching in unfamiliar environments can enrich their competences. To date, there has been limited research on exposing pre-service teachers' living experience in underdeveloped rural areas. This study aims to understand pre-service teachers' transformative learning through their living experience during teaching placement in underdeveloped rural areas, and its impacts on them. Forty-one pre-service teachers, who come from elsewhere and were placed for one year in underdeveloped rural areas of Indonesia, participated in semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. The findings show that pre-service teachers engaged in disorientation, reflection and exploration of new roles and actions, leading to transformative learning. Disorientation occurred due to encountering challenges while living there. In response, pre-service teachers explored their new roles and actions. Through reflection during their interviews, they were also able to derive meaning from their experiences. Their transformative learning contributes to the participants' personal development, improvement in intercultural skills, and raising awareness about the importance of conserving nature. This study details how underdeveloped rural areas can be a powerful learning context for pre-service teachers.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Pre-Service Teachers, Living Experience, Underdeveloped Rural Areas of Indonesia.

## Introduction

Transformative Learning (TL) is an experience-based learning focusing on exploring unfamiliar environments (Cho & Johnson, 2020). TL must take the context of the experience into account (Hoggan, 2022) to avoid distorting the interpretation of the experience (Morrice, 2013). Furthermore, exposing pre-service teachers (PSTs) to unfamiliar teaching environments is important because their learning will not only focus on the pedagogical but also the socio-cultural aspects (Stacey, 2022).

To date, exposing PSTs to unfamiliar environments has predominantly focused on exploring foreign countries (e.g., Chandra et al., 2022; King et al., 2022). There has been limited research on exposing PSTs to unfamiliar environments in the context of contrasting localities within the same country, exploring PSTs' living experience in underdeveloped rural areas. This study aims to address this scarcity by investigating and understanding PSTs' TL through their living experience during placements in underdeveloped rural areas and its impacts on them. We address two research questions:

- 1) How does living in underdeveloped rural areas foster transformative learning in pre-service teachers?
- 2) What are the pre-service teachers' transformative learning changes?

## **Transformative Learning as the Theoretical Underpinning**

Mezirow defines TL as:

The process by which we transfer our taken-for-granted or problematic frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action (Mezirow, 2000, p. 7).

This TL process emphasizes disorientation and reflection for triggering change (Ruales et al., 2021). Disorientation is a cognitive dissonance that affects individuals' emotional state (Sokol & Shaughnessy, 2018), which is often followed by engaging in negative emotions (Laros & Košinár, 2019). Encountering challenges can stimulate this disorientation, for instance, pupils have difficulty following the lesson triggering frustration among PSTs (Sari et al., 2022). Meanwhile, reflection is a stage where individuals can engage with and understand their changes (Ruales et al., 2021). According to Mälkki and Raami (2022), reflection should be guided to facilitate change.

Experience is fundamental to the TL process, meaning that the stages occur on an experiential basis (Baldwin, 2023). Investigating individuals' TL requires consideration of the broad issues involved while they engage in an experience (Tedford & Kitchenham, 2021). TL also emphasizes the context in which learning takes place; different learning contexts yields different outcomes (Hoggan, 2022). The context of this research is underdeveloped rural areas of Indonesia. According to The General Directorate of Science, Technology and Higher Education (2015) underdeveloped rural areas in Indonesia are rural areas with less developed geographical, social, and economic conditions compared to other rural areas. These areas often face socio-economic issues, such as poverty (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015), educational issues like teacher shortage (Febriana et al., 2018) and difficulties with accessibility (Magayang et al., 2020).

The outcomes of TL encompass changes that can involve becoming different or improving (Hoggan, 2016). Hoggan (2016) categorizes TL changes into six broad groups: worldview, self, epistemology, ontology, behavior, and capacity. PSTs participating in teaching programs where they are required to live in foreign countries engage in TL with outcomes focusing on cross-cultural adaptability (King et al., 2022) and social development (Salmona et al., 2015). When the target foreign countries have socio-economic issues such as poverty, PSTs develop personally and further commit to social action aimed at improving those countries (Chandra et al., 2022).

## **Methods**

The setting of this study was the SM3-T program. SM3-T stands for “Sarjana Mendidik di daerah Terdepan, Terluar dan Tertinggal” which translates to the graduates teaching in outermost, frontier, and underdeveloped rural areas (the General Directorate of Science, Technology, and Higher Education, 2015). It was a governmental teaching program in Indonesia aimed at placing PSTs in underdeveloped rural areas for one year. The government appointed several universities to manage the program. These universities were responsible for PSTs' recruitment, pre-departure training and deployment to the target areas.

The participants of this study were forty-one pre-service primary teachers from three designated universities who were part of the fifth batch of the program. To ensure that all participants of the program completed the placement, the government required them to be

unmarried during the program (Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education, 2015). These participants neither were came from nor had been to underdeveloped rural areas before. They were deployed in a different province than their domicile. Their ethnicities also differed from the locals’.

The study utilized a qualitative research method. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. The interview scheme consisted of a series of questions assessing PSTs’ living experiences during placement and the benefits of these experiences. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and retrospectively, after participants completed their placement. Each interview began with an introduction and a brief explanation of the study’s purpose by the researcher. Subsequently, participants were asked to sign informed consent forms and provide demographics information. They were then prompted to recall their stories, activities, and struggles that led to change. Interviews were digitally recorded whilst the researcher took notes. Each interview lasted approximately sixty to ninety minutes.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis in NVivo 11. The conversations in the interviews were transcribed verbatim. The analysis followed the steps recommended by Braun & Clarke (2019); (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for the themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. Familiarization was achieved by listening to the recordings and reading the transcription several times. A hybrid approach between deductive and inductive was used in the coding process. That is, labelling participants’ stories, activities, struggles, and changes was both based on data and theory driven. Subsequently, searching the themes was conducted by combining and collating the codes.

## **Findings**

The findings showed that all participants engaged in five themes identified as important elements of a TL experience; challenges, disorientation, exploration of new roles and actions, reflection, and changes. These themes will be elaborated further below:

### **Challenges**

All participants encountered at least two of the following challenges while living in underdeveloped rural areas:

- 1) Participants had difficulty adapting to the local culture with its different traditions. All participants were placed in provinces different from their own, resulting in differences in ethnicity compared to the locals. Subsequently, locals’ traditions differed from participants’, and some participants even admitted that certain local traditions contradicted their own.
- 2) Most target areas lacked facilities such as internet, mobile signal coverage, electricity, and clean water. During pre-departure training, their universities informed and prepared all participants for the limited facilities and difficult physical accessibility in the target areas. Although most participants believed they were prepared for these situations, they found living in underdeveloped rural areas to be more extreme than expected.
- 3) Locals in some target areas were wary of outsiders or misunderstood the teaching program. Many of the targeted areas were isolated, with few outsiders coming to stay for extended periods. Despite the involvement of local leaders in introducing participants to the community, locals remained suspicious, leading to avoidance of interaction or unfriendly behavior. In some cases, locals even prevented their children

- from attending school. The participants found this situation was difficult, as the success of the program depended on active engagement with the locals.
- 4) Several participants faced environmental challenges, such as floods and forest fires. Some were placed in palm plantation areas where water was contaminated, and floods were common during the rainy season. Others in mining and farming areas experienced regular flooding and forest fires, often caused by locals opening new land for cultivation and mining.
  - 5) A few participants experiencing ethnic or tribal conflict. One participant described being at school when an ethnic conflict erupted in the surrounding area. Although she was eventually evacuated due to negotiations between locals and authorities, another participant recounted being unable to evacuate during a tribal conflict due to its intensity. Instead, she was advised to stay home until the situation calmed down.

### **Disorientation**

Participants encountering these challenges triggered disorientation for two reasons; participants felt that the reality in underdeveloped rural areas was different from their beliefs before placement, or the reality in their target areas was more extreme than what they had believed. Their disorientation effected feelings of sadness, disappointment, fear, worry, and anger. One participant said, “I cried a lot in the beginning of my stay because the village was very isolated” (Interviewee 7).

### **Exploration of New Roles and Actions**

To cope with their situation, participants explored their new roles and actions as newcomers. They implemented several strategies during their exploration:

- 1) Participants followed local traditions.
- 2) Participants adapted to the local lifestyle and adopted a modest way of living.
- 3) Participants attempted to raise awareness about environmental issues among locals.

However, this proved challenging as locals’ livelihoods often relied on activities such as mining. Instead, participants integrated these issues into their teaching, hoping that their pupils would understand and inform their parents.

It is interesting to note that regarding conflict, participants did experience disorientation but did not engage further. Instead, they either left the area or stayed out of the conflict.

### **Reflection**

Although all participants engaged in such challenging experiences, they did not initially realize that these experiences had changed them; they only mentioned that it was a unique experience that they did not regret. During the interviews, all participants were asked to recall their experiences and made meaning of them, which led them to engage in reflection. During this reflection, they realized that the experience had changed them. One participant shared,

The challenges of living in underdeveloped rural areas were beyond my imagination. Nevertheless, I think the experience contributes to my personal growth. The village did not have mobile signal and could only be accessed by off road vehicles. So, if I need to buy something, I had to hold it back for a while. (Interviewee 5)

### **Changes**

Participants’ first change was personal development. They became more resilient, believing they could survive if deployed to other challenging areas in the future. They not only improved their empathy towards people living in underdeveloped rural areas but also felt more

grateful towards their own life in their hometowns. Furthermore, living in underdeveloped rural areas taught participants to become more patient. For instance, when they wanted to call their family, they needed to wait until they had time to go to the city.

The second change was an improvement in intercultural skills. All participants admitted that they were more open and tolerant to people with different traditions and cultures than their own after returning home. It is worth noting that although experiencing local conflicts did not cause participants to implement any strategy or action, the experience still helped them improve their intercultural skills; they realized that intercultural interactions should be supported so they can understand each other.

The third change was an increased awareness of the importance of conserving nature. As many participants had to walk long distances to get clean water, with some even having to collect rainwater, they valued water more than before their placement. They became aware that deforestation and palm plantations harmed both people and the environment, with the impact being particularly severe for locals living in surrounding areas.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The findings show that PSTs engaged with disorientation, exploration of new roles and actions, and reflection, indicating that they experienced TL. The challenges encountered stimulated this process.

An interesting finding in the PSTs' TL process reveals that they needed to explore new roles and actions to tackle most of the challenges. However, the same PSTs did not engage in this exploration in response to encountering ethnic or tribal conflict, yet changes still occurred. This suggests that individuals can have different responses to different social issues. Sari et al (2023) mention that TL is flexible, and the TL process occurs differently from one person to another. The result of the current study adds a nuance to the flexibility of TL; the same individual can have different TL processes in response to encountering different challenges. This result supports both Laros and Košinár (2019) who mention that a TL process requires an exploration of new roles and actions to instigate change, and Ruales et al (2021) who comment that disorientation and reflection are sufficient to instigate changes. Our study implies that the necessity of involving exploration of new roles and actions relies on the learners themselves, referring to the independent and autonomous nature of TL (Wiessner & Mezirow, 2000). Nevertheless, further investigation might be needed to examine differences between TL changes involving exploration of new roles and actions, and those that do not. This examination can be conducted referring to Hoggan's three characteristics of TL changes (2018) – breadth, depth, and irreversibility.

In addition, it is not surprising that PSTs' changes in this study are associated with personal and social development because other TL studies associated with exploring unfamiliar environments primarily address personal and socio-cultural development (e.g., King et al., 2022; Salmons et al., 2015). Nonetheless, PSTs unexpectedly improve their awareness of environmental issues. The result of my study is in line with Hoggan's statement (2022) that transformative educational programs can be prescriptive where educators decide how learners should change and which changes learners need to adapt to. Fundamentally, the government expects that the SM-3T program will contribute to PSTs' personal and social-cultural development (The General Directorate of Science, Technology and Higher Education 2015), as Indonesia has more than 300 diverse ethnic groups (The World Population Review, 2021). However, it cannot be denied that PSTs can immerse themselves in issues that were not emphasized by teacher educators during the design of the program. It is worth noting that when

designing transformative educational programs, teacher educators should consider that experience is central in TL (Baldwin, 2023) and this experience is holistic (Hoggan, 2022). Despite being prescriptive, the changes resulting from transformative programs tend to be open.

In conclusion, this study provides implications to teacher education. It suggests that teaching programs should include living experiences because they enrich PSTs' changes. Living with a local community surrounding the school enables PSTs to better understand the local community and the environment. Additionally, PSTs can encounter unexpected situations that broaden their knowledge. This study can serve as a reference by teacher educators in designing transformative teaching programs for PSTs.

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## **We Spaces for Racial Equity: Lessons from Our Praxis**

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**Abstract:** This paper/presentation reports on lessons learned from our praxis enabling individual and social transformation through deep engagement across racial differences. In residential workshops called “Dare to Connect”, and in ongoing affinity groups that we call “Breathing Spaces”, the work has involved engaging participants in the creation of a collective “We-space” in which people can fully bring their various social identities while creating a collective space in which deep engagement across those differences is possible. This paper describes the key principles and practices underlying this work and the lessons learned from action inquiry within the challenging social and political context of the last five years. Those practices involve ancestral healing, shadow work, intra and intergroup dialogue, various embodied and contemplative experiences, engaging with the natural world, and conceptual pieces around the integral AQAL model, white supremacy, and healing from racial trauma. In this paper, we focus on lessons from our praxis concerning: unwhitening our learning spaces; the use of intragroup affinity spaces; and our “use of self” (as individuals and as a team) in our facilitation.

**Key Words:** Racial Equity, We-Space, Intergroup Dialogue, Affinity Groups

### **Introduction**

Nearly five years ago, in late October 2019, we joined with our two co-facilitators and twenty participants at Ghost Ranch, New Mexico for a 5-day residential retreat called Dare to Connect. Since that weekend on the eve of the pandemic, we and our colleagues have led similar retreats in different parts of the country. In this paper, we explore what we have learned through this work about how to engage people in a process of transformative learning that fosters personal and social transformation through engaging deeply across our racialized differences.

The model underlying this work, which we call “we-spaces for racial equity”, is described in a recent book chapter (Gallegos et al 2022). That model draws on and integrates an array of approaches to transformative learning, including transformation through group work and dialogue (Schapiro et al 2012), soul work (Dirkx 2012), embodied practices (Menachim 2017), integral theory (Wilber 2000; Gunnlaugsen & Brabant 2016); and social identity development (Hardiman & Jackson 1991)). Implicit to this model are our understandings about how transformation occurs within a brave holding space (Arao & Clemens 2013) in which people can take risks and participate in radical experiments in the here and now, engage in disorienting experiences through which their current assumptions and ways of being are challenged (Mezirow 1991), experience re-integrative practices through which they can experience a deep connection with one another and a deeper sense of wholeness, and eventually put these new understandings, feelings and insights into practice.

Our work builds a foundation wherein people can begin to explore the complexity of their own group legacies, owning the flaws and wisdom available by reclaiming their group identities as, for example, women of color or white men. This exploration involves considerable emotional excavation and requires the intentional creation of brave spaces where people can become vulnerable rather than defensive, curious rather than overwhelmed by shame, engaged rather than detached from what they bring and what has shaped their experiences. We have developed a process whereby people can gradually confront their shadows and bring to light the lessons derived from our ancestors. By intentionally building a container called “we-space”, we can shift the attention of the participants from a narrower focus on themselves as individuals to one where they are also able to acknowledge and communicate across and between group boundaries.

As we have continued to experiment with this work, we have been in a continual process of praxis/action inquiry, learning from our experiences and adapting the work in response. In this paper, we report on three key themes from that inquiry: how we are intentionally learning to “unwhiten spaces” and interrupt white supremacy culture and practices; our “use of self” (as individuals and as a team) in our facilitation.; and the opportunities and potential pitfalls of using intragroup affinity groups in this work.

### **Unwhitening Our Learning Spaces**

We continually challenge ourselves to move away from habitual and dominant practices rooted in white supremacy culture (Okun 2021) – practices that create learning environments in which white people are more comfortable than are people of color – and move toward more relational practices and norms, which helps us to “brown” our spaces. We aim to move away from practices rooted in valuing individuality, urgency, timeliness, efficiency, and mind over body to more relational practices rooted in valuing relationships over time, emergence over rigidity, embodiment balanced with intellectualization, quality over quantity, emotion balanced with rationality, distributed power vs hierarchy, and valuing the collective over the individual. In so doing, we continue to be challenged by how difficult this is to achieve, since our conditioning to seeing white cultural practices as normal and superior runs so deep, in ourselves and our participants of all races.

The ways in which we have been experimenting with these goals include:

- minimizing our use of theory and didactic presentation and maximizing time for experiential and embodied learning
- developing a culture of inquiry by engaging participants in critical questions without suggesting that there one right analysis and perspective
- introducing participants to the characteristics of white supremacy culture earlier in our time together, and inviting them to join us in noticing when these elements show up among us, and in practicing alternative ways of being
- recognizing that elements of white culture can often be useful, while questioning their normative and habitual use
- holding our designs and plans lightly, allowing room for emergence and change in response to the needs and experiences in the here and now of the group
- elevating and supporting the voices and experiences of people of color while inviting the white people to stay engaged and contribute from a less dominant place
- integrating indigenous ways of knowing and learning into our designs, making space for more and more time to be intentionally spent in nature, listening to the messages that the trees, the animals, and spirit have for us.

These practices have challenged us to let go of our impulse to control what is happening in service of sharing power with the group, and to step away from a stance rooted in our expertise to one rooted as well in our unknowing and our own growing edges – thus inviting our participants to do the same and to focus less on demonstrating their own knowledge and convincing others of their truth, to an openness to learn from and with others across their differences.

### **Use of Self and Team as Instruments in Our Facilitation**

Facilitating racially mixed and homogenous groups is always difficult, high stakes, dangerous and exciting, rewarding work. Those of us drawn to do it are a wild mix of characters. Each of us has a different style, history and approach to the dance of facilitation. We are yet interested in distilling the aspects of facilitation that are more consistently present in high functioning learning groups best supported by the “leader”. In our experience each person must learn how best to use their own “instrument” – in this case, the instrument is our very selves hence “self as instrument”. To this we add the variations “team as instrument”, “body as instrument”, “spirit as instrument”, “setting as instrument”, and most importantly, “collective as instrument”.

The role of transformational facilitation requires high degrees of personal and social identity exploration and healing. One can only take groups as far as one herself has gone. While on the journey, facilitators need to be at least a half step ahead of participants to assure the group that while we may go to scary places, we have been through these forests before and can assure their safe passage and return. We continue to learn how to best use our selves in this process by not hiding behind our roles as facilitators, but by using our own identities and felt experiences as a catalyst for others’ learning - sharing our felt reactions to what is happening in the room, including at times our feelings of pain or disappointment, our excitement, and affirmations, along with our questions and our self-doubts. As bell hooks (1994) has said, “empowerment can not happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging others to do so” (p. 21). Our heart-centered experience, thoughtfulness, and attentiveness all demonstrate to groups that they can settle in and “breathe” together. We intentionally co-create the container with them, sharing into the space our voices as facilitators while elevating theirs and the coherence of the collective.

While the various levels of system that we develop with our group work are beyond the scope of this paper, “team as instrument” is worth emphasizing. The importance of intentionally developing a multicultural, inclusive team environment is crucial to the evolution of the larger group. We have seen the positive impact when we are fully aligned as a team and able to deal constructively with our own conflicts, as well as the negative impact of a team that is not as congruent and developed. This team sets the tone, initiates the culture and begins the process long before participants enter the space. The collaborating that goes on to prepare for session work is the key to developing healing spaces. The team mirrors and shadows the group – so the extent to which this can be acknowledged and actively worked with, it can enhance understanding and customizing activities to meet the larger group needs. But it comes with effort and creative conflict – inviting and encouraging contrary views and alternatives is key to effective and emergent design processes.

### **“Affinity groups” – Pitfalls and Possibilities**

As a Latina cis-gendered woman and Jewish cis-gendered white man, intergroup dialogue and racial identity development have been central to our practice since we began in the 1980’s. We are convinced that important work can happen in the presence of same-race and/or same-gender groups where, as the saying goes, people can “do their own work” - which can involve both consciousness raising about white supremacy and patriarchy, and healing from the pain and trauma that those systems of oppression impose on us all. Steve facilitates groups of white men while Placida supports ongoing groups of women of color and white women. We have noticed patterns within these groups that inform our practice and contribute to what we understand about group membership and the potential for transformational learning within and across groups.

One pattern we have observed is that people of color (POC) gravitate to being together and want as much of that as they can get, and need to be convinced of the value of doing intergroup work with white people – asking what is in it for them? And for white people the reverse is often true. They need to be convinced of the value of spending time with one another and want POC to be present to help them learn.

Some mistakenly assume that simply because a group is homogenous (re: race, gender or other group identities), it will be conflict free, with participants able to engage more deeply than in mixed group settings. While there is some truth to this assumption, as we do tend to feel less guarded when surrounded by our “own people”, the story is more complex. Groups also tend to replicate white supremacy and patriarchal biases even among people of color and women as well as among dominant group members. The good and bad news that this brings us to is that WE ALL HAVE WORK TO DO. It can never be the case where we can just blame the dominant group members, call them out, beat them up and throw them out. Instead, women and BIPOC folk have work to do to identify and uproot their own internalized subordination and within group biases. While it seems counterintuitive, we have found that people can be prejudiced against members of their own group, often a result of their internalized oppression. Women can be heard saying, I don’t like working for or with other women. POC can be heard being critical of other members of their own groups or other subordinated groups, criticizing them for not being black or brown enough or judging others for their accommodation to white supremacy culture aka “selling out”. White men need to learn from experience that in a group setting it is possible to be vulnerable with one another, and to provide one another with emotional support as well as challenge in unlearning racism and sexism, in contrast to seeing groups of white men as a setting for superficial conversation about politics and sports, or, among more “woke”men, a competition for who is the most politically correct and evolved.

We use the term “Breathing Spaces” to represent the kind of safety we aspire to in our group work – to co-create enough safety and bravery to let down some of our armor and open to our vulnerability in each others’ presence. It doesn’t happen automatically, nor does it happen without support and clear intention. Patience is often required as the development of trust and relational connection among members takes time and repeated contact, commodities on short supply in many group contexts. Some want to be able to achieve trust and safety in short time frames and with only minimal in-person or repeated contact. To learn to breathe together and create robust “we-spaces”, we need to invest in each other and commit to ongoing effort and consistency. As Adrienne Maree Brown (2017) put it, “we can only move at the speed of trust.”

### **Challenges of Intragroup Dynamics – Can We Even Breathe Together?**

We are finding that women of color seem to rely on each other and develop a level of trust with each other much more readily than white women or white men. Perhaps because of the constant assault they experience in organizations including frequent microaggressions and the constant demand to “people-please”, be nice and make other people comfortable around them, when they come into homogenous group space, away from the “white gaze”, they audibly sigh at the assumed comfort of not having to be hyper-vigilant to survive. White women, in our experience, seem to need much more reassurance to begin to trust other white women. Given their privilege as white people and their disadvantaged status as a subordinated gender, white women come to these spaces with their armor well in place. In white women groups, they enter the work with deep concerns about losing their individual identity, being seen as racist or not offending others by saying/doing the wrong thing. This hyper-attention to performance leaves them ambivalent about showing vulnerabilities and critical of other women’s actions and behavior. It takes deep work and self-reflection to recognize how they are holding themselves back from more fully engaging.

Women of color face different challenges. If POC groups include people from a variety of backgrounds and nationalities, colors and shapes, the diversity in the group can help or hinder the formation of a cohesive group. Sometimes the “oppression olympics” are activated with each group wanting to be acknowledged for the unique ways that racism impacts them and their people historically. In a scarcity mindset, this can set people up to compete for dwindling resources and see other groups as part of the problem rather than allies. It takes effort and growth in intercultural competence for people to hold the complexities of these various identities while also acknowledging and building upon their shared experiences, strategies for navigating white dominant organizations and intergenerational trauma passed on from their ancestors.

White men are used to seeing one another as people to be feared, as competitors and agents of putdowns and various forms of one upmanship, or as people with whom they can escape criticism from women and POC about their privilege and toxicity. Creating groups in which men can be vulnerable with one another while critically examining their socialization into internalized dominance can be very challenging but ultimately very rewarding. Since it is largely from other white men that they learned the lessons of white supremacy and patriarchy, it is among other such men that they can be re-socialized. Getting white men into these conversations can be challenging, and we have learned that it is important to start where they are and to give them an opportunity to begin by sharing their own pain and loneliness, and their longing for connection. Ultimately, in dialogue with one another and across the gender and racial divides, they can come to recognize that their liberation relates to others, and what they have to gain by deconstructing various forms of oppression.

### **Challenges of Intergroup Dynamics – Will We Ever Be Able to Breathe Together in Each Others’ Presence?**

As we continue evolving our practice, it is our hope that as individuals are able to develop their breadth and range of understanding of their own group memberships and group differences, that when they come together in mixed group settings, they are better able to engage; in other words, that white people become more aware of how their power and privilege has unintentional impacts on POC while they in turn develop capacity to tolerate and interrupt microaggressions and the everyday racism they encounter.

The question for us becomes, can we ever be able to truly meet each other in intergroup settings and learn to relax somewhat in each others presence? Given the challenges of working

within one's own group, these difficulties are multiplied by the amount of diversity in any given room. Here the concept of intersectionality becomes key. Rather than my group over yours, we strive to notice and accept all the various aspects of diversity present in any group setting and be able to tap into the wisdom and complexity of the mix.

### **What's at Stake**

Without easy answers, we optimistically reach beyond the limits of what we have already learned and what we have already tried. We see the need for more expansive views and intentional practices that show us how to be most functional and engaged across differences. Our notions of "We-space" and "Breathing Spaces" are the foundational grounds for these practices. As the polarization grows across the planet and our need for deeper understanding and transformative learning across groups is called for, we need to innovate and stretch ourselves into new ways of thinking, being and loving. In our practice, we call this "fierce love", the capacity and willingness to have difficult conversations that are learningful while holding each other in our widest and deepest embrace.

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# Reimagining Teaching and Learning: The Transformative Potential of Service Learning

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**Abstract:** Transformative learning, originally introduced to account for adult education, was then broadly applied and updated, and eventually reached schools and Universities. Teaching and learning practices emerged in the last decades that bear close affinities with transformative learning. Service Learning is one of the most interesting. It is defined as a service activity carried out by students, aimed at addressing real needs that are felt by the community. Service Learning shares with transformative learning not only an experience-centered epistemology, but also the central role of reflexivity: it is critical reflection on experiences that fosters change and personal development. Not by chance, Service Learning methodology makes explicit reference to reflective and transformative many practices and techniques. Reflexive thinking, in both service learning and transformative learning, is the process through which learners re-structure and re-interpret meanings. It involves critical self-evaluation, analysis of experiences, and reconfiguring of pre-existent knowledge and visions. Coherently pursued, Service Learning – like transformative learning – is loaded with deep transformative potential, touching upon some paradoxical aspects of formal education – aspects concerning control, power, and openness-closure of educative processes and contexts.

**Key Words:** Transformation, Teaching-Learning, Service Learning, Reflexivity

## **Transformative Learning: From Adult Education to School**

Transformative learning is a model of learning developed in the 1990s by Jack Mezirow. The model's ambition is to describe genuine learning, and to provide a guide to set up and recognize learning situations that empower learners to question and change their own ways of seeing and thinking, while deepening their understanding of both their own experience and the world (Mezirow, 2000).

This model of learning, originally introduced to account for – and improve – adult education, was then broadly applied and updated (for a review, see, e.g., Christie et al. 2015). Indeed, driven by the unsettling challenges that are becoming more and more apparent in our societies (see, e.g., UNESCO 2017), transformative learning eventually reached schools and Universities, where it became a critical counterpoint to a model based on knowledge transmission. In these instructional contexts, transformative learning corresponded to an emphasis on learning-by-doing, and to the promotion of reflective skills and other meta-skills that would allow learners to keep learning in changing social contexts, and to be in charge of change, rather than suffer it. As Mezirow himself once summarized:

in contemporary societies we must learn to make our own interpretations rather than act on the purposes, beliefs, judgments, and feelings of others. Facilitating such

understanding is the cardinal goal of adult education. Transformative learning develops autonomous thinking (Mezirow, 1997).

The evolution of educational culture is, of course, anything but linear, especially at the global scale. Yet, some trends can be identified. Many teaching and learning practices emerged in the last decades bear close affinities with transformative learning. While not stemming directly from it, they have similar goals, and often make explicit reference to transformative methodologies. Among these teaching-learning practices, Service Learning is one of the most interesting as we will argue below.

### **Service Learning and Transformative Learning**

Originated in the U.S. several decades ago, Service Learning is now a hot topic in the international debate on education (see, e.g., UNESCO, 2021). It is defined as a service activity carried out by students, aimed at addressing real needs that are felt by the community; the activity is institutionally planned and integrated with the academic career, by being a context for application of knowledge and learning by doing (Fiorin, 2015; Mortari, 2017; Bornatici, 2020; Cadei e Simeone, 2021). Service Learning is indeed “a balanced approach to experiential education” in which “service and learning goals [have] equal weight and each enhances the other for all participants” (Furco, 1996, p. 3). Service Learning embraces direct community oriented experiences, as well as many forms of planning, training, elaboration and evaluation; it is an occasion for students to learn and develop social and professional skills, but it is also an opportunity for reflection and sensemaking (Cadei e Serrelli, 2021); it requires and favors the construction of a dialogue between school (or university) and community, while at the same time articulating learning with social responsibility and active citizenship.

Service Learning shares with transformative learning an experience-centered epistemology of learning and education, where real life, participatory activity is seen as an occasion to trigger a “reflexive conversation” (or “transaction”) between learners and the context. The conversation unfolds through phases such as problem setting, connection with past experience, trial and error, reflection on action, and conscious development of new strategies.

Students actively participate in projects that provide a service to the community, while at the same time reflecting on their experiences and on the meaning of what they are doing (this critical reflection is central to service learning, as it helps students connect their service experiences with academic concepts and develop a deeper understanding of social and community issues).

*Reflexivity* is fundamental in both service learning and transformative learning, since critical reflection on experiences fosters change and personal development. Transformative learning is the process by which people reconsider and restructure their conceptions of the world in response to meaningful and disorienting experiences. This process involves deep critical reflection on one’s beliefs, values, and perspectives, and leads to a substantial change in worldviews and behaviors. In service learning, reflexivity develops through the process of reflecting on encounters and service experiences in the community. Students examine their service activities, question their own perceptions and interpretations of experiences, and connect what they have learned in academic discourses. In this learning process, reflection is an action, not just a simple series of thoughts. This suggests that reflection cannot be separated from actions, but rather that actions themselves form the basis of reflection.

Reflexive thinking, in both service learning and transformative learning, is the process through which learners re-structure and re-interpret meanings. Reflexivity is an active process involving critical self-evaluation, analysis of experiences, and reconfiguring of pre-existent knowledge and visions. This process of critical reflection is essential for personal change and the transformation of perspectives in service learning and transformative learning.

Service Learning also makes explicit reference to transformative practices and techniques that must accompany experience in order to liberate its potential. These practices and techniques should support Service Learning in all fundamental phases – from definition of needs, to design, execution, monitoring and evaluation – and remain fluidly integrated with the activity. The repertoire of practices is vast (Striano et al., 2018), including writing practices (personal diaries, collective writing), listening (interviews, reading stories and accounts), displacement (role playing, vision of movies and other media products), visualizing (photos, videos), expressing (theater, painting, sculpture and all other artistic languages), bodily experience (individual, in group, in couples, under supervision), biography (reflecting and connecting with personal motivations and family history), case studies and many more practices can hardly be reduced to a summary. Narrative approaches and Student Voice movements were particularly emphasized in recent times (Cadei, 2017; Cadei & Alfieri, 2021). Methods and techniques that accompany experience should be relevant and appropriate to support the engagement of students, sharpen their ability to identify community needs, and help integrating the students' experience, academic curriculum and social responsibility.

### **The Transformative Potential of Service Learning: Reimagining Teaching and Learning**

Service learning insists on integrating community service activity with academic learning objectives. In Service Learning, learning is meaningful, being a result of personal elaboration of knowledge. The process empowers thinking, meant a social rather than individual process:

[thinking is] a process of dialogical, reflexive knowing, necessarily construed by relating knowledge and people in order to escape the shallows of individualist thinking. A life perspective is found not in stable containers protected by fixed and secure notions, but in the awareness of fragility of what we know, and in the ability of creating and managing relationships (Orsenigo, 2009, our translation).

There is an important link between service learning and transformative learning. Both modes of learning focus on direct experience and critical reflection as tools for change and personal development. But Service Learning, when coherently pursued, bears deep transformative potential for the proposing institution, too: its necessary institutionalization requires integration into the values, logics and processes of the school or university itself, with regard to its relations with territory and communities (Cadei & Serrelli, 2022). Moreover, the transformation proposed by Service Learning aims to eventually move students to overcome the status quo, think disruptively, co-create new knowledge, and contribute to communities. Service Learning is thus hardly compatible with control and standardization. This could be seen as a paradoxical mismatch between Service Learning and formal education. Nonetheless, just for that, the profound assimilation of the logic of Service Learning is considered urgent and necessary for “reimagining” education and tackling the challenges of our times (UNESCO 2017, 2021).

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# Embodied Dialogic Spaces as Research Methodology for Students' Post-Graduate Reflection on their Dance Learning

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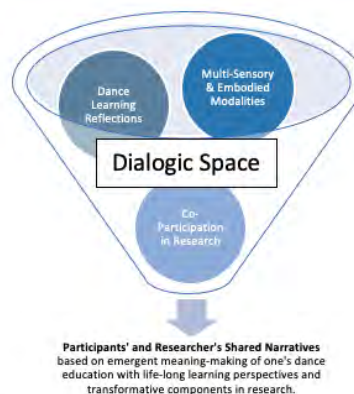
**Abstract:** This arts-based narrative research was an inquiry into how embodied dialogic spaces can provide access to dance learning reflections by students after graduating from a pre-professional dance program in Germany and the Czech Republic. Dialogic spaces, a term used by a few contemporary scholars, were examined as inclusive spaces for openness in learning. Data was collected through different modalities (textual, visual, and embodied), including surveys with alternative assessment tools, interviews, and somatic dance narratives (SDN), dance solos, for 'inner' listening and embodied exchanges between the researcher and participants. The SDNs served as vital data reporting and reflected the embodied version of all data collected within a dialogic space between the researcher and the individual participants with an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. The phenomenon of former students' reflection on their dance learning and the research design within a dialogic space equally informed the researcher's perspective and interpretive reporting of this study. This research argued for the need for dialogic spaces—for non-judgmental spaces prioritizing ontological over instrumental learning, not only during an education but also for identifying lifelong learning skills after an education. It aimed to explore the transformative possibilities of dialogic spaces and their impact on individual growth.

**Key Words:** Embodied Research, Research as Transformation, (Dance) Learning Reflections, Extra-Rational Learning.

## Introduction

This arts-based narrative research examined how embodied dialogic spaces support students' dance learning reflections after graduating from three pre-professional dance programs (DanceWorks, Berlin, and Palucca University, Dresden, Germany, and Duncan Center, Prague, in the Czech Republic). Its methodology was built on the premise that by graduating from a college-level or equivalent dance program (3-4 years), many students experience Mezirow's *disorientating dilemma* by leaving a "safe" dance learning environment, an exclusive world from many other fields and entering an adult world in which embodied expressions are mostly suppressed and hidden. Dialogic spaces, a term used by a few contemporary scholars, are vital for "openness and a multiplicity of voices—the potential for unbounded contextual meaning" and inclusiveness in learning (Wegerif, 2017, n. p.). They served as the amalgamation of dance learning reflections by six postgraduate students, sensory & embodied modalities, and co-participation in research by entering a shared space of emerging narratives influencing each other.

**Figure 1**  
*Components of My Embodied Dialogic Space*



### **Methodology**

The research methodology was intentionally designed to create an ongoing “dialogue” between textual, visual, and embodied data in the research process. The study was divided into Phases I-III, in which Phases I and II were conducted online. Phase III included three in-person dance rehearsals, eventually accumulating into a dissertation performance a few months later. The multi-modal components were essential in the data collection processes, including surveys with alternative assessment tools, interviews, and somatic dance narratives (SDN). SDNs were personal dance solos that supported an inner listening state and also served as embodied exchanges between the researcher and participants. I, the researcher, used an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach by responding with her SDN to each participant’s. In this way, the multi-modality of this research was not only “experienced” by the participants but fully realized by the researcher, who became a full participant in this process. The SDNs became an essential feature of the data reporting and reflected the embodied version of all data collected within a dialogic space between the researcher and participants. All data would be further analyzed by their “Phenomenologically Themeing,” which is “the study of the lifeworld as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize or reflect on it” (van Manen, 1990, p. 9). By focusing on the holistic narratives of the participants and the researcher in a dialogic space, nuances of transformative components emerged in their shared property. It was essential that the phenomenon of former students’ reflection on their dance learning and the research design within a dialogic space equally informed the researcher’s perspective and the study’s interpretive reporting.

### **Main Findings**

Bringing embodiment into dialogic spaces allowed for heightened sensitivity and attuning between all participants, not only when we moved together in a physical space in the dance studio (in Phase III) but also in developing our SDNs. Dialogic embodied spaces could, therefore, also develop in our online exchanges in Phases I and II. The embodiment phases allowed my participants to reflect on their dance education in the foremost language they were taught—embodied. Participants expressed that the provided dialogic space did not create undue pressures and supported the development of their non-performative dance solos (SDNs). They were viewed as a creative outlet for emotions that would emerge in their reflections. Giving the

time and space for reflection was positively received and seen as necessary overall. The embodiment components in this study attuned participants and researcher to the comfort and discomfort levels in our bodies with which our hidden memories of our dance education surfaced. Our bodies became the vessels with which we perceived our dance learning experiences and by which they were manifested in our bodies so we could change “our meaning perspectives” on our dance education to move forward renewed (Mezirow, 1991, p. 3). This research confirmed the benefits and needs for dialogic spaces as transformative opportunities and for increasing self and other knowledge.

### **Discussion:**

This research argues for the need for dialogic spaces—nonjudgmental spaces that prioritize ontological over instrumental learning—not only during education but also for identifying lifelong learning skills after education has been completed. It brought awareness to the transformative potencies of dialogic spaces and their impact on individual growth. This research moved beyond Mezirow’s cognitive understanding of transformation and highlighted Dirx’s (2006) emphasis on the “process of meaning-making” of participants’ dance learning experiences. This process is “essentially imaginative and extrarational,” in which embodiment became a propelling component towards transformation (p. 64). It aligned with Schlattner’s (2022) declaration that “transformative learning is embodied” (p. 833). All bodies need to attune and dialogue with each other for meaning perspectives to shift and generate a *larger* belonging and being in this world for participants (learners, students, mentees, colleagues, etc.) and researchers (leaders, teachers, mentors, lecturers, colleagues, facilitators, etc.). These transformative processes can be adapted to other learning fields where the body is not predominantly center-staged. Further research needs to be conducted to investigate the shared influences between embodied dialogic spaces and transformative learning in different learning settings.

### **Conclusion**

Embodied dialogic spaces enhance transformative learning and lifelong learning perspectives. A dialogic space in research needs to align with its appropriate methodology for inclusive findings. This research contributes to a sense of “wholeness” in education and research by bringing embodiment to dialogic research and offering embodied dialogic approaches to other fields, including transformative learning for the emergence of *good* trouble. It may be time to re-listen to Mezirow’s (1978) call for “a re-definition of our priorities - in terms of goals, functions, methods, and modes of research and evaluation” (p. 109).

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# Exploring the Contribution of Transformative Learning (TL) to Developing Intercultural Competency in a North Greece Community Hosting Refugee and Immigrant Populations

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**Abstract:** This paper presents the research conducted in a local community hosting refugee and migrant populations in North Greece. It concerned intercultural competence development among locals and transformation of their worldviews regarding cultural diversity. The conceptual framework of the research was grounded in Jack Mezirow’s Transformation Theory expanded by Knud Illeris’ and Edward Taylor’s contributions; both theorists provided a rationale for understanding the connection between intercultural competence development and transformative learning. The purpose of the research was two-fold: (a) to explain the locals’ actions and behaviors towards the other group, and (b) to understand the role of transformative learning in fostering intercultural awareness. The research was qualitative and involved open-ended, semi-structured interviews with 6 male and 6 female members of the host community. The results illustrated the connection between extensive social contacts with refugees and migrants, and the informants' attitudes and behaviors developed as a result of the culture shock (xenophobia, fear of job loss, distortion of the Greek Orthodox tradition). The results also showed that informants, whose lives were affected by the presence of refugees and migrants, agreed that participation in non-formal transformative learning interventions (e.g. cultural festivals, and seminars) could appease their fears and change their attitudes.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Intercultural Competency, Refugees

## Introduction

With what heart, what spirit,  
what desire and what passion  
we took life; what a mistake!  
and then we changed it.

George Seferis

Change is the only constancy in life. Nobel Prize-winning Greek poetry sets change at the heart of the human condition. We allow desire and passion to pave the way we lead our lives, and tacit knowledge to direct and influence our thinking until we get to a stumbling block; it could be Mezirow’s disorienting dilemma (2007) or Taylor’s culture shock (1994a, 1994b). And that is when change begins in the form of a learning process through which new knowledge is acquired to guarantee freedom from distorting and unquestioned assumptions and catalyze a change in society (Fleming, 2022).

Globalization has greatly influenced societies over the past several decades with unknown implications as yet (Stewart, 2022). Greece in particular, was severely stricken by the economic crisis at the beginning of the previous decade to be followed by an influx of refugee

and migrant populations only a few years later. The agreement signed between the European Union and Turkey in 2016 resulted in the confinement of tens of thousands of refugees and migrants in the Greek territory. Hospitality facilities were then built on the periphery of towns to accommodate asylum seekers' needs temporarily.

Since then, local societies have been challenged with coexisting with culturally and religiously diverse communities. As a result, intercultural differences have been defined as a major unbridged chasm between locals and newcomers, thus increasing entitlement, divisiveness, tension and conflict. Signs of growing xenophobia, nationalism and intolerance have fueled an ongoing public debate on the matter (Christopoulos, 2020).

Education, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of teaching and learning in changing learners' attitudes and fostering tolerance, acceptance and appreciation of other cultures in an attempt to establish a more harmonious and equitable world with social justice (Stewart, 2022). In retrospect, the adult education community held ambitious visions in the aftermath of the Second World War including elimination of ignorance and illiteracy, and the promotion of peace and understanding among peoples in its foundational concept (Benavot, Odora Hoppers, Stepanek Lockhart & Hinzen, 2022). The question that arises is whether the adult education community could respond to the sifting realities of our times.

Jack Mezirow's Transformation Theory is based on Dewey's ideas that through adult education social change could be explored and implemented (Fleming, 2022). Critically examining their dysfunctional assumptions and based on a better-informed judgment, adults can change their perspective on life to make it more open, inclusive and comprehensive (Taylor, 1994a, 1994b; Kokkos, 2020; Stewart, 2022). Mezirow's theory has been amplified and reinterpreted by several theorists, whose contributions have enriched and expanded it by incorporating important aspects of life.

The foundation of this research is laid on the contributions of Knud Illeris and Edward Taylor; the former associates Transformative Learning with changes in one's identity and competence development, whereas the latter establishes a direct connection between intercultural learning and the theory of perspective transformation. The research aimed at understanding the impact of intercultural experiences on the perspective transformation of the locals in a Central Macedonia community where refugees and migrants were hosted. By recasting the idea of Transformative Learning in a new light, the research aspires to accentuate the importance of integrating intercultural education and transformative learning experiences in all settings of Lifelong Learning.

### **Transformation Theory**

In Jack Mezirow's Transformation Theory, a person's set of values (e.g. beliefs, perceptions, predispositions and assumptions) is coined as "frame of reference" and serves to facilitate navigation through life by interpreting and giving meaning to one's experiences (Mezirow, 2007; Kokkos, 2020; Lintzeris, 2010).

However, the complexity of modern life is characterized by constant change and uncertainty and often creates experiences which cannot be interpreted and classified based on previous knowledge. The incompatibility between existing values and the new experience disturbs one's established psychological, social and cultural balance, thus leading to dysfunctional situations (Jarvis, 2004; Illeris, 2016). When this is the case, a transformative learning process is required to question dysfunctional assumptions and give new meaning to the experience as well as a new informed outlook (Kokkos, 2022; Lintzeris, 2010).

What transforms in Transformation Theory is meaning perspectives and meaning schemes (Mezirow, 2007; Kokkos, 2022) so that adults can acquire the tools, competencies and skills needed to broaden and deepen their thinking, thus transforming it into a less exclusive, more open-minded, reflective and critical manner through an open democratic dialogue. As a result, adults are empowered to act upon informed knowledge and lead productive fulfilling lives (Kokkos, 2020; Stewart, 2022).

Mezirow's theory was instantly embraced by the adult education community and since then has been constantly evolving as a living theory in progress. An array of distinguished scholars has enriched and expanded it to include more important aspects of life, which renders it a focal point of reference in transformative learning (Kokkos, 2022). The current study focuses on the contributions of two distinguished theorists, Knud Illeris and Edward Taylor.

### **Competence Development as Transformative Learning Process**

Knud Illeris interconnected his emblematic work on the three pillars of learning (cognitive, emotional and social) with Mezirow's ideas on the transformation of meaning perspectives (Kokkos, 2020; Lintzeris, 2020). According to him, transformative learning is the most advanced form of human learning in terms of a profound change in one's perspective on life (Lintzeris, 2020). Knud Illeris introduces the term "identity" as the most germane to the key element which answers Kegan's question "What form transforms?" in the transformation process, and explicitly advocates that transformative learning is any learning that implies changes in the learner's identity (Illeris, 2014 $\alpha$ , 2014 $\beta$ , 2016; Lintzeris, 2020).

By placing the concept of identity at the heart of the transformation process, he establishes a potential link between competence development and transformative learning since the development of a person's life skills is closely intertwined with the process of building one's identity (Lintzeris, 2020). Competence involves a combination of functionality, sensitivity and sociability including core abilities such as creativity and imagination, combinatory skills, flexibility, empathy, instinct, critical thinking, etc., all of which are considered necessary for a quality life both private and professional (Illeris, 2014b, 2016; Lintzeris, 2020).

### **Intercultural Competence Development**

Edward Taylor was one of the few theorists who linked intercultural competency with Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning theory explaining the kind of learning process through which these internal changes lead to the development of intercultural competence (Jokikokko, 2010). The concept of intercultural transformation coined by Kim and Ruben refers to "a gradual change that takes place in the internal conditions of individuals as they participate in extensive intercultural communication activities" (Kim and Ruben, 1988, p. 299, as cited in Taylor, 1994b, p. 392). Reviewing various conceptual frameworks regarding a successful intercultural experience/intercultural competence, Taylor (1994b) concluded that an intercultural transformation process results in an individual's transcendence of their cognitive, affective and behavioral limits, thus reaching "a higher status of consciousness and a more discriminating and integrative worldview" (Taylor, 1994b, p. 392).

Taylor set up a learning model establishing a link between intercultural competence development and Mezirow's Transformation Theory based on three common dimensions:

- 1) the condition for change
- 2) the process
- 3) the outcome.

Taylor's research (1994b) demonstrated that the learning process of intercultural competence follows a path of perspective transformation similar to that described by transformative learning theory. At the same time, he challenged but also strengthened the theoretical assumptions about the transformation process of meaning perspectives, expanding the theory of transformative learning to include intercultural learning, thus offering “an ideal conceptual framework for future research to study the learning process of intercultural competency” (ibid, p. 406).

### **Literature Review**

Developing intercultural competence as a transformative learning process has been scarcely researched (Jokikokko, 2010; Stewart, 2022). Studies on intercultural competency have mainly concerned expatriates working or studying in culturally diverse countries, and focused primarily on identifying personality attributes which are indicative of a successful sojourn (Taylor, 1994a; Stewart, 2022). In Greece, in particular, adult education programs have been limited to building up intercultural communication skills among teachers working in the primary and secondary education (Magos & Simopoulos, 2010).

This substantiates the originality of the current research since it studies implementation of transformative intercultural learning interventions in the general public.

The following elements have emerged through the existing literature:

- intercultural learning is a holistic, transformative process affecting cognitive, emotional and behavioral patterns (Taylor, 1994a, 1994b; Jokikokko, 2010).
- intercultural competence is intertwined with intercultural learning as a lifelong process; therefore, intercultural learning occurs in formal, informal and non-formal settings (ibid).
- some form of cultural destabilization (culture shock) is a prerequisite for the transformation of meaning perspectives to commence. However, a single, albeit strong experience is not enough to trigger the change (ibid).
- people's worldviews do not change only through critical reflection; expression and recognition of their feelings should precede (ibid).
- intercultural transformation requires intensive interaction with the people of the other group, exploration of new roles and experimentation, and search for new skills and knowledge (Taylor, 1994a, 1994b; Stewart, 2022).
- conflicts between culturally diverse groups are potentially learning opportunities, which serve as a means of exploring differences (Taylor, 1994a, 1994b; Nagata, 2006; Jokikokko, 2010).
- change in meaning perspectives of the other culture reduces nationalistic and ethnocentric tendencies and increases universal understanding (Klein & Wikan, 2019).
- daily contact with members of a culturally diverse group puts to the test not only one's perception of otherness, but also of oneself and one's own national culture; this leads to self-awareness, which is an important element in developing intercultural communication skills (Nagata, 2006).
- transformative learning empowers and capacitates the individual to acquire new skills, greater self-confidence and a deeper understanding of cultural differences; new meaning perspectives become more inclusive, diverse and open to new worldviews

(Mezirow, 2007; Taylor, 1994a, 1994b; Bennett, 1986, 2004, 2017; Jokikokko, 2010; Nagata, 2006; Klein & Wikan, 2019).

### **Research Background and Purpose**

The research focused on examining the potential impact of increased knowledge and awareness – resulting from an intercultural transformative learning intervention – on the development of intercultural competencies among locals, thus changing their perspectives of and actions and behaviors towards the other culture.

The researcher's hypotheses were based on her assumptions that (a) the locals' actions and behaviors towards the other group were grounded in stereotypical assumptions due to lack of substantial knowledge of the other culture, and (b) a learning intervention of a transformative type through experiential learning and cultural sharing could offer locals a much-needed opportunity to reflect on and re-evaluate their assumptions. This new insight could offset the rise in xenophobia and nationalism.

The research design was planned carefully so that data would be collected and analyzed to inform the research questions and hypotheses. The research took place in Axioupoli, a small town in Paionia province in Central Macedonia North Greece, on the outskirts of which a Hospitality Centre for refugees and migrants has been set up. The interviews were carried out between April 20 and May 10 2021, and were conducted over the phone due to protection measures against the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Research Methodology and Design**

The qualitative research method was deemed best suited to answer the research questions since it allowed the researcher to delve deeper into the participants' beliefs and assumptions.

The research sample consisted of 6 male and 6 female informants, all of whom were residents of the above-mentioned town. An effort was made so that the sample would be as generalizable as possible in terms of age, gender, academic level and socioeconomic status.

Interview questions were structured upon four research questions regarding the researcher's hypotheses; the first two research questions corresponded to the first hypothesis and the last two to the second one as follows:

- Research Question (RQ)1: Acceptance of otherness
- Research question (RQ)2: Stereotypical perceptions, suspicion and/or xenophobia towards refugees and migrants
- Research question (RQ)3: Readiness to participate in non-formal intercultural learning interventions
- Research question (RQ)4: Transformative Learning impact on understanding, respecting and tolerating the other culture.

Data collection was followed by a content analysis.

### **Results**

The results of the study are presented below.

RQ1: The presence of refugees and migrants in the community was discrete – it did not disturb community life:

- male residents had random encounters with members of the refugee and migrant groups and therefore, were not affected by their presence

- female residents had daily interactions with them (in the market, when taking children to school, in the playground, etc.) and experienced conflicting, ambivalent feelings towards them
- Young adults felt discomfort in the presence of refugees and immigrants in the community – job-seeking and employment opportunities seemed to be at risk.

RQ2: Lack of awareness of cultural and religious disparities constituted a major issue of confrontation and discrimination against the Muslim community.

- male residents' attitudes and behaviors were not particularly influenced by stereotypes, fear or prejudice
- female respondents were susceptible to stereotypes and prejudice on grounds of religious and cultural differences; for them, the Christian Orthodox culture was at risk due to the Muslim presence, which could lead to xenophobic reflexes
- unemployed or low-income young adults developed an instinctive fear, which turned stereotypical assumptions into suspicion and xenophobia; members of the other group were potential "competitors" regarding state subsidy policies and financial privileges.

RQ3: Male and female residents had opposite views:

- male informants considered learning opportunities merely a means to enhance their knowledge of other cultures rather than a learning need
- female respondents expressed an interest in getting to know the newcomers in an attempt to establish a kind of rapport with them and relieve emotional stress; this could account for a latent learning need.

RQ4: Purposeful and intentional intercultural sharing and transformative experiences may be feasible but would not suffice to sustain social integration of the minority groups:

- educated male informants with secure jobs agreed that an educational intervention would dispel myths, fears and prejudice, thus promoting understanding and acceptance; young, low-income or unemployed male informants considered gap bridging to be a non-viable solution since any movement towards refugee/migrant social integration would trigger racial reactions among locals
- all female respondents admitted that intercultural learning opportunities would facilitate social relationships between groups with self-confidence and reciprocity in a safe, unbiased setting.

### **Discussion**

The research study was grounded in the theoretical positions of Mezirow, Illeris, Taylor and others, which provided the background and justification for it. The resultant findings bore similarities and coalesced with the literature review. As seen in the results, frequent interactions with members of the other culture resulted in a cross-cultural destabilization in certain members of the local community. Anxiety, fear of losing their cultural and national identity (female informants) and insecurity towards an oblique future (unemployed or low-income young adults) shaped residents' stance regarding tolerance and integration of the other group, which could give rise to nationalistic and xenophobic reactions.

For those locals who experienced a disorienting dilemma due to extensive interactions with culturally diverse groups, experiential learning and intercultural awareness development seemed imperative to help them restore their disturbed balance. Learning opportunities of this kind would possibly facilitate expression and acknowledgment of their personal feelings, and

getting to know the other person would help them become aware of the other cultures' peculiarities and consequently, be more open to diversity.

### Conclusion

In the pluralistic societies of today, the need for all people to develop their cognitive and behavioral attributes to successfully navigate within other cultures and promote tolerance and social cohesion remains an ongoing challenge. The results of this research study were consistent with the existing theory thus substantiating theoretical underpinnings; young unemployed or low-income adults and female locals who were disturbed by the presence of the other culture and considered it a potential threat to their socioeconomic stability would benefit from transformative experiences and intercultural learning opportunities. These could serve to ease the culture shock and bridge ethnic, racial, nationalistic and economic disparities among culturally diverse communities.

The importance of integrating intercultural competence development through transformative learning experiences in adult education policy-making seems evident and necessary to promote ethnorelativism vs. ethnocentrism.

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## **Parkinson's Care Innovation as Transformative Learning**

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**Abstract:** Healthcare organizations try to make care more integrated and person-centered. However, such fundamental transitions tend to disorient people and challenge their extant frames of thinking. Therefore, transformative learning would be expected to play a significant role, if such envisioned change is to occur at all. Here, we discuss a PhD-thesis on Parkinson's care innovation that contains three studies on transformative learning (TL). Study 1 retrospectively investigated center formation and network-care implementation. Study 2 used action research principles to develop a learning program supporting nurse-specialists to develop as nurse-leaders. Study 3 scrutinized person-centered care through arts-based research. We found that, in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> project, TL experiences were rare or unnoticed. However, transformative potential was present in both those settings: practitioners worked more across the borders of their disciplines and organizations then before, and participants had expanded views on healthcare, change and innovation. Two paradoxes - loyalty v.s. openness to other perspectives & subjective experience v.s. universal values - that may lie at the root of this puzzle are described and theoretically developed. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> study, we found that the role of the other and taking time were key conditions for deeper reflection and better integrated, person-centered care.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Arts-Based, Action Research, Healthcare, Innovation

### **Introduction**

Many healthcare organizations try to make care more integrated and person-centered. In this process learning takes on a key role: where people are required to work differently, they also need to learn (Tynjälä, 2022). However, in such a complex transition personal and professional frames of thinking may be challenged. Therefore, transformative learning would be expected to play a significant role, if such envisioned change is to occur at all. (Frenk et al., 2010). Here, we present a PhD-thesis that contains three studies which investigated transformative learning (TL) experiences. The 1<sup>st</sup> study, a retrospective and longitudinal (5 years) interview and observational study, explored center formation and network-care implementation. We looked at three levels: managers, general staff, and care practitioners. The 2<sup>nd</sup> study used action research principles to develop a learning program supporting nurse-specialists to develop as 'nurse-leaders'. One of the design principles was for nurses to take the lead in co-creating their own program. The 3<sup>rd</sup> study scrutinized, together with patients and professionals, the value of "person-centered care" through an arts-based method (photography). In what follows, we present key findings and discuss some theoretical implications relevant to this conference.

## Findings

The context of the 1<sup>st</sup> study put a lot of emphasis on structured (and disease specific) learning environments (CPD, credit point systems, etc.) based on the vision of management (Bloem & Munneke, 2014), which aligned with the educational views of most participants being quite formal. In spite of these views participants did learn a lot informally by working across institutional and disciplinary borders (Kellogg, 2014). Through the network- and center formations, participants came into contact with different disciplines and normative views, for instance with regard to what constitutes ‘good healthcare’ Paradoxically, the focus on just one disease offers opportunities for multidisciplinary, but also runs the risk of converging on a technocratic and solutionist position which does not acknowledge any epistemic injustice. This needs to be addressed for making care person-centered (Carel & Kidd, 2014). Also, participants did not share stories about their own perspective transformation, but did criticize the perspective of others.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> project, we built a learning environment through participatory action research strategies. In the course, the nurses shared ownership: they decided upon the structure and content, which became a monthly meeting of four hours. They split this meeting up, based on self-directed learning principles (Brookfield, 2009): two hours for the “fast lane” aspects, focused on action through specific theoretical knowledge (medication, network-care, etc.). And two hours for a “slow lane” aspects, focused on reflection (based on triple loop learning principles (Tosey et al., 2012)) through peer-coaching and supervision. Based on their personal leadership experiences in the learning program, participants started to restructure their own work environments. This was noted by others, but not so much by themselves.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> project, we designed an arts-based research environment wherein we could focus on normative experiences in a healthcare relationship (Stap et al., 2022). In each session, we brought a person with Parkinson’s and their healthcare practitioner into a make-shift photographers studio at the hospital (Stap et al., 2023). Here, they found that taking time - much more than they had normally - lead to different conversations, which in turn could lead to better treatment. They also noted, amongst other things, that ‘touch’ plays a central role in many healthcare processes, but that ‘touch’ was not part of professional education, or only framed negatively (as professional *distance*). Lastly, the role of the other - patient or professional - seemed to be vital in constituting one’s self-image.

## Discussions

We concluded that TL experiences (going through actual change) are rarely described in the first two studies. However, in both cases people did start to work and behave differently. For instance, the nurses exercised personal leadership within their context, actively overtaking the conventional leadership position of neurologists. In the 1<sup>st</sup> project too, practitioners worked more across the borders of their disciplines and organizations than before. And in both studies, participants seemed to expand their views on healthcare and innovation. Nevertheless, respondents either presumed they hadn’t transformed at all, or thought that it wasn’t such fundamental change. In other words, two vital conditions for transformation are met: disorientation through structural change of the environment, and the presence of other perspectives, but the transformative potential is not fleshed out in the reported experiences.

There might be two reasons for this. First, participants described that the structured (part of the) learning environments invoked behavior they enacted in other conventional educational contexts, and thus led to consumption instead of critical reflection (Freire, 2013). Secondly, there

was an interesting paradox visible at the level of community. Many participants mentioned how much they were energized by the innovative community they belonged to. The same sense of belonging also led to great loyalty to one another. We know from TL literature that loyalty may also prevent critical reflection on core values and norms of the community (Hodge, 2014).

### Conclusion

To conclude, in all studies elements that could bring to life transformative experiences were found. The 1<sup>st</sup> study showed the complexities of learning processes across borders. We realized that, in order to become conscious of such deeper processes, the relationship between the self and the other, and slowing down are key. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> study, in order to develop personal leadership skills, we intentionally designed space for self-direction and ownership. This, in turn, helped to create time for deeper reflection: in the “slow lane” of their learning program, nurses noted an increase in their personal leadership skills. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> study, taking time was also a key design element. Here, as became visible in the 1<sup>st</sup> study, we found that the role of the ‘Other’ was key for formulating one’s own position. Slowing down, and the acknowledgement of the role of the other gave rise to deep conversations about what integrated and person-centered care means: being in the moment, sharing attention, holding still, and experiencing what is there, now.

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## **Becoming a *Change Agent*: A Professional Transformative Path for Faculty at University of Padova**

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**Abstract:** Training on innovative teaching was a transformative experience for faculty as change agent (CAs) at University of Padova. The training path offered dissonant factors that drove faculty's teaching and learning perspectives change. The aim of this study is to know what changes CAs have experimented with after training compared to their prior teaching perspectives, and within their department as a facilitator of Continuing professional development (CPD). 9 CA were involved in the study, through a qualitative interview. Findings show that the dissonant event of training has generated CAs' teaching/learning perspective, but still much more needs to be done for an effective role of CAs in the departmental community.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Change Agents, Continuing Professional Development (CPD), Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

### **Training as the Origin of Teaching Innovation and Change Agents at Unipd**

Since 2015 a transformative initiative has involved teaching and learning processes at the University of Padova, when a deep reflection started among faculty on the need of teaching practice innovation which resulted in a transformation in teaching and learning called *Teaching4Learning (T4L)*. T4L has been an incremental transformative process of faculty development, curriculum innovation, and teaching evolution. Unipd defines transformative learning as a dynamic process of change through continuing reflection on teaching practices and on institutional culture, which leads to a continual review of teaching in action, adoption of active teaching, and development as a learning-dedicated organizational culture (Fedeli, Mapelli, & Mariconda, 2020). Proof of that are the financial resources (1million of euros) that Unipd invests every year in the call for the teaching innovation process.

This implementation of transformative change is a challenging process and the Padova teaching innovation, which began with volunteers, evolved into compulsory participation in the T4L programme for all new faculty. It was decided early in the process to follow change implementation procedures and as a part of this, a group of volunteer faculty were enlisted to become T4L *change agents* within their own departments. Playing this role required them to be supporters and mentors of their colleagues, to generate interest for discussion and innovation around teaching and learning, and to share good teaching practices.

The T4L Change Agents' main role is to promote continuing professional development (CPD) through the cultivation of professional learning communities (PLCs). Day and Sachs

(2004) described CPD as “all the activities in which teachers engage during the course of a career which are designed to enhance their work” (p. 3), underling the importance of the transition from an individual teacher development to a collaborative CPD. CPD is based on programmes where teachers are encouraged to share their learning and mutually support each other. It is not only a process of knowledge acquisition, but rather about maintaining teachers as activist professionals (Sachs, 2016)

PLCs are one of the most effective strategies for promoting collaborative CPD (Vangrieken, Meredith, Packer, & Kyndt, 2017), where the role of change agents as facilitators becomes crucial for nurturing and evolving communities (Hunuk, 2017). For this research on change agents, empirical data were collected with the aim of exploring, through a qualitative approach, (i) what is the transformation for *change agents* as teachers after the training and the experience within their PLC? (ii) what changes can be identified in change agents’ teaching perspectives and practices; (ii) what factors of change have they registered in their department thanks to their role?

### **Transformative Learning Framework**

Transformative Learning (TL) has been used to interpret the level of change in adults’ perspectives and beliefs on events of their life (Mezirow, 2000; Taylor, 2008). In general, TL occurs when individuals experiment with an inconsistent experience with their existing perspectives, and at the same time it provokes a disorienting dilemma. As results of this process, individuals question their own assumptions and re-interpret their previous experiences. In fact, Taylor (2008) states that “transformative learning theory explains [the] learning process of constructing and appropriating new and revised interpretations of the meaning of an experience in the world” (p. 1). According to Mezirow (1990), the transformative process is achieved thanks to critical reflection on experience and dialogue with oneself and with others. At Unipd transformative learning is considered an individual, social, and organizational dynamic process of change, where critical reflection and relationships characterize PLCs. (Fedeli, Mapelli, & Mariconda, 2020). The individual aspect involves every single new faculty who, through the attendance of a professional development path must experiment with the personal reflection on his/her teaching perspectives; social dimension is related to the sharing process of teaching and learning perspectives within the PLC with the support also of change agents as facilitators of collaborative CPD. The organizational change is consequent to the faculty’s continuing reflection on teaching practices because the outcomes of this process are generally collected and analyzed at central level with impact on institutional culture and policies. The whole process enhances a continual reflection on teaching and learning, review of teaching in action, implementation of active strategies, and development of a learning organization which aims to promote excellence in the experience of teaching and learning.

### **The Study**

The study was carried out at Unipd in the fall 2023, through a qualitative approach. It involved 9 change agents in a face-to-face hour-interview. The interview was focused on 3 dimensions: i) comparison between before and after training teaching/learning perspectives; ii) the most meaningful factors of the training path; iii) changes that CA have generated in their department.

Data were analyzed through ATLAS.ti software and the codes and sub-codes allowed two of the researchers involved in the analysis process to identify connections between the identified core-categories (Tarozzi, 2008).

### **Findings**

Researchers have identified 3 main themes (Table1)

**Table1**

*Main Themes*

Theme 1	Training drove the change of CAs' teaching/learning perspectives
Theme 2	Teachers' and students' role, feedback and microteaching potentiality were the most meaningful factors of the training.
Theme 3	The effective role of CA is influenced by formal recognition and colleagues' resistance.

Theme 1: Data analysis showed that training acted as a compass that led the change of teachers' teaching and learning perspectives, shifting from a teacher-centered to the student-centered perspective. Now they are considering interactive teaching methods, the emotional dimension of learning, the formative assessment, and the teacher-student relationship, as aspects which they had not considered before training and

Theme 2: The most meaningful aspects of training were the new vision of teacher as facilitator and the role of students as agents of their learning process. Feedback was considered as a strategic formative tool for learning; it gives students the possibility to reflect on their work. Microteaching as final session of the training was considered a strong dissonant event that promoted critical reflection on teachers' perspectives.

Theme 3: All participants identified the CA community as a PLC. Some of them implemented some practices in their department: peer observation, monitoring of teaching of new faculty, but most of participants are still facing the colleagues' resistance. They stated that without a formal recognition from governance, their role will not be so powerful in terms of impact on culture change.

### **Conclusion**

The training path offered a dissonant experience for CA which motivated them to critically reflect on their teaching and learning perspectives. It offered the opportunity to reflect critically on their prior experience (Mezirow, 1990) and to change their teaching/learning perspectives in dialogue with trainers and colleagues (Mezirow, 2000; Taylor, 2008). Many active teaching strategies and changes have been implemented since training was delivered.

They recognized the value of CA community as PLC and in it they have identified the power to generate change within the departmental communities, but many of them still envisage a lot of work has to be done to loosen colleagues' resistance.

At personal and professional level, the training experience was meaningful because of generated perspectives and practice changes; at organizational level the positive impact of training on teaching results has motivated the governance to continue in the investment of financial resources on teaching innovation.



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## **Toward Transformative Learning in Online Education: Testing a New Community Engagement Framework Model**

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**Abstract:** A sense of community is an essential part of transformative learning; cultivating it can be difficult in online education. We draw on the student-engagement themes proposed by Redmond et al. (2018) - cognitive, behavioral, collaborative, and emotional engagement; these forms of engagement can be facilitated by online course design and pedagogy. These types of engagement, in turn, help foster students' social engagement, which, as a manifestation of social capital, is linked to better learning outcomes and increased confidence and resilience in the learning process, which are essential elements of transformative learning.

Drawing on the community of inquiry and community of practice frameworks, we have previously proposed a new theoretical model – a Community Engagement Framework for Online Education. We are now surveying online students at a public university to cross-validate this model using path analysis and structural equation modeling. Identifying the elements necessary for transformative learning in online settings is critical at a time of growing population of online learners, and especially relevant in online adult education. Our goal is to identify the elements of online course design and pedagogy that correlate with increased student social engagement and, therefore, increased social capital, to bring educational praxis closer to online adult education.

While online courses have long been gaining credibility, many are still arguing that with online classes, learning outcomes often disappoint, and that virtual instruction runs counter to the most important asset at a major university — personal interaction with your peers and with highly qualified experts. Multiple factors can affect the experiences of online students. These factors include, minimal or no sense of community, lack of motivation, the feeling of isolation, confusing course design, and support systems available at institutions, individual academic programs, and instructor levels [1, 2, 3]. Suppose that we wish to tackle the concept of transformative learning in an online environment. Instructors must then create an efficient and influential learning community where students feel connected with their peers and the faculty/teacher to effectively engage in well-designed collaborative learning [4, 5, 6]. Scholars stress that a strong feeling of community among students is crucial to increasing academic benefits by encouraging cooperation and commitment among students and achieving students' goals [7, 8]. Students who collaborate actively in the group space, as part of the learning approach, can better explore concepts in depth, have enhanced learning experience, increased confidence, participation, satisfaction, and a greater sense of achievement.

We now turn to praxis – a Greek word that means moving back and forth in a critical way between reflecting and acting on the world. Because reflection alone does not produce change, Freire [9] advocated for the necessity of action based on reflection. Praxis involves dialogue as social process with the objective of “dismantling oppressive structures and mechanisms prevalent both in education and society” [10, p. 383]. It is thought that critical, transformative leaders enter and remain in education not to carry on business as usual, but to work for social change and social justice [11, 12, 13]. Unfortunately, Rapp, Silent, and Silent [14] found that 90% of educational leaders, both practitioners and professors, remained wedded to what Scott and Hart [15] call ‘technical drifting’ — a commitment to emphasize and act on the technical components of one’s work above the moral. Technical drifters fail to validate the cultural, intellectual, and emotional identities of people from underrepresented groups, they avoid situations where their values, leadership styles, and professional goals are challenged and dismantled, and they use their positions of power to reaffirm their own professional choices. To this end, we think that educational praxis should emphasize building a sense of community belonging as essential in transformative learning, especially for those students who are prone to lower educational attainment due to prior conditions (e.g., socio-economic status, race,) which affect their retention/graduation rates and time to degree completion.

However, it has been noted that cultivating a sense of community can be difficult in online instruction. Lack of collaboration, communication, motivation, in-person participation, and social presence in the virtual medium of learning leads to increased frustration, disengagement, and lower levels of learning among many students. Additionally, some instructors may neglect the community aspect of their courses since they do not see and interact with learners regularly [7, 8]. These authors believe that a sense of community, built through communication and collaboration and “connected to student engagement,” is an essential element of online students’ success. When students have a sense of community, they understand the purpose of learning, so they can contribute by connecting with other students and feel a sense of *ownership of their learning experience*.

This is where our work began; we wanted to investigate course designs and pedagogies that are likely to foster increased perceptions of community belonging, confidence, and resilience in the learning process for online learners. We drew on the student-engagement themes proposed by Redmond et al. [16] – the cognitive, behavioral, collaborative, and emotional engagement; we argued that these forms of engagement *can* be facilitated by online course design and pedagogy. These types of engagement, in turn, help foster students’ social engagement, which, as a manifestation of social capital, is linked to better learning outcomes and increased confidence and resilience in the learning process, which are essential elements of transformative learning.

Drawing on the community of inquiry and community of practice frameworks [17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23,] we previously proposed a new theoretical model – a Community Engagement Framework for Online Education. This novel model aims to identify elements of online course designs and pedagogy that are likely to foster students’ cognitive, behavioral, collaborative, and emotional capital – our latent-independent variables, which influence students’ social engagement – our latent-dependent variable. Our model is more theoretically complex and analytically sound than previous proposals, rendering applicability through testing with real-world data. Our next step is to survey online students at a public university to cross-validate this model with path analysis and structural equation modeling. Identifying the elements necessary for transformative learning in online settings is critical at a time of growing population of online learners, and especially relevant in online adult education. Our goal from this research is to

identify the elements of online course design and pedagogy that correlate with increased student social engagement and, therefore, increased student social capital, in an effort to bring educational praxis closer to online adult education.

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## **Transformative Dilemmas in Modern Contexts**

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**Abstract:** The current presentation addresses the role of transformative learning as an evolving field in the new turbulent era (Hoggan & Hoggan-Kloubert, 2023; Hoggan & Higgins, 2023; Hoggan & Finnegan, 2023). The presentation focuses on psychic distortions (Gould, 1970; Mezirow, 1981; 1990; 2000) in the context of new modern dilemmas that focus mainly on loss and change of women's position in the modern workplace. In the light of the current era, old assumptions seem to collapse often in chaotic and abrupt ways, leaving no room for processing and critical thinking. False beliefs (Gould, 1978) such as the safety illusions, reward of sacrifices, illusions of control and "cure-by-love conspiracy", related to unconscious psychic distortions (Gould, 1978) need further exploration. The process of transformation from immaturity to maturity, happens at once as a "risky act" that invades the consciousness and inevitably induces mental pain (Gould, 1978). The risks for fixation to previous stages are also open. The presentation suggests that modern challenges regarding gender discrimination need to be discussed and processed in adult group settings. However, the boundaries of the adult educator's role in the transformation process are also present and create new challenges and demands for a 'good enough' context that fosters change.

**Key Words:** Transformation, Dilemmas, Change, Fixation

### **Gender Discrimination and Transformative Learning**

One of the modern challenges in the current era is the recognition of gender discrimination in the workplace. Despite the progress achieved in recent years, the fact remains that women (Zapf et. al., 2020) are mainly those who experience workplace harassment as social and cultural stereotypes persist. In many organizations and businesses, women are still treated with stereotypes and prejudices (Rosander et. al., 2020; Misawa et. al., 2019), regarding their right to work, to be paid equally with men, to participate in decision-making and to claim positions of authority in the work environment. This results in women facing more barriers to advancement in the hierarchy even though they may be numerically more than male employees. However, even when women rise in the hierarchy, they are often criticized not just by men but also by other women. The passive aggressive rumors and behavior addressed towards women usually focus on moral. The phenomenon of gender discrimination in the workplace reflects the ways in which the dominant culture reproduces stereotypical perceptions of the role of women in the workplace and prevents them from claiming a hierarchically superior position. It also pressures them to be unable to struggle for equal opportunities and rewards in their job environment and the often end up remaining idle to conditions that offend not only their salary but also their dignity and principles. The result is the cultivation of the culture of silence that reinforces the passive and suppressed self-image of women. The woman turning against herself,

feels guilt and shame, fear and anxiety and is unable to defend herself openly. Therefore, it is of great importance that the workplace itself takes a primary role in women's career pathways, with specific actions and policies to strengthen human resources (Tsiboukli, 2023).

Negative stereotypes and prejudices about the role of women in general and in the workplace, lead to questioning of women's knowledge, skills, and abilities, even when they are objectively more qualified than men occupying higher positions. Negative stereotypes also lead women either to a constant effort to prove their worth, or to frustration, resignation, and withdrawal. The glass ceiling phenomenon, i.e., the barriers a person faces due to its own gender to progress in the hierarchy, despite having all the necessary qualifications, is widely known and women are often exposed to it (Kedra & Tsiboukli, 2014). The recent years the glass cliff phenomenon is also observed (Bechtoldt et al., 2019; Morgenroth et al., 2020), according to which, some companies allow women to occupy high positions in the hierarchy, but this happens when businesses are in crisis or already perform poorly. It also happens when women are offered jobs that are too demanding, in the hope that they won't be able to cope with them and resign. In both cases, women are exposed to criticism and stereotypes and prejudices against women are reinforced. The narrative that women are ultimately incapable of leadership prevails (Mulcahy & Linehan, 2014). In these cases, the fact that the specific companies were already facing serious sustainability problems and were looking for the scapegoat is kept silent.

In cases where women succeed in occupying high positions of power in the hierarchy of a company, they are often criticized for the management model they follow. When they are focused on their goal are seen as distant and they are criticized for adopting the "male model" of management. Therefore, even when women manage to succeed in roles or professions that are considered "masculine", or when their behavior and appearance do not conform to stereotypical notions, they are still more exposed than men (Salin, 2018) to criticisms, comments, and harassment. When they are accessible, operate with empathy, care, and emphasis on working relationships, they are criticized for adopting the "feminine model" of management and are therefore considered ineffective and inadequate.

The ambiguity that still exists regarding the general position of women in the workplace poses further obstacles to women's professional advancement and reproduces the vicious cycle of stereotyping and the exclusion of women from the labor market and senior management positions. In Greece, gender stereotypes and social prejudices that still dominate the workplace have as a result that women's participation in the workplace is characterized by inequality of opportunities for professional development, with various implications at a social, economic, and professional level. According to a study by the European Organization for Safety and Health at Work, gender discrimination is related to work-based stress. Up to 81% of the women, claim that one of the main causes of stress they experience in the workplace is exposure to unacceptable behaviors such as bullying and harassment. Nielsen & Einarsen (2012), attempted to understand the effects of harassment on stress levels, especially for female workers. They carried out a meta-analysis of various studies on this topic, involving a total of 140,000 workers. The results showed that the effects of workplace moral harassment and bullying, both on the individual's physical and mental health, are particularly important. Victims reported great anxiety, especially when they were women, who found it difficult to react believing that the reaction will worsen the situation. Therefore, most of the time, they tried to cope passively with the situation and ignore it. However, passive reactions are not effective. Therefore, the most serious challenge, according to the European Organization for Safety and Health at Work FACTS 23 report, it is the increased

workplace stress and the illnesses that accompany it, as a relevant study in which 16,622 people from 26 countries participated in telephone or face-to-face interviews, revealed.

The implications for the organization or the business are also not negligible. A recent study of 96 organizations in Norway in a sample of 10,627 employees (Nielsen et. al., 2020) highlighted that the phenomenon of mobbing is linked to continuous absences due to illness from the workplace and to issues of mental discomfort. No healthy organization would want to lose its staff after spending time and resources to train them. Human resources are not easily replaced as a significant part of the acquired know-how is lost. Time, financial and human resources need to be invested until new staff can acquire the required expertise that will help the organization or business evolve. At the same time, non-productive work hours are valuable and cannot be replaced. The vicious cycle of human resource loss is counterproductive for both, the organization, and the individual. Therefore, the empowerment of both, the individual and the organization, will help prevent these phenomena and strengthen the institutional processes. Workplace mobbing and bullying are not easily managed. In some organizations, the culture may even be such that it encourages harassment and bullying. In these cases, employees find it difficult to react, especially when there is no relative support from the work environment. The difficulty of reacting is due to many factors. Some workers may worry that they will lose their jobs, others, especially new entries, may feel that harassment is part of the company's and thus they should be subjected to it as part of their training, and others may find it difficult to manage these phenomena as they recall past experiences. In these cases, according to the Workplace Bullying Institute, perceptions that there is no harassment or bullying at work, prevail. Therefore, significant concern should be placed on how discrimination and harassment are dealt with in the workplace. Even more so, significant attention should be paid to sexual harassment as well.

In this paper we wish to focus mainly on how women themselves need to face many challenges regarding their old dysfunctional assumptions and psychic distortions (Gould,1970; Mezirow,1981;1990; 2000) and how they may have to face their own internal obstacles and barriers that keep them fixated (Gould, 1978) in the past, exploring the role of transformative learning as an evolving field in the new turbulent era where new dilemmas emerge (Niebuhr, et.al., 2022) and where women are called to change their sense of self in relation to others in the world (Hoggan & Higgins, 2023) but at the same time they have to engage in this change process others, as transformations should emerge from societal dialogue rather than being pre-determined (Hoggan & Hoggan-Kloubert, 2022). The presentation focuses on women's own psychic distortions (Gould,1970; Mezirow,1981;1990; 2000).

### **False Beliefs, Psychic Distortions and Gender Discrimination**

Jack Mezirow was influenced by Roger Gould to introduce the concept of psychic distortions that are rooted in early childhood traumas (Tsiboukli, 2020). Early childhood traumas are transformed into psychic distortions that hinder change in adulthood. Change can occur through ten stages of change that include action taking. There are internal obstacles to change. Mezirow shared with Gould the view that "all our unexamined assumptions have psychological dimensions" (Mezirow1978a, pp. 104) and accepted that Gould had "a clear understanding of the nature of the most common psychological problems of adulthood"(Mezirow, 1998, pp. 194) which is necessary for understanding and facilitating transformation. Adult beliefs have their roots in early childhood traumatic experiences. Women as all adults do, hold a set of false assumptions that act as obstacles to change and need to be transformed. These false assumptions in relation to how they perceive and how they cope with work harassment, might be difficult to transform as understanding and transforming dysfunctional assumptions might be painful. Two



central themes seem to constantly emerge: loss and change. Loss of the approval and acceptance of others and change into a new state of freedom and independence. Loss and change require emotional processing. In the case of women, the psychic distortion of the reward of the sacrifices made for the upbringing of the children, the well-being of the family and the obedience to the rules imposed by the family of origin, often leads to resentment and frustration as women's efforts and burdens are not followed by a material or moral reward. However, when through transformative processes women gain insight and understand social reality that can be a first step towards a new course of life where professional goals can be reached. Nonetheless, loss and change relate to anxiety and fear of transition from a well-known (familiar) to a new 'unknown' (unfamiliar) state. This is perhaps why some women resist in fulfilling their own desires and thus fail to identify their position within the working environment. These false assumptions and related feelings might be obstacles to achieve maturity and adulthood. Furthermore, the "cure-by-love" conspiracy is in contrast with women's efforts for autonomy and personal development. This dysfunctional assumption produces anxiety and fear towards any attempt for autonomy. Thus, some women may sacrifice their professional desires and development out of fear of losing important relationships.

Therefore, the most significant assumptions that need to collapse are illusions of security, the reward of sacrifices, illusions of control and the "cure-by-love conspiracy" that it assumes that when people give and receive love, they might become so powerful that they could overcome any problems they may encounter, including even severe illnesses and/or death. This type of illusion works competitively against women's efforts to attain autonomy, independence and personal development as they cultivate feelings of anxiety and fear over any tendency towards self-dependence. It may disrupt the foundations of love relationships and bring about disastrous consequences. Especially smaller assumptions that support the notion that "it is impossible to leave without protection" or that "my loved ones will protect me" and that "there is no life beyond this family" might prevail and lead to fixation. The process of transformation encounters several obstacles. Maturity is considered a "risky act" as fantasies, obsessions and assumptions invade the consciousness and induce mental pain. As Mezirow (1978b, pp. 11) said *"for a perspective transformation to occur, a painful reappraisal of our current perspective must be thrust upon us"*.

The collapse of false assumptions can occur when women are confronted with a crisis situation (e.g. divorce, the loss of a loved one) as it might be harassment at work. To cope with harassment needs an important attempt on behalf of the woman to reach independence and encounter the myths of the past. The path to independence questions parental assumptions and that at times may be proved painful leading to fixation. The risk of fixation is significant as women may be fixated in the past by remaining highly dependent on others and very rigid and strict with themselves. They may remain fixated as they often feel disappointed and frustrated by the demands of external reality. Fixation might be also reinforced by internal and external conflicts that cause mental pain, usually not conscious, but observed through uncontrollable self-destructive behaviors, like accepting harassment, in which case counseling or therapy may be needed.

Suppressed feelings may lead to apathy and frustration. To achieve change the development of conscious critical reflection of any false assumption is significant (Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 2000; Gould, 1978, 1989, 1990, 2001) and that is why some researchers (Donlevy, & Donlevy, 1998) classify Mezirow's theory along with Gould's in the sphere of psychological theories. However, the questions remain to what extent adult

educators can intervene and assist in changing women's own false assumptions that place a hindrance in their personal and professional growth.

### Epilogue

Transformation theory is present for more than thirty years. However, there are still many questions about the process of human transformation (Hoggan & Finnegan, 2023) and the learning components for individuals, groups, organizational cultures and societies at large. Adult education programmes in organizational settings and especially programmes that address the need to transform organizational cultures (Tsiboukli, 2018; Armaos & Tsiboukli, 2018) and personal assumptions so as to promote gender equality and equity at the workplace are still needed. The programmes cannot be filtered to include only information campaigns, but they should rather focus on providing counseling and guidance on how to handle gender discrimination cases. Furthermore, working with leadership in developing a code of work ethics is of high significance. However, this in itself will not prove to be adequate unless it is followed by the adoption of specific policies and strategies that promote a whole-organisation culture transformation together with the transformation of personal dysfunctional, mainly psychic, assumptions that lead to disorienting dilemmas and not properly informed decisions.

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# Performative Didactics as Transformative Didactics. Re-discovering the Self Through the Gaze of The Other

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**Abstract:** This research explores the potential of an intersubjective educational experience focused on body relationships to facilitate transformative processes, allowing students to discover and understand themselves in new ways. By making theatre and neuroscience interact in the educational context, the research proposes a performative didactic experience that recognizes the central role of the body and relationships in cognition. The exploratory study, structured on the art-based research approach (ABR) (McNiff, 2007) and on practice-based research (Hockey, 2003), aims to test whether the creation of a “relational climate” favorable in the teaching processes-Learning can generate transformative experiences in students. The analysis of students’ logbooks from a sample of 30 students from the Master’s course in *Theatre, Pedagogy and Didactics* at the Suor Orsola Benincasa University of Naples reveals that an intersubjective and active learning experience based on theatrical training can lead to transformative growth and self-understanding, fostered by the creation of a safe and shared learning environment, where where the gaze of the other and the awareness of the presence of one’s own body are emphasized, fostering growth and self-awareness. The research suggests that this approach to teaching can create the necessary relational climate for transformation, confirming the hypothesis that identity is formed through the encounter with others.

**Key Words:** Performative Didactics, Trasformative Didactis, Relationship, Resonance, Intersubjectivity

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

This research aims to investigate how an intersubjective training experience can stimulate a transformative process in which students can rediscover themselves and construct their self-understanding in new ways. The idea suggested in this research is a reinterpretation of the

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Maria Vittoria Battaglia is the co-author of the paper, she wrote the section 1.1 Theoretical Framework, The Gaze of the others: Intersubjectivity from philosophy to neuroscience. She elaborated the research data in the sections 5. Results and the section 6. Discussion;

Valeria Vadalà is the co-author of the paper, she wrote the section 3. Research Design, the section 4. Sample and the conclusion

Together they wrote the introduction.

teaching experience from the perspective of the encounter with otherness, of the intersubjective clash, i.e. in the perspective of a transformative process.

The starting point is the theatre, understood as a practice of rite of passage in the confrontation with the other which allows the establishment of the space of relationship necessary or overcoming the borders between the *me* and the *you* (Grotowski, 1965). A space in which mirroring and *resonating* (Rosa, 2019) with others opens up an intersubjective and collective vision, substantiating transformative experiences (Mezirow, 2003). By making theatre and neuroscience interact (Carlomagno, 2020; Rivoltella, 2021; Sofia, 2009), and declining the respective theories in the teaching field, a performative teaching experience has been designed, centred on the idea that cognition is action (Caruana, Borghi, 2013), recognizing the body and the relationship as central elements. «Learning does not seem reducible to a disembodied and decontextualized linear process which arises causally from teaching, but it is outlined as a situated process that is structured on the active participation of the actors co-acting in a learning environment co-evolving with the director, who regulates their performative trajectories in action» (Carlomagno, Minghelli, 2021:189). It follows that knowledge «is not the representation of a reality given a priori» (Maturana, Varela, 2001: 58) but is a process in continuous becoming dictated by the incorporated action of the actor that generates the mutual transformation of the actor, the spectator and the environment. Just as it happens in theatre where «the actor's work would be in vain if he could not share, beyond any language or cultural barrier, the sounds and movements of his body with the spectators, making them part of an event that they themselves must continue to create» (Rizzolatti, Sinigaglia, 2006:1).

## 1. Theoretical Framework

### 1.1 The Gaze of the others: Intersubjectivity from philosophy to neuroscience

The issue of intersubjectivity has ancient roots, which can be traced back to the golden rule, established by the oracle's response, which commanded *know yourself*. However, the great Socratic teaching tells us that self-knowledge is achievable only by engaging in dialogue with others. The construction of identity requires the reference of the other, and it is precisely this concept that is expressed by the word *intersubjectivity*, within which it is possible to identify the *subject*, which refers to the dimension of the Self, and the prefix *inter*, which refers to the relationship, to being-with. From a philosophical point of view, intersubjectivity lies in the relationship between the self and otherness, in which one can reflect oneself thus constructing the identity. The relationship between the self and otherness, in an intersubjective relationship that can lead to self-consciousness, must be equal: this is the great debt we owe to Hegelian philosophy. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit (1807)*, the German philosopher indeed states that «Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged» (Hegel, 1807/1968:178). The necessary condition for the development of self-awareness is therefore the self-other dyad, because it is not enough the recognition of the self by the other, but is also needed the recognition of the other by the self. Hegel thus affirms that a single subjectivity to be such must not presuppose another but both must presuppose the process of their reciprocal interaction, as recognition is not enough, it must be mutual, it must become intersubjectivity so that self-consciousness is achieved. The logic of recognition thus characterises and defines, from an ontological point of view, self-consciousness. Hegel's model of mutual recognition converges with neuroscience findings in that in order to understand ourselves we must rely on the same mechanisms that we use for understanding others

(Marchetti, Koster, 2014). The neuroscientific evidence of the last decades has allowed, in fact, a radical change in perspective regarding the subject and intersubjective relationship. The discovery of the mechanism of mirror neurons (Rizzolatti, Sinigaglia, 2006) has shown that the relationship with otherness is not simply the result of a decisional and arbitrary act of the subject, but that the relationship is constitutive of the subject itself. Indeed, these mechanisms are automatically activated when attention is paid to the experience of the other. These mirror mechanisms suggest the presence of a direct mode of access to the meaning of others' behaviours, a mode that can disregard the explicit attribution of propositional attitudes. Mirror neurons allow us to perceive and simulate a stimulus coming from the outside with the entire body.

This view of intersubjectivity, which is both relationship and corporeality, helps us to overcome that Cartesian dualism and that vision of the mind as a single entity, separate from the body and isolated from the external world, recognizing instead the existence of a shared collector that allows the creation of intentional consonance, that is, the perception of a relationship of identity and reciprocity with the other (Gallese, 2003).

### **1.2 The Body in relation between training and theatre**

Assuming the neuroscientific (Gallese, 2003) and bio-educational (Frauenfelder, 1983; 2018) perspectives, the idea that the subject is only able to identify him/herself due to the fact that he/she enters into a relationship with another is supported, as in the paradoxical self/other relationship the self remains as such, yet is simultaneously transformed into that self which emerges in relation to the influence exerted by the other (Gallese, Morelli, 2024).

The *we-ness* at the biochemical level, i.e. the symbiotic phase, is overcome through movement and experience through which sensory multimodality is integrated.

From this perspective, the origin of knowledge is in our capacity for action and movement, and the key to understanding us passes through the experiences that our body undergoes since there is no experience without a body (Gallese, 2014).

The corporeal paradigm, based on the intersubjective relationship and embodied simulation, opens up pathways for understanding the self by placing presence in a *noicentric* space.

It starts from a view of the body «not as a mere vehicle for transporting a disembodied intelligence but as the primary source of the relational potentialities that define our world and the social context in which we develop» (Gallese, Morelli, 2024: 10).

And it is precisely in the intersubjective experiences of education and training that the relationship in the dimension of 'we' comes into play as a prerequisite for the process of individuation of the subject ego.

With the latest neuroscientific evidence, it can be stated that we are mind, brain, body in relation and that behind every thought there is an emotion. The empathic process also seems to precede and contain us, and our ability to understand each other is entrusted to our ability to resonate together.

If, in fact, the basis of the experience of resonance between the two subjects of the relationship is to be found at the level of the neural systems, activated when faced with visual-motor and sound stimuli (Gallese, 2007), intersubjectivity can be interpreted from the interbody. Sharing the same body with another, capable of performing the same actions and movements, allows us to recognise him/her as our equal, and thus to mirror ourselves in him/her, to see ourselves transformed in his/her gaze.

From this point of view, it is of fundamental importance to base teaching action on methodologies and practices that can be based on the performative action of the body, capable of putting the subject in movement, in relationship with himself, with the other and with the environment (Frauenfelder, 1983) through a community experience that takes on a transformative value. The transformative experience in fact passes through the relationship with the other and the critical reflection of the experience lived with the other (Fabbri, Romano, 2017).

In such a scenario, theatre is validated as that art which focuses primarily on the body (Barba, 1993). «An untrained body is like an untuned musical instrument, its sounding board is filled with a confusion of out-of-tune and unpleasant sounds, of useless noises that hinder listening to the true melody. When the actor's instrument, his body, is tuned by the exercise, the wastes and tensions of bad habits disappear. Now he is ready to open himself to the limitless possibilities of emptiness» (Brook, 1995). In the theatre, the actor's body becomes the pivot around which the attunement between actor and spectator develops, an attunement that finds its basis in the imitative mechanism typical of human beings, demonstrated by the presence of mirror neurons (Rizzolatti, Sinigaglia, 2006). This happens because resonance is structured when bodies vibrate at the same frequency, i.e. resonating together while retaining their own unique sound (Rosa, 2019).

In the Master's Degree Course in Theatre, Pedagogy and Didactics at the Suor Orsola Benincasa University of Naples, through practical workshops structured on the basis of theatrical performance practices, which start from training, a theatrical body practice, we work on the student's self-perception, awareness of their body and their expressive modes. These practices aim to refine the students' expressive capacity, and this means not being able to ignore an accurate perception of one's own body, thus stimulating the relationship with the self with the other and with the surrounding environment. This connection is generated by the theatrical action itself, which determines openness to perception and to the other, since theatre can do without everything except the perception of the relationship between actor and spectator, which is structured on the living and active perceptive capacity (Grotowski, 1965).

A process of relationship and resonance underlies the process of formation and transformation in which the student can rediscover himself through the gaze of the other, with and self-understanding in new ways.

## **2. Methodology**

The idea proposed here was investigated through an exploratory research, creative and embodied, conducted with a qualitative investigation methodology, i.e. through the analysis of the perceptions and workshop experiences of the master's students transcribed in their logbooks. The research is structured on the art-based research (ABR) approach (McNiff, 2007) and on practice-based research (Hockey, 2003) which identify the performative practices of artistic processes as the main forms of active investigation also in education (Pellerey, 2005).

In this methodological framework, a strategic value was assumed by the training activity «Through the practice of acting training, activities based on breathing, eye contact, relationship and individual and group body explorations, one works on the activation of the emotional and bodily awakening, investigating the energetic abilities of the body through the awareness of its own potentialities and expressive and creative instruments, explicit and implicit, that lead to the elevation of the plane of consciousness and to the full self-consciousness and self-awareness and self-determination, elements capable of co-creating a reality in which alienation gives way to



resonance and empathy. A holistic process that is activated when one connects to their own creativity, that is to the condition of abandonment, of listening and connection to oneself and others, in the Body-Mind-Heart alignment» (Carlomagno, Minghelli, 2022:204).

The different use of the body *in situation* (Rivoltella, 2017) defines performative didactics (Carlomagno, 2021), which puts the subject in movement, in the relationship with self with the other and with the environment, through a community experience. A didactics capable of activating one's own presence, of the here and now, in the relationship and action with the other that affects the pre-expressive and expressive level of each person, but also the perceptive level of space, capable of amplifying the energy of actions and enhancing their effects in the empathic dialogue between the interlocutors. A performative and dialogic didactics that promotes 'the embodied cognitive process of didactic transposition (Chevallard, 1986) centred on formative, performative and transformative actions in a condition of alignment and structural coupling made possible by the triggering of empathic relations' (Carlomagno, Minghelli, 2022).

This process is decisive in creating the learning setting, the space of encounter, based on active listening that generates 'living' perceptions (Grotowski, 1965) of a sensitive, present, perceptive and acting body.

The classroom setting makes use of the rule of suspension of judgement (Rogers, 2013) and is achieved by activating an evocative stimulation of the imagination (Vygotsky, 1972) that allows the whole group to tune in and align, according to a teacher-learner, director-actor co-evolution (Carlomagno et al., 2021).

### **3. Research Design**

The proposed exploratory research aims to investigate how an intersubjective educational experience centred on body relationships can stimulate, through the adoption of theatre-based performance practices, a transformative process in which students can rediscover themselves and construct their self-understanding in new ways, through the gaze of the other. What we intend to explore is whether in teaching-learning processes it is possible to create the 'relationship climate' necessary to generate transformative processes in students. The data presented are the result of a careful analysis of the bodily, emotional, relational and communicative activation effects of the students during the workshop lessons of the Master's course in Theatre, Pedagogy and Didactics documented in logbooks.

### **4. Sample**

The exploratory research was conducted through the analysis of logbook data obtained from a sample of 30 university students who in the academic year 2022-2023 attended the Master's course in Theatre, Pedagogy and Didactics. Methods, techniques and practices of the performing arts at the Suor Orsola Benincasa University of Naples, including 13 teachers or educators, 9 artists and 8 working in other professions. The sample is composed of 21 women and 9 men, the average age is between 30 and 40, and the region of origin is mainly Campania.

### **5. Results**

The student's logbooks were subjected to qualitative content analysis with the support of ATLAS.TI Web software to track the coding strategy and refine it iteratively to ensure reliability. The decision was made to adopt the content analysis approach because it is «a research method for subjective interpretation of textual data content through systematic classification of coding and identification of themes or patterns» (Hsieh, Shannon, 2005:1278). It is therefore an

analytical approach that goes beyond simple word counting or extraction of objective content from texts to examine meanings and themes that may be explicit or latent in a particular text, and therefore is particularly effective when interpreting linguistically constituted facts (Krippendoff, 2004; Cohen et al., 2007).

Content analysis unfolds in multiple phases - the coding, the thematising, and the interpreting phase. To analyse the data, we proceeded firstly with coding, guided by the following question: *What processes does the use of performative practices activate?*

In proceeding with the coding, we therefore sought to identify how students experienced the theatrical training. Since the research question aims to investigate how performative practices can activate a process of transformation, we decided to include only diaries that spoke of these experiences and not of the more theoretical matrix lessons, and to focus not on the description of the proposed activities but on the perception and feelings generated by these in the students. Some students also reported how they felt before starting the training, and we decided to code these emotions and moods as well in order to express a comparison with the feelings left by the lived experience.

The second step of the qualitative analysis then involved categorising the codes to identify thematic nuclei common to all the analysed logbooks. In the tables, we report the identified themes, the codes associated with these thematic nuclei, and example phrases. Table 1 pertains to the emotions, sensations, and experiences lived by the students during or following the theatrical training activities, while Table 2 refers to the emotional states - reported by only some students - experienced before the implemented activities.

**Table 1**

*Themes, Codes and sample quotes pertaining to the experiences lived by students during or following the theatrical training activities*

Theme	Codes	Sample quotation
Transformation	Transformation; learn to transform negative moments into positive moments; transforming fear into relation; transforming fear into growth; becoming aware of myself; self-improvement; feeling better	<p><i>"I feel that it must have really happened, did they ask to express the state of the present with one word? However, I find myself transformed, displaced."</i></p> <p><i>"It is curious to note that everyone uses, or tries to use, these lessons and the master's degree in general to improve their work or profession but in the end they improve themselves."</i></p>
Space of encounter	Sharing; support; Empathy; warmth; safe space; shared space; welcoming setting; Home; Gaze	<p><i>"It was wonderful to perceive the energy we transmitted to each other and how little by little a group was created. I really perceived the feeling of belonging to a community and of having created in that red circle, a sacred space in which to get to know myself and others."</i></p> <p><i>"During the lesson we managed to create a sacred, familiar, protected, in tune space and to present ourselves within the latter, thanks also to the use of the</i></p>

		<i>rope, a metaphor of how in the theatre nothing is just personal and everything reverberates on others and on the environment”</i>
Awareness	Awareness; awareness of one’s own body; becoming aware of myself; self-improvement; discovering	<p><i>“Through the professor’s instructions, little by little, as far as I’m concerned, I became aware of every part of my body, from my toes to the tips of my hair. As we moved forward, breathing intensified and left room for our emotions and sensations.”</i></p> <p><i>“The core of performative work is the question of presence, of being there. The mind is body and the body is the mind. What I am (and what I am not) can be read in everything that encompasses my way of being there.”</i></p>
Connection	Connection; sincerity; trust; give myself to others; intimate connection with others; free to express myself; open up to others; contact; empathy; sharing; support; warmth; involvement; gaze; love	<p><i>“The positive aspect for me in this case too remains the constant sharing of everything: on this occasion it was an even more intimate and personal sharing that allows you to build relationships in which judgement is lifted to give space to understanding.”</i></p> <p><i>“We worked in pairs in which the objective was [...] to build a movement that is always fluid, connected, spontaneous, which arises from listening to the other and listening with the other. The movement that arises is a continuous chiasmus between the two bodies, a giving and receiving between the two bodies.”</i></p>
Well-being	Excitement; regeneration; curiosity; Lightness; happiness; Unexpected; surprise; Easing; satisfaction; Gratitude; freedom; Wellbeing; life; Harmony; energy; serenity; love; pride; fun; relax	<p><i>“I had a feeling of well-being mixed with gratitude between smiles and shining eyes. I was happy to be there at that moment and didn’t want to be anywhere else.”</i></p> <p><i>“It was a good lesson, personally I was also a little tired and not in great shape, taking time and space together to heal in that way was good for me.”</i></p>

**Table 2**

*Themes, Codes and sample quotes pertaining the emotions felt by students before the theatrical training activities*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Sample quotation</b>
Uneasiness	Fragility; critical moments; anxiety; lack of protection; Insecurity; curiosity; Anger; embarrassment; confusion; tension; Doubtfulness; Dread; distance;	<p><i>“When I arrived I was in a world unknown to me, full of doubts and uncertainties.”</i></p> <p><i>“Entry into the classroom communicates to me.....DISTANCE”.</i></p>

	distraction; Stress; hurry; fear; solitude; frustration; Pain; sadness; demotivated; disappointment; envy; Apathy; lack of curiosity; lack of connection with others; negativity; Illness; tired; disappointed;	<i>"I arrive at the station with an apocalyptic load of negativity, tiredness and stress"</i>
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## 6. Discussion

Research on transformative learning has highlighted the need for holistic approaches that invite students to engage in deep reflective practices, such as the process of writing texts, journals, and diaries, conceived as pedagogical tools to activate a process of transformation (Russell, 2014). It is not only the writing process that stimulates reflection, the attribution of meaning to events, and activates a transformative process, but also the practices adopted by teachers can influence students' transformative learning. In fact, «transformative learning includes a holistic change in how a person both affectively relates to and conceptually frames his or her experience; thus, it requires a healthy interdependence between affective and rational ways of knowing» (Davis-Manigaulte et al., 2006), an interdependence that characterises expressive forms of knowledge (Heron, 1992) such as artistic and performative practices. In fact, the themes identified in qualitatively analysing the contents of the logbooks seem to show that students, as a result of performative practices, have changed their perspectives of meaning (Mezirow, 1978) and experienced a transformative process that primarily involved two levels.

A first level led to a transformation regarding the emotions felt, while a second level concerned a transformation regarding self-awareness and self-understanding. The first level of transformation can be observed by comparing the initial codes to the final ones. This analysis - primarily qualitative given the numerical difference in occurrences - shows that before the training, students generally had a negative mood. Discontent was attributed to contingent reasons such as weather, tiredness, organisation, transportation strikes, personal reasons, physical pains, embarrassment, or anxiety, but in all these cases, performative practices led to a radical transformation towards serenity, harmony, and feeling better. In their diaries, students consistently linked this transformation to theatrical practice, the welcoming setting, and the relationship with their peer group. These elements also led to the second level of transformation.

Among the themes emerging in the final codes, we find *awareness*, *connection*, *space*, and *transformation*. Explaining each theme individually, they collectively lead to a better understanding of the self. *Awareness* was primarily linked to a bodily dimension, a call to presence here and now that facilitated the awareness of being and, above all, of being in a specific space, environment, and in relation to others. Relationship was the other significant component of the awareness theme, recalled through the relationship with otherness, empathetic recognition of the other, and the possibility, offered by the activities, to open up to others. Relationship and corporeality also emerged as the two factors leading to the *connection*, representing the second thematic nucleus. Connection is multifaceted, primarily referring to direct contact with the environment, a reconnection with the emotional, intimate, and bodily self, and a moment of empathetic and intimate connection with others. Awareness and connection were stimulated because performative activities allowed the creation of a space of encounter where the self and the other could overcome the boundaries that divide them (Grotowski, 1965) thanks to mutual recognition guaranteed in the gaze of the other, in empathetic resonance. The codes characterising this theme describe it as a safe, sacred, sharing, welcoming space devoid of

judgement where everyone felt free to express themselves, to open up to others, and to welcome others. A space where mirroring and resonance with others open up an intersubjective and collective view, substantiating transformative experiences (Mezirow, 2003), the last thematic nucleus derived from the previous ones. Indeed, *transformation* was described as an experience of general change from negative, critical, and tense moments to positive and growth moments. In addition to a general tendency to transform states of discomfort into states of well-being (*feeling better*), as also evidenced by the comparison between ‘initial’ and ‘final’ codes, students reported experiencing transformative experiences that led to a greater self-awareness (*becoming aware of myself*), self-growth (*transforming fear into growth*) in their individuality (*self-improvement*), and intersubjectivity (*transforming fear into relation*).

### Conclusion

The thematic qualitative analysis of the students’ logbooks shows, in conclusion, that a performative, i.e. intersubjective and active learning experience can stimulate a process of transformation in which students can rediscover themselves and self-understand themselves in new ways, thanks to the creation of a safe and shared learning environment - the encounter space - in which the gaze of the other, the empathic resonance with it, and the awareness of one’s own body in the dimension of the present, of the here and now, lead to experiences of growth, acquisition of awareness, of self-understanding renewed and regenerated by the theatrical experience. The workshop activities thus generate the creation of a protected space where the teacher assumes the role of director, leaving the student that of the actor protagonist of his cognitive process «through autonomous actions in which each one has the opportunity to measure himself with his own aptitudes, with his own creativity, with his own body in action and to get to know his own world starting from his personal skills in sharing with others» (Carlomagno, Minghelli, 2022:204).

We want to suggest that teaching understood in this way can create that climate of relationship that is fundamental for transformation, always perceived through the gaze of the other since, as Ricoeur states, identity implies otherness in the process of constituting the self (Ricoeur, 1993). «To be in the classroom, or in the theatre, means to be there with body, mind and heart, to be a lived presence; only in this way can the learner or spectator say that he or she is sensorially involved in a cognitive and empathic osmosis that allows him or her to say that he or she has experienced a transformative cathartic dimension» (Carlomagno, 2020:356).

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# **Adult Lifelong Learning Communities of Action to Enhance Environmental Literacy, Through Transformative Learning**

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**Abstract:** Improving adult environmental literacy is crucial to achieving the sustainability of the planet. The literature review demonstrates that adult lifelong learning and the development of critical thinking of the learners through reflective dialogue, experiential learning, and self-directed learning development in the framework of learning communities could be a solution for radical change of the human resource acting at local and global level. Environmental literacy in learning communities include all three factors of transformative learning: the knowledge and skills acquired through experience; the attitudes, which are the product of effective learning, derived from the emotions evoked by an event; and the behaviors activated, leading the individual to make decisions and act in a positive way. By observing a sample of a learning community of eight women in the municipality of Holargos (Athens, Greece), working on environmental sustainability issues, the present research demonstrates how effective can be the active learning of citizens in the framework of learning communities. Mezirow's theory on transformative learning steps contribute to the empowerment of individuals to build their own learning communities, and learn to be tolerant, accept the diversities, and role-model democratic values for a sustainable future.

**Key Words:** Environmental Literacy, Lifelong Learning, Learning Communities, Transformative Learning, Critical Thinking

## **Theoretical Framework**

Lifelong Learning is one of the key levers for the transformation of human behavior and the only method that can guarantee the environmental literacy of people at individual, local and international level. In today's VUCA world<sup>1</sup>, the principles of Jack Mezirow (2007), founder of the theory of Transformation, can bring innovation and emphasis on lifelong transformative learning for adult empowerment. His theory recognizes the importance of both critical dialogue and reflection, leading to activation, participation, and self-regulated learning by citizens in the search for 'their own solutions' to complex problems.

Moreover, investing in the creation of Adult Lifelong Learning Communities for a Sustainable Future, based on interaction and peer learning, is the lever for the transformation of wider societal problems. In the context of this article, the emergence of sustainable local learning and action communities is applied by using the action research method as an agent of transformation and introduction of new educational perspectives in adult education. Learning

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<sup>1</sup> VUCA for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity, in <https://hbr.org/2014/09/a-framework-for-understanding-vuca>



communities can bring about change in people's attitudes and behaviours, both in their daily lives and in decision making affecting the local, national, and international context (Wenger, 2000).

### **Environmental Literacy through Transformative Learning**

The field of environmental literacy in Adult Education is an important parameter for understanding new value perspectives required to sustain human existence on earth, in the discovery of new cultural contexts and environments of action (O'Sullivan, 2012). Environmental literacy aims to change attitudes and behaviors of citizens, fostering hope and optimism for the survival of humans in the future due to the rapid impacts of climate change. Such a change needs to support a distributive culture, with respect and restraint towards all creation, and awareness of the importance of recreating, recycling natural resources, and abandoning the concept of consumption, in every aspect of people's daily lives, whether they are urban or rural (Figueres, 2021). For this to be possible, the learner needs to operate with the epistemological approach of the "self-determining mind", that is, to be able to confront new concepts of sustainability as fields to be considered, rather than becoming subject to them in the way they are given to them by external sources. This is the critical milestone for contemporary culture, to understand and transform moral and social norms and to free itself from existing social and cultural models, and stereotypical and binding perceptions. The ability to be responsible contributors to their fellow human beings are elements that need to be brought out in this transformative learning process (Hill et al., 2002).

Different perceptions emerge and the potential conflicts and their solutions, lead the to make decisions and realize common goals for the community. The solutions come through constant conflicts, compromises, and mutual concessions of the opposing sides, but they all work together for one single goal: their common sustainable future. Ultimately, community members are left to find their solutions, become aware of the new frame of reference, and are gradually led to reject dysfunctional assumptions, acting without guidance, through emancipatory processes, (Mezirow, 1989).

Environmental literacy, as a new frame of reference in Lifelong Learning, introduces learners to collaborative thinking to achieve reflective dialogue, which according to Mezirow (2007) is a process in which several basic values and assumptions of adult learners about the world change. It all starts with an assumption: lifelong learning allows individuals to recognize how to operate effectively, correct problematic areas, and think proactively about the future. An important, and perhaps integral, element of any learning process is the reflective attitude and practice both at the individual and collective level to achieve change. Such a change requires will, readiness, and mutual understanding for participants to reach reasonable agreements and organize themselves into actions for a sustainable future.

### **Defining the Scope of Adult Lifelong Learning Communities of Action**

Under the pressures of the globalized and constantly evolving 21<sup>st</sup> century, the ability of citizens to learn to adapt to new circumstances is essential. A sustainable future can only be achieved by devising strategies that promote the development of social capital. The most effective way is to initiate citizens into learning so that they are empowered to build their own learning societies. In this way, they learn to be more tolerant of different aspects of life, to accept diversity, and to be less influenced by conservative ways of life that tend to dominate them. It is a matter of stability, prosperity, and personal development for every citizen to engage and be part of a learning society (Longworth, 2006).

The emergence of creative thinking and the application of practices from the classical traditions of each locality manifested anew, can help the positive evolution of humanity. As citizens are getting involved in the localized society, they communicate, intervene in the environment, join small or larger social groups, and create, satisfying common needs and goals, with education being the driving force for their maintenance and sustainability. Learning communities are structured along these lines, with different types of groups depending on their type and field of activity. They develop an emancipated workforce capable of tackling complex and sudden situations with efficiency and resilience (Τσολακίδου, Βαλλιανάτου, 2023).

Adult Lifelong Learning Communities of Action to Enhance Environmental Literacy, are defined as small groups of citizens who collaborate and seek sustainable solutions daily in an organized context, using the most appropriate sustainable methods and highlighting the local needs and specificities of each environment (Lange, 2012). Their participation in learning programs for a sustainable future, as well as in interactive communities that enhance how participants learn, tends to achieve an ecologically adequate consciousness and citizenship (Kaye, 2020). This education can contribute “to informing, raising awareness, changing values, developing skills and shaping appropriate behavior based on local knowledge and oriented towards domestic, local and, by extension, national partial self-sufficiency” (Κάκαλου, 2015, p.4). Through the local needs and specificities of the environment in which they are developed, the communities can support sustainable practices such as local biodiversity, local products, cottage industries, local forms of energy production and relevant indigenous knowledge and culture (Jordan et al., 2009).

Finally, citizens will equip themselves to remain environmentally literate and update their knowledge in a rapidly changing planet that is in danger of losing its sustainable balance. The aim of the community is to be able to sustain itself after completing the education, remaining active and connected both in person and online, acquiring an important role in society, sharing knowledge and giving meaning to the sustainable daily life (Βαλλιανάτου-Βουτσινά, 2022).

### **The Survey Sample and the Research Tools**

The conducted research aimed to explore the concept of the adult lifelong learning communities, as a space for the development of environmental literacy of citizens, aiming to transform the dysfunctional beliefs of the sample and encourage action for sustainability. For this purpose, the Research-Action method was utilized, with a qualitative and systemic methodology that aims to transform reality and promote knowledge (Alrichter, 2001).

#### **Objective and Research Questions**

The action research initially sought to investigate the environmental and social conditions that currently prevail in a municipality in Greece, to highlight its needs for a sustainable future, through a sample of citizens who were willing to engage in transformative processes (Βαλλιανάτου- Βουτσινά, 2022).

For the survey the key questions would answer to what extent Adult Lifelong Learning Communities for Action could:

- 1) bring about transformative positive impacts on participants.
- 2) empower them to become the agents of further social action, for the sustainability and durability of their local area.

## **The Research Sample and Research Tools**

For the research purpose, a 40-day pilot project was implemented, using a mix of informal, face-to-face, and distance, synchronous, and asynchronous learning in May 2022. The sample consisted of eight citizens of the Municipality of Holargos, aged 40-60 years old, focusing on participants who were available and gathered a high percentage to meet the requirements of the survey. The participants were female, working and mothers in the majority, two of them were teachers, four of them were freelancers, and one was an employee of a public utility company. The educational level of three of them was secondary school, three of them were tertiary school, and two of them were primary school. Seven of them reported being mothers, four of them with minor children, three with adult children, and one was childless.

Participant observation of the group by the researchers was the methodological tool applied throughout the 40 days, through face-to-face and online synchronous and asynchronous group meetings. The second tool was the group-focused interview, performed at the end of the activity, to evaluate the participants' experience, as well as to reflect on all stages of implementation. The third tool included Mezirow's methodological guide of the ten steps of transformation. Finally, the questionnaire of the public who participated in the Group Action, collected afterwards, helped to evaluate both the Action and the continuation of such collective initiatives. From the responses (100% completion), important findings were extracted which are presented in the survey results.

## **Results Of the Survey**

To set the educational context of a minimal environmental literacy for the participants, the curriculum was adapted to be sufficient and understandable in the limited time available. Throughout the action research, self-learning was reinforced as a more appropriate method for adults. The group was left free to lead the learning process on their own, while brainstorming took the lead in the meetings and in the asynchronous communications. Participants sensed the transformative processes through questioning new knowledge and then by engaging in systems thinking until they came to realize the global environmental crisis.

Also, the transformative processes redemptively led the participants to act, expressing their expectation to continue such initiatives. In their interview, they were surprised to highlight the mental satisfaction they felt while confirming their involvement in subsequent similar actions. What follows is an attempt to describe the process followed during the action research, and to analyse it in the light of Mezirow's 10-step theory (Λιντζέρης, 2008).

### **Step 1 - A Disorienting Dilemma**

In the first face-to-face meeting, the basic concepts of sustainability were presented, such as the UN's 17 Goals Agenda (2015), the importance of the ecological footprint, the overcoming of the planet's environmental boundaries and the social limits required for humans to thrive. The reflective dialogue helped the group to connect systemically to global environmental and social problems. Learning, according to Mezirow (2007), is a process in which previous interpretive patterns are challenged for the learner to enter the process of transformation. The study of further material, using asynchronous methods, led participants to engage in critical reflection to involve them in a rational dialogue of awareness and truth-seeking.

### **Step 2 - Self-examination of Feelings Of Fear, Anger, Shame**

In the following days, the group was introduced to the concept of Anthropocene and began to get in touch with the consequences of human actions on the environment worldwide. Communication during the week was carried out online, using modern or asynchronous methods

and tools (Zoom, Messenger, Viber). During this time, an extended training cycle was completed that helped participants internalize the complexity of the challenges of climate change through a systemic view of reality. After a barrage of numerous ideas, which were discussed at length, it was decided that the idea of a clothes exchange against fast fashion prevailed as a pilot application at the local level to promote sustainability.

As transformative learning is not a one-dimensional event, nor does it take place independently at a given moment, but instead is a multifaceted process in which the adult learner consciously participates, the group, as it delved into the subject, gradually began to shift. Faced with extreme revelations such as child slavery, labor abuse, and ecological destruction, the participants appeared shocked and often skeptical.

### **Steps 3-4 - Critical Evaluation of Assumptions, Sharing of Dissatisfaction and the Process of Transformation**

The search for relevant information on the topic of fast fashion, through modern and asynchronous distance communication and learning, was the subject of the group's next steps. Through many examples and audiovisual material, the participants were often confronted with a system of assumptions, which they questioned. One participant emphatically stated, "Unfortunately I had a very superficial view of fast fashion, and I am disturbed to see all the reality". Despite the unpleasant issues, participants were very encouraging, applauding every effort, to collect and share relevant material.

### **Steps 5-6 - Exploring Options for New Roles, Relationships, and Actions**

At this stage, as argued in transformative theory, the design of a new action plan helped by using critical thinking, as well as rational and reflective dialogue in the group to develop self-reliance, empowerment, and the ability to pursue its own solutions. The planning of the chosen Action on fast fashion was achieved collaboratively: 'differently the Action to a certain number of guests, where there can be a projection, presentation and something more experiential, and differently the open attendance for the public, where the other person will come as a passerby and will not pay attention to what is said'. The group concluded with a group presentation of the topic to an invited audience, through selected texts and photographic material they would gather on the consequences of fast fashion, to raise important issues for discussion and exchange of views with the attendees.

### **Steps 7-8 - Acquiring Knowledge and Skills to Implement the Action Plan and Testing New Roles**

Many members of the group expressed inhibitions about exposing themselves to the public on the day of the Action because they felt embarrassed and insecure. In the distance and face-to-face meetings, open-ended questions, demonstration and utilisation of trial-and-error processes, focused discussion and verbal confrontations were encouraged as additional techniques (Jarvis, 2022) to strengthen the group dynamics (Tsolakidou, 2017). The members engaged in a reflective process of dialogue with themselves and with the whole group to gradually bring about awareness and transformation, for the whole project and its value. For example, one participant chose to condemn bonded labour as an effect of fast fashion, through an inventive and moving rendition of a fairy tale.

### **Step 9 - Building Capacity and Confidence for New Roles-Relationships**

On the day of the action, many discussions and generally actions were held to raise awareness and activate citizens for a sustainable future. At the end of the presentation, everyone, team, and audience, seemed to have received positive feedback, which had to do with the need to share and exchange not only clothes but also ideas, like the reduction of carbon footprint,

recycling, reuse of materials, etc. They also mentioned how ensuring trust for making society open to democracy and the effective functioning of institutions. The positive dynamics of the collective effort was confirmed, as everyone expressed a strong desire to join more such activities.

### **Step 10 - Reintegration Into Life According to the New Conditions - Perspectives**

During the group feedback, positive messages were exchanged in the group-focused interview conducted in person. All this awakening pushed them to try to go “from beliefs to practice” as they stated, stressing “the great power of group and experiential interactive learning”. They also mentioned the positive impact the action for the common good was hiding, and how hilling it was for depression. The new data helped to free the trainees from misleading self-perceptions, opening their horizons to inclusive approaches, after practicing equal opportunities, acceptance, and consensus on final decisions, through thoughtful dialogue. They all commit to continue their efforts to recycle, eliminate consumption, and promote sustainable solutions at the local level.

### **Conclusion**

Transformative learning theory has a significant impact on Adult Lifelong Learning Communities of Action. Transformation is achieved by the learners after interactions and conflicts, debates and compromises, identification of strengths and weaknesses of a community of action. Conceptualisations emerge when learners perceive environmental sustainability challenges and complex problems and realize the value of proactive action to save the planet. This paper demonstrates how following the tens steps of Mezirow’s theory learners not only acquire knowledge on environmental issues but recognize disoriented dilemmas, take action and plan tactics by developing new skills and changing behaviors.

The action research showed how many real events that shake the planet can transform citizens’ attitudes when the sense of proactivity is activated, linking their every action to the sustainability of the whole planet, and encouraging participants to multiply these messages to other citizens. The transformation of dysfunctional perceptions and stereotypical beliefs brought about by the theory of transformation, with the tools of critical thinking and reflection lead to awareness of situations and proactive and participative action of every citizen.

The public response embraced this experiential action and supported its continuation. The development of a new plan demands updated skills and new attitudes aimed at understanding the interconnectedness of environmental, social, and economic situations, of today’s rapidly changing reality which prioritizes saving the planet.

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# **Navigating Cultural Transition & Uncertainty: An Autoethnographic Exploration of a Transformative Learning Journey as a Latina Voluntary Migrant**

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**Abstract:** The simplicity and complexity of my story encapsulate a personal experience that aims to convey a message that transcends beyond the surface to bring attention to a problem that may be unknown to many others. Thus, getting transformation into ‘good trouble’ by exploring the voluntary migration journey allows us to gain a richer understanding of the intricate relationship between individual narratives and the wider society. As such, I will describe an experience Van Manen (2016) defines as “the thing that happened to me” (p. 51). The “thing” I have chosen relates to the phenomenon I am exploring in my research study, which has taught me the power of letting go of control to accept change within ambiguity and to rebuild amidst the challenges. This autoethnography paper explores my transformative learning journey through migration and the acculturation I continue to endure as a Latina voluntary migrant, highlighting the interconnections that contribute to our collective growth.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Voluntary Migration, Culture, Acculturation

## **Introduction**

Hoggan and Hoggan-Kloubert (2022) explained that inquiry into “migration brings with it different social and personal life events, and disorienting dilemmas with potential for transformation and learning” (p. 91). Through introspection and reflexivity, I explored the multifaceted aspects intrinsic to voluntary migration, particularly experiences that began before I arrived in the United States. The process of navigating uncertainty, leaving the comfort and familiarity of home, and embracing the puzzling nuances of an unknown environment allowed me to examine the learning potential associated with exposure to a new culture. Such exposure, according to Mezirow (1991), “encourages transformative thought,” leading to a profound shift in perspective and understanding that the ambiguity associated with this cultural transition can act as “catalysts or trigger events that precipitate critical reflection and transformations” (Mezirow, 1990, p. 14). Upon reflecting on my quest, I have undoubtedly recognized the vast richness and complexity of this experience. It is not merely a personal journey but a shared human process that presents boundless opportunities for growth, insight, and the deepening of cross-cultural connections. Voluntary migration is not a simple geographical move; instead, it is a transformative experience that allows us to understand ourselves, our cultures, and our interconnectedness in a truly profound way.

Navigating through the cultural transition, often characterized by culture shock (Cupsa, 2018) and analyzed within the framework of acculturation theory (Berry, 1997), I discovered the value of harnessing each learning experience to derive meaning through “critical self-reflection” (Mezirow, 1990). Simultaneously, I became cognizant of “[my pre-conceived] assumptions” (Hoggan and Hoggan-Kloubert, 2022, p. 91) related to my “particular cultural identity” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 276). This process of reflection allowed me to understand what I had initially perceived as rejection from members of the U.S. community and to appreciate the complex dynamics of belonging. This journey of self-discovery and adjustment ultimately culminated in



what I personally regard as a lifelong transformative learning journey, reshaping my perspective and deepening my understanding of my place within this new cultural context.

This narrative aims to unveil the hidden dimensions of the voluntary migrant experience as a complex journey marked by a sense of loss contrasted with the rediscovery of unique ways of existence. As I navigate the process of finding my footing and integration into a new cultural environment, I also seek to offer “a deeper understanding of [the] sociocultural phenomena” (Hernandez et al., 2022, p. 3) linked to voluntary migration as a challenging experience for all types of migrants independent of their reasons for leaving home. Grounded in Jack Mezirow’s transformative learning theory (1978), this study embraces a robust theoretical framework to dissect the intricate layers of my learning journey and offer insights into the potential benefits of fostering support mechanisms within organizations, institutions, and complex systems by facilitating a deeper comprehension of the voluntary migrant experience for the cultivation of environments that enable seamless integration for newcomers, ultimately fostering an inclusive society.

In essence, this narrative “exploits the capacity that any social actor possesses for learning new cultures, and the objectivity within this process” (Maso, 2001, p. 137) to embark on an expedition of a profound inward journey, presenting the value of learning interlinked by the act of migration. This pursuit transcends my thoughts and seeks to connect with the universal human experience by enhancing our collective knowledge of voluntary migration. Therefore, I extend a purposeful invitation to others to actively engage and expand the broader discourse surrounding the significance of transformative learning and cultural integration since this conversation is not confined to individual or isolated viewpoints but echoes across the boundaries of personal experience. As “social beings [we are] embedded in web relationships with others within [a] social context” (Hernandez et al., 2022, p. 7); thus, our personal stories and experiences are vital threads that connect to create our society. This perspective allows us to see that migration is not just an individual transition but a communal transformation.

### **It Starts with Me**

The simplicity and complexity of my story encapsulate a transformational journey that has taught me the power of letting go of control, to accept change within ambiguity, and to rebuild amidst challenges. What I have chosen to share is what Van Manen (2016) described as “the thing that happened to me” (p. 51). This is my migration experience from Panamá to the United States and the acculturation process I continue to endure after 25 years as a voluntary Latina migrant living in this country.

#### **Migration Is Expecting New Experiences**

In Panamá, my older brother and I were raised by my grandmother with the help of my aunts and uncles. My mother moved to the United States for better opportunities when I was 4 years old. I remember seeing her sporadically and talking on the phone for short periods of time. For 14 years, she tried to get us into the United States, but the embassy denied us visas. At some point, my older brother was able to travel and left. One day, when I was 18, the embassy finally granted me a visa with permission to enter the country only once over a 10-year period. My family was unaware of this important detail, as we later learned. After being rejected many times, I did not want to leave my home for a country that did not fully welcome me. Nevertheless, I felt obligated to make the trip because my 3-year-old little brother, who lived in the United States, had passed away unexpectedly.

Nothing about that trip was memorable, other than the reason behind it and a conversation with my mother. She asked me to return to the United States again to learn English, which seemed like a great opportunity, so I agreed. On my second trip, I was doing what was called migration, as I learned many years later. My grandmother had arranged everything for me to travel and informed me that I would be traveling alone, but someone from the airline would accompany me until my older brother picked me up. I did not give it much thought because I was thrilled to embark on this adventure. Although I felt mixed emotions about traveling alone, my attention quickly turned to the opportunities that awaited me. I was eager to experience living with my mother for the first time in years, learn a new language, and see snow.

This trip is when I realized that migration is expecting new experiences: departing and hoping for better and new things to come. Migration is expecting new experiences when promising not to forget one's family, while expecting to make new friends. Migration is leaving home behind, wanting to establish a new one far away.

### **Migration Is a Farewell**

I felt the need to tell everyone I was leaving, so they would not forget me. In the weeks leading up to my trip, I visited my aunts and uncles to say goodbye and shared the news with neighbors. Some seemed disappointed. Others encouraged me to travel to El Norte and learn a new language.

I sat in my room and looked around to take a mental picture: the rose-colored walls, four large windows, and sunlight coming in. I got up, walked to the closet, and grabbed a dress my "mom," as I called my grandmother, made for my quinceaños. I put it in a clear bag, folded it, and safely stored it for when I returned.

I walked outside the house and looked at every plant. My grandmother and I shared many moments while caring for them throughout the years. I stood in front of a sunflower she taught me how to plant. I said to it, "Keep growing and wait for me to see you." I hugged my dogs, played with my birds, and listened to nature.

I helped my grandmother in every way I could until the day of my departure. I said goodbye while hugging her. I promised her I would not forget her. I was devastated to leave her behind. She comforted me as I walked through the house, looking at every room until I reached the door.

Migration is a farewell, as I said goodbye because I did not want others to forget me. It was a farewell because I tried to memorize every detail of my house so as not to forget it. Migration is a farewell, as I was trying to keep my belongings safe until my return. It was a farewell, as I contemplated nature, not knowing if or when I would be back to experience it again. Migration is a farewell, as I cried, missing home, while driving away from home.

### **Migration Is a Chain of Movements**

When I got into my aunt's vehicle, it was quiet. I could only hear the engine running and waited for her to start driving. When the car moved, I looked out the window, so I would not forget the house, the two mango trees, and the avocado trees in the backyard. My aunt drove for 2 hours, while I cried. At the airport, I stepped out of the car and heard birds chirping. It was green all around us. We got my luggage out and waited a long time to check in. At the counter for Continental Airlines, my aunt reminded them that I was flying alone and asked to be sure I had help when I arrived. The person said I would arrive at Newark Airport in New Jersey and reassured her that someone would be with me until I was picked up. My aunt looked at me and said, "Don't worry. You will be fine."

I got in line for the security checkpoint. My aunt talked to me while I waited, but I do not remember the details. I can only remember feeling nervous, looking around, and seeing many people. At some point, I had to continue alone. My aunt hugged me, told me she loved me, and waved goodbye. I felt tears coming down my face and waved back.

Migration is a chain of movements, never a chance to stand still; the only constant is change. Migration is a chain of movements, where one constantly walks toward or away from something or someone. It is a chain of movements, being told to go, to sit, to enter, or to leave. Migration is a chain of movements, as others wait for one's arrival. It is moving from one place to another without knowing when it will stop.

### **Migration Is Feeling Lost in the Unknown**

After the security checkpoint, I looked around and felt lost—but at least I could understand everyone. At some point, a flight attendant at the gate called my name to board. It was comforting knowing someone was there to help me through the process of boarding, finding my seat, and buckling my seatbelt. I looked out the window and saw workers placing the luggage in cargo hold.

As the plane took off, I remember breathing slowly and looking at many different types of trees outside the window. I thought, I will be back soon. Do not miss me too much.

Eventually, my conversation with trees was interrupted by the clouds. I then felt excited, but after a couple of hours, I thought about what I had left behind. A feeling of sadness overtook me, and tears rolled down my face. They did not stop for 3 hours. It was the second time I was traveling, but it felt like the first time because I was unsure of what to expect once I arrived.

When the plane landed, people clapped. I was puzzled. People opened the overhead compartments and remove their luggage. Everyone deplaned, while I waited for someone to tell me what to do, but the flight attendant never returned. I got up and followed the people leaving the airplane. A Spanish-speaking woman asked me if I knew where I was going. I said no. She asked me to follow her, so I did. We ended up in an area with many people. It was very loud. I could hear someone on a speaker but could not understand. I made it to a counter with a man in uniform. He spoke to me in English. Not knowing what he said, I smiled. I felt scared. He stepped away to talk to another man in uniform. He returned, took my passport, put it in a red folder, and pointed to his right.

I went down a long hallway, with a man at the end standing in front of a door. I looked around, walking with the red folder and my backpack. The man said something I could not understand. He opened the door and pointed at a chair. I sat down. I looked around. I saw people crying, upset, and scared. I thought, "This must be what jail looks like." After 2 hours, a man in uniform called my name and waved for me to go over. I walked toward him. There was a glass window at the counter higher than me. The man spoke some Spanish. I felt relieved because I could understand him. He said I had permission to enter the country only once, and this was my second trip.

He asked me, "Who are you here to see?"

I answered, "My mother."

He asked, "Do you have a phone number to call her?"

I said yes and quickly looked at my brown, six-ring binder, flipped to the contacts tab, searched for her number, and handed it to him. He picked up his phone, dialed, and spoke in English. After some time, he handed me the phone. It was my mother. I felt relieved and smiled.

The man gave me my passport, pointed to the door, and said, “Welcome to the United States.” I answered, “Gracias,” with a smile.

My mother told me afterward that they asked about her migration status, and she told them that she was a citizen and that I was going to stay with her because she was claiming residency. She explained travel agency was doing the paperwork. They had not said anything about needed additional permission to enter the country, so we did not know of the entry restriction. Because my mother was a citizen, they couldn't send me back.

I left the room and walked down the same hallway, which had high ceilings, white walls, and light gray carpet. The loud, crowded area had become quiet and empty. Most of the people were gone, and the remaining people were whispering. I remember seeing a man pacing, but I could not see his face. I kept walking, and the then man ran toward me. I was nervous—until I realized it was my older brother. Then, I felt joy and ran toward him. He gave me a tight hug and asked me many questions: Where was I all that time? Did someone from the airline help me? Whom did I talk with? What happened? He kept on going until, eventually, he said, “I was so worried, but I was not going to leave this place until I found you,” and he hugged me again. I told him what had happened, and then he called my mother. I remember him saying, “I got her.”

Outside, it was warm and very sunny. We got in the car, and I asked him how far we were from the house: 4 hours. He played music from Panamá, while I looked out the window. I wanted to absorb everything I could. I remember smelling the air to see if it differed from Panamá. Everything seemed bigger and contrasting. There were billboards with graffiti on the buildings. I asked my brother what the billboards said. I tried to understand them, but I could not. After driving for some time, I told him I was hungry. He stopped at McDonald's and said, “I'm going to show you something really cool.” He ordered and then handed me an enormous hamburger with fries and a very big plastic cup. I looked at the meal and was amazed. I have never seen anything that size. I held a French fry and said, “Esto es gigante.” We laughed together. At that moment, I realized I would learn things I had never imagined.

This is when I understood migration is feeling lost in the unknown, as I experience new things alone. It was fear of the unknown, as I waited for help that never arrived. Migration is fear of the unknown when others talk, but I couldn't understand. Migration is fear of the unknown, when you fear those around but need to trust them even when meeting them for the first time.

### **Migration Is Transformative Experience of Lifelong Cultural Learning**

Choosing to migrate to a new country is often a difficult decision. Voluntary migrants can experience it as a complex process in which ambiguity is always present. Unknowingly, I entered a cycle of transitions, during which I experienced a constant flow of new information. The only constant was change. A series of shifts became part of my everyday life, causing chaos and confusion; however, 25 years later, I realized this new cultural environment is fertilized soil, where new experiences become the genesis of a lifelong learning journey.

Migration is finally understanding that integration is finding a space where I belong. It is accepting that the world can be viewed in many ways by the people around me. Migration is using my experience to instigate the questioning of cultural assumptions by those I encounter. It is leveraging cultural differences to connect and learn from each other. Migration is learning that I should embrace vulnerability by having the courage to share my journey for the first time. Migration is my transformation.

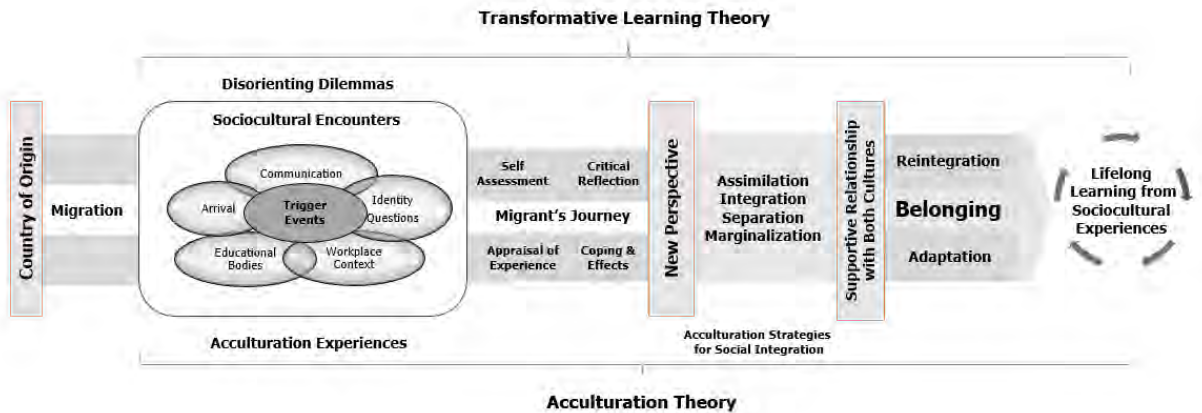
## Theoretical Framework Underpinning the Study

Transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1978) and acculturation theory (Berry, 1992) can be used to highlight the early years of life as being a critical period for individuals. During this time, “meaning perspectives are acquired in childhood through the process of socialization, often in the context of an emotionally charged relationship with parents, teachers, or other mentors” (Mezirow, 1990, p. 3). Individuals learn their culture, language, social cues, and beliefs and create assumptions about their environment. These preconceived assumptions then influence their abilities to accept, reject, or make meaning because “migration constitutes different life-shaking incidents or triggering events in the host country, prompting one to reinterpret previous life views and personal beliefs” (Hoggan & Hoggan-Kloubert, 2022, p. 91).

According to Chirkov (2009), researchers should study migrants’ experiences “during their transitions from one culture to the other, followed by understanding the meanings that they assign to their actions in various situations” (p. 102). As migrants enter liminal spaces, they must learn to navigate different sociocultural encounters, which trigger confusion, causing them to self-reflect or appraise a particular new experience. Mezirow’s (1978) transformative learning theory and Berry’s (1992) acculturation theory provide a unique framework for analyzing this phenomenon, as they can be used to consider the participants’ points of view, identifying perspective learning and adaptation strategies as new cultural conditions appear (see Figures 1 and 2). In addition to both theories, the theoretical framework is complemented by incorporating concepts from “Erikson’s re-envisioned eight stages of psychosocial development” (Sacco, 2013, p. 143) and culture shock literature (Adler, 1975; Cupsa, 2018; Furham, 2012; Ward et al., 2008).

**Figure 1**

*Bridging Cultures: Latino Voluntary Migrants’ Transformative Learning Journeys*



*Note:* This theoretical Framework is used to describe my understanding of the migration journey of migrants as they acculturate to their host country.

Acculturation literature refers to migration experiences as ones that “place a load or demand stemming from the experience of having to deal with two cultures in contact and having to participate to some extent in both of them” (Berry, 1997, p. 18). Some trigger events explored in culture shock and acculturation literature relate to the migrant’s arrival in the host country,

new cultural context, communication challenges, and new work and educational transitions and environments (Adler, 1975; Berry, 1997; Cupsa, 2018; Furham, 2012; Ward et al., 2008). Transformative learning theory calls these trigger events “disorienting dilemmas [which] may be evoked by an eye-opening discussion, book, poem, or painting or by one’s efforts to understand a different culture that challenges one’s presuppositions” (Mezirow, 1990, p. 9). These disorienting dilemmas become “catalysts or trigger events that precipitate critical reflection and transformations” (Mezirow, 1990, p. 9), which “become a [new] learning experience” (Hoggan & Hoggan-Kloubert, 2022, p. 90). Once new learning is produced, an individual may adopt or reintegrate with a newfound meaning perspective.

Berry (1997) explained that in the acculturation theory, adaptation refers to the “relatively stable changes that take place in an individual or group in response to their environmental demands” (p. 20). Then, migrants will adapt by deciding which social strategy to apply based on their need to integrate to their host country.

### **Conclusion**

In presenting this study, my objective is to reveal the hidden layers of the voluntary migrant experience—a journey characterized by deep loss and the emergence of new identities. This research is of substantial significance as it probes how shifts in perspective can catalyze transformative learning, an area of considerable interest in the field of adult education. Through my personal narrative, I explored the profound impact of migration intertwined with personal growth, reflecting on how this process has allowed me to accept a challenging chapter in my life. This was not merely a geographical transition but a transformative experience that fostered acceptance of my new reality and led to a profound shift in my perspective, which I consider a lifelong transformative learning journey.

The study delves into the complex dynamics between perspective change and migration, emphasizing the role of sociocultural encounters and the emotional upheavals often accompanying them, such as feelings of loss, confusion, and identity crises. These insights are crucial as they highlight the need for supportive environments that facilitate personal growth and resilience among migrants. Moreover, this research contributes to building understanding and fostering integration between Latino voluntary migrants and their new communities in the U.S., aiming to create a more inclusive society that values and supports diverse backgrounds and experiences. By addressing the challenges of migration and the universal need to belong, the study not only advances the transformative learning literature but also provides practical strategies for improving the acculturation process. Moreover, by delving into the voluntary migration journey, this research embodies the concept of ‘good trouble,’ offering a deeper insight into how individual narratives interconnect with broader societal contexts. This approach enables a more comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between personal experiences and the wider social framework.

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# Scaling Up Transformative Learning through Organizing Reflection to Create Good Trouble for Sustainability

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**Abstract:** The urgency to address the detrimental impacts of climate change continues to grow amidst widespread data-driven warnings about sustainability issues. Acknowledging the complexity of sustainability challenges, this paper proposes scaling up transformative learning for collective transformation in higher education as a worldwide institution. This scaling involves collective dilemmas, reflection, and discourse to transform whole organizations that make up the institution. The concept of *organizing reflection*, a tool for organizational change, emphasizes collective reflection's significance and can be applied in higher education through centers for excellence in teaching and learning. These centers could be hubs for fostering collective reflection among instructional faculty and staff, paving the way for collective transformation in sustainability worldviews, consciousness, identities, and ways of thinking and being. This paper proposes a theoretical model to formalize spaces for organizing reflection, facilitating a continual questioning of assumptions, and driving collective action for sustainability. This tentative model will guide empirical research to assess its effectiveness and implications for higher education as a global institution combating sustainability challenges.

**Key Words:** Faculty Development, Centers for Teaching Excellence, Organizing Reflection, Sustainability, Collective Transformation

## Introduction

In March 2023, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its sixth assessment report, highlighting the detrimental impacts of climate change on people and ecosystems worldwide. The report underscores the urgency of building resiliency, adaptation, and implementing mitigation efforts for earth. To comprehend, critique, and act on such reports, ecoliterate individuals must grapple with the intricate and multifaceted challenges of sustainability. Higher education serves as a crucial hub for both research and training of future leaders who formulate and implement innovative solutions to sustainability challenges like those highlighted by the IPCC. The transformation of higher education towards these goals must include reflection and transformative learning not just in individuals or collectively among groups, but at the organizational and institutional levels (Ross, 2020). This theoretical paper proposes that this shift requires a scaling up of transformative learning (TL) through novel structuring of faculty development centers to be reflective communities.



## Theoretical Background

Sustainability is conceived of in this paper as the “ability to recognise the paradigmatic premises of the pathway that we are creating, and recognise the implications of these premises in order that we may create more regenerative, reciprocal, systemic, inter-relational, evolutionary, beautiful worlds” (Ross, 2020, p. 56). Progress towards sustainable solutions must aim not only at individual recognition and shifting of our premises but also at collective transformation of our premises (Viera Trevisan et al., 2024). For this work, a planetary perspective of TL is being adopted (O’Sullivan, 2012), under which the transformation outcomes would need to be across all of those proposed by Hoggan (2016): Worldviews, identities, epistemologies, ontologies, and consciousness as evidenced by social action to mitigate and reverse sustainability challenges. However, a critical social TL lens (Cranton & Taylor, 2012) must also be used, to maintain a focus on the collective and inter-relational work. Together, these theoretical foundations inform our proposed model to scale up TL for sustainability in higher education.

The sustainability educators’ role in this process is to create a learning environment through which they can co-learn with students and support them in their collective transformation journey. They seek to prepare students to create a more socially and environmentally just society through their understanding and challenging of ecological, economic, and power systems that privilege some at the expense of others, perpetuating economic, cultural, and social inequalities (Brookfield, 2012). This sort of educational environment can only be created through a transformation of higher education (Sterling et al., 2018).

### **Transformative Learning to Foster Paradigmatic Change in Sustainability Education**

TL has become an important guiding framework for sustainability education, especially for institutions aiming for critical-reflexive education toward paradigmatic change (Sidiropoulos, 2022; Weinberg et al., 2020). Rodríguez Aboytes and Barth (2020) contend that this convergence between TL and sustainability is an emerging field of investigation, though studies so far have applied TL theory only superficially. Sidiropoulos (2022) claimed that this growing emphasis on TL for sustainability is due to conceptual congruence between those two concepts in their results (cognitive, conative, and affective) and learning outcomes (instrumental, communicative, and transformative).

The intersectionality of TL and sustainability education, then, focuses on a holistic, interconnected, and relational ontology and offers potential for emergent change and transformative engagement (Ross, 2020). To reflect this overlap of the two constructs, updated terminology must be employed, even if it may perturb traditional usage of the phrase *sustainability education*. We draw the distinction suggested by Lange (2012) between *education for sustainability development* with its anthropocentrism and *education for sustainability’s* more ecological view. But we go further, along with other TL scholars (Burns et al., 2022; Michel et al., 2020; Ross, 2020), by promoting the view that the complexity of sustainability challenges cannot be solved merely by traditional transmissive education for sustainability, but only through *transformative sustainability education* (or *learning*). Transformative sustainability education is conceptually different in relation to previous swaths of sustainability education which were “problem and science-focused” environmental education (Ross, 2020). Transformative sustainability education’s objective is to enable consciousness, radical holism, ontological, epistemological and ethical shifts towards relational reciprocal, entangled, and systemic ways of being on planet earth. Transformative learning *about* sustainability refers to learning about the matters at hand, transformative learning *for* sustainability refers to changing assumptions about

sustainability learning, but only transformative sustainability education implies a change in learners' worldviews and paradigmatic beliefs with implications for alternative agencies.

However, the question remains as to how to provide the learning environments and transformative learning experiences to reach these goals. Studies that integrate TL more deeply in examining process, outcomes, or learning environments show its significant contributions to the design and implementation of sustainability education interventions and learning assessments (e.g., Brunstein et al., 2021; Hathaway, 2022). To that point, Brunquell et al. (2018) developed a qualitative multi-case study to analyze how sustainability education programs play a pivotal role in promoting changes in students' dominant beliefs, values, and assumptions about sustainability. In their findings, sustainability courses had the potential to contribute to critical reflection and transformative learning outcomes because they offered opportunities to engage with different points of view, review taken-for-granted premises about sustainability, and problematize sustainability dilemmas. However, the key is establishing a space within an organizational environment that promotes critical reflection experiences on sustainability issues for students and instructors, promoting in-depth insights, perspective transformation, and powerful resultant actions (Brunquell et al., 2018).

### **Organizing Reflection to Scale Up Transformative Learning Institution-Wide**

Initiatives to scale up TL to the group, organizational, or institutional level for collective transformation are not common but result in positive outcomes for learners (Fabbri & Romano, 2022; Gutzan & Tuckermann, 2019). Conditions for the success of TL beyond the individual level have been identified: The combination of critical reflection experiences with action, spaces, and events dedicated to achieving transformation (Franz, 2005); adopting value creation perspectives (Gutzan & Tuckermann, 2019); trust (Cotter, 2014); institutional legitimacy; and other factors. Organizational TL occurs when an organization, which is perceived as a complex entity with known ideology and identity experiences, changes its socio-material practices and cultural beliefs, leading to transformation over time in its value system and direction (Fabbri, & Romano, 2019). This collective organizational transformation necessarily involves all members (Dike, 2022).

In support of organizational TL, the concept of *organizing reflection* (Vince & Reynolds, 2009) has been proposed as foundational. An extension of Schön's (1987) discussion regarding reflective practitioners, it involves building an organizational culture, supporting resources, and spaces around collective, not individual, reflection. For those authors, "reflection is best understood as a socially situated, relational, political, and collective process [with] both theoretical and practical advantages" (p. 6). Critical reflections are here conceived as a collective responsibility for creating a structure that reflects and questions assumptions collectively and continuously to undertake collective actions (Brunstein, & King, 2018; Vince, 2002). The focus is on organizing experiences in spaces and processes for public debate, examining underlying questions, and collective reflection. This alters the organization's positioning resulting in collective accountability for reflective practice (Vince & Reynolds, 2009). This materializes through the creation of subsystems, peer consulting groups, organizational role analysis, action learning, and communities of practice creating synergy to question assumptions, analyze power issues, and develop alternative paths (Vince, 2002). We propose that scaling up TL depends on the capacity to organize reflection, and at universities, centers for teaching excellence are the ideal location of this space.

## **A Provisional Model to Scale Up Transformative Sustainability Education: University Centers for Transformative Teaching and Learning**

In higher education, centers for teaching and learning (“Centers”) have been formed in response to public criticism of contemporary higher education to promote organizational innovation and enhancements. Though often focused on skills training for faculty, Centers can also function as laboratories to foster pedagogically innovative learning experiences (Lieberman, 2005). They position teaching and learning at the heart of universities’ concerns and actions while creating a positive environment to nurture faculty strengths (Cook & Kaplan, 2011). This is commonly done by developing activities dedicated to learning, discussion, and encouragement towards innovations in teaching and learning.

Only a few Centers declare a well-established transformative perspective in their mission, focusing on promoting transformative learning throughout institutional levels and implementing this through faculty communities of practice, management leaders, and students (Brunstein & King, 2018). To determine how common it is for top universities to include foci on faculty development, transformative learning, and sustainability, we surveyed the websites of the top 30 universities of approximately 1400 worldwide, as ranked by QS World University Rankings (QS Quacquarelli Symonds, 2022). Approximately 90% of these elite institutions had a center for faculty development, underscoring their significance in leading universities. In terms of sustainability, 29 of the top 30 institutions prominently named sustainability as an important topic. Specifically, 13 universities highlighted sustainability on their websites, presenting strategies or initiatives that foster sustainability on their campus or in student learning, while the other 16 universities went farther by having established sustainability centers, offices, or schools of sustainability studies. These data indicate that the institutionalization of faculty development and sustainability is becoming more established, which aids in their expansion.

However, it is crucial to note that TL is not explicitly mentioned in any of these 30 institutions, which supports Kasworm and Bowles' (2012) assertion that few universities incorporate TL as a core aspect of their work. Beyond the QS-ranked top-30 institutions, we carried out a Google search for the keywords: “Center for Transformative Learning,” “Center of Transformative Learning,” “Transformative Learning Center,” and “Centre for Transformative Learning” and found just 13 Centers with a focus on sustainability and/or social impact from a critical-reflective and transformative perspective. This means that critical reflection and/or TL aimed at the common good or sustainability were explicitly included in few Centers' missions, visions, values, or objectives.

These preliminary data demonstrate that Centers dedicated to teaching and learning and those openly focused on sustainability often operate independently and with distinct agendas. They are not necessarily synergistic. This observation reinforces our central argument: Integrating transformative sustainability education initiatives through these Centers is essential to scaling up sustainability practices within higher education. In the model we are proposing, Centers for *transformative* teaching and learning serve as the loci of organizing reflection through faculty communities of practice where they instigate organizational transformation towards collective sustainability mindsets (Brunstein & King, 2018; Rimanoczy, 2020).

The power of fostering TL at the organizational level also leads to intraorganizational initiatives, a field that needs further study (Franz, 2005). Franz's research suggests conditions for these initiatives to be successful:

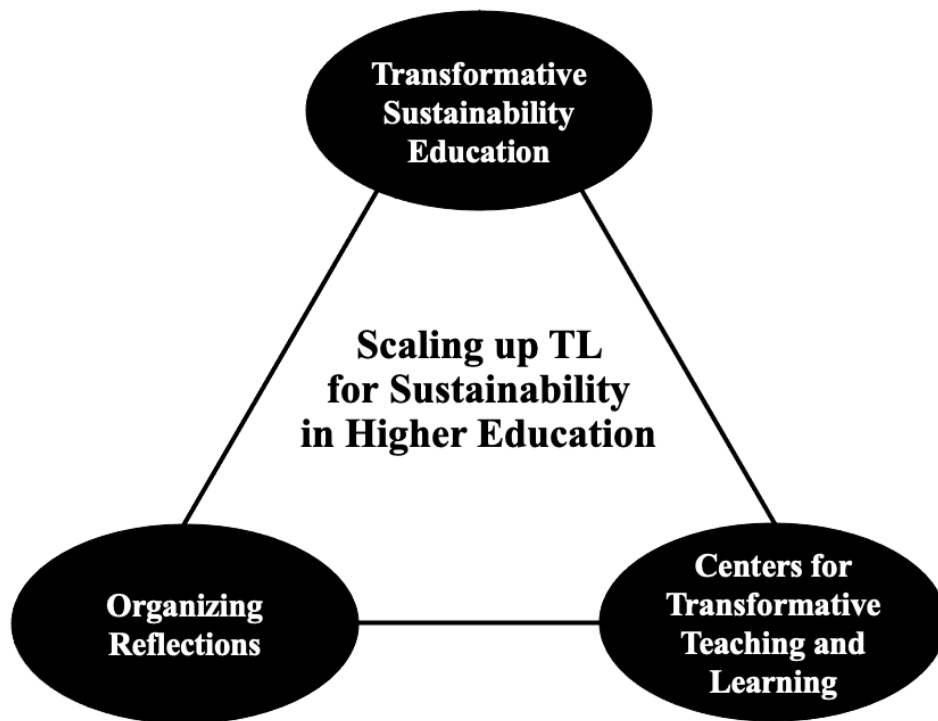
- Facilitation partners for reflective discourse, questioning, exploring theory, and playing devil's advocate;

- Articulation for critical reflection practice between partners, considering the previous and new assumptions they achieve in the process;
- The occurrence of disorienting critical dilemmas to set the foundation for transformative learning;
- Capacity to bridge the differences between partners with a common purpose; and
- The balance between interdependency between partners with independence (autonomy).

Our proposed new, or reformed, Centers would highlight a university’s commitment to collective reflection on practices, guidelines, values, and pedagogical actions to promote continual questioning of habits of minds and assumptions. Our proposed model (Figure 1) to scale up the operationalization of TL at organizations is hypothesized to better meet sustainability learning outcomes and transform higher education as a global institution.

**Figure 1**

*Intercepting Concepts for Future Studies on Transformative Sustainability Education*



## Implications

There are gaps in the literature about how to implement a TL scale-up, the nature and rate of learning curves for doing so, benefits of it, and its impacts on organizational practices (Gutzan & Tuckermann, 2019). Our model proposes that sustainability challenges can be overcome through collective transformation of learners, but that can only happen through the development of educators. Our model provides a placement of organizing reflection in TL theory and adds to the sustainability education literature, indicating how TL is fostered at the organizational level to scale it up across all higher education. As scholar-practitioners, the authors' next phase is inter-country collaborative research to test this hypothesis at university Centers putting this model into practice.

The goal is to obtain results that contribute theoretically, practically, and socially to TL, sustainability education, and organizational change. From the theoretical point of view, we hope the findings represent an advancement in studies of TL at the organizational level. Also, for advancing the discussion of transformative sustainability education in higher education, results could point to aspects that foster or inhibit the strength of university initiatives beyond the individual and small group. In addition, it intends to advance the concept of organizing reflection through a practical experience since the discussion in the literature has been made mainly from a theoretical perspective, without analyzing it from an empirical, worldwide campus research agenda as we plan to do in this course of study.

From a practical standpoint, the research outcomes would offer a template and pathway that other universities could emulate to embed and expand transformative sustainability education within their faculty and staff development Centers. Concurrently, enhancing the prominence and operational approaches of Centers at universities worldwide could become a hallmark of higher education's progress, with the institutionalization of sustainability mindsets representing a vital contribution to societal well-being.

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# **Do Japanese Business Leaders Experience Transformative Learning Through a Deliberately Developmental Organizational Culture Intervention? A Developmental Perspective**

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**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Adult Learning, Subject-Object Interview, Deliberately Developmental Organization, Japan

## **Extended Abstract**

Corporate Japan is currently facing unprecedented challenges in this ever-changing world, primarily led by technical innovation, the globalizing economy, and the rapidly aging society. Organizations are recognizing the need to build their foundations upon authentic collaborations and a developmental culture to cope with these challenges. A fast-growing accounting firm in Japan has implemented an organizational development intervention based on agile processes to create a deliberately developmental organizational culture (Kegan et al., 2016) for over five months. The Founder & CEO has appreciated the effects of the interventions because the company has successfully expanded its business, and the turnover rate among the participants has dramatically decreased. However, little is known about the effects of the interventions among the participants from the lens of transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000, 2008, 2012) and informal learning (Marsick & Watkins, 2001), especially in the Japanese context.

## **Objective**

This study aims to clarify the transformative learning process among the participants whose meaning-making shifted post-program. Inspired by Taylor and Elias's (2012) chapter, we use Kegan's (1994) "model of *transformations of consciousness*" (p.147) and the constructive developmental theory, which was extended by Drago-Severson (2009, 2012) as ways of knowing, and connect this model to Mezirow's transformative learning theory and Marsick & Watkins's (2001) informal learning theory. We were inspired by two main research questions: (1) How did the participants whose meaning-making shifted perceive their past experiences as phases described in Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory? and (2) What formal and informal learning activities in the intervention did they engage in that fostered the development of new perspectives?

## **Method**

In this research, we connected Kegan's theory, Drago-Severson's ways of knowing, Mezirow's theory, and Marsick and Watkins's theory to explain how the transformative learning process unfolded for those participants who experienced a shift in their meaning-making after an intervention. First, Mezirow (2000, 2008, 2012) mentions that frames of reference are the cultural and linguistic forms one uses to interpret meaning by assigning signification to our experience and form our perception, cognition, and feelings (Mezirow, 2000, 2008, 2012). These preconceptions determine our "line of action," enabling us to shift from one mental or behavioral



activity to another automatically and consist of two dimensions: a habit of mind and resulting points of view (Mezirow, 2000, 2008, 2012). Habits of mind are abstract and habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, affected by assumptions that create a set of codes (Mezirow, 2000, 2008, 2012). Points of view articulate the habits of mind, beliefs, memories, value judgments, positions, and feelings that construct an interpretation and are available for awareness and feedback (Mezirow, 2000, 2008, 2012). Thus, a frame of reference includes both a habit of mind and a point of view, and both imply that a frame of reference is a way of knowing (Taylor & Elias, 2012). Mezirow (2000, 2008, 2012) identified 10 phases of transformation:

- 1) A disorienting dilemma
- 2) Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame
- 3) A critical assessment of assumptions
- 4) Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared
- 5) Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
- 6) Planning a course of action
- 7) Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
- 8) Provisional trying of new roles
- 9) Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
- 10) A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective (p. 86)

We offered a fast-growing accounting firm in Japan a 5-month organizational development program for its 15 highest-ranking executives, including the founder and CEO, in 2020 (Watanabe & Watanabe, 2021). This program utilized the adaptive leadership model (Heifetz, 1994) and the immunity-to-change (ITC) method (Kegan & Lahey, 2009), which is grounded in adult developmental theory and the deliberately developmental organization framework of “fashioning an organizational culture in which support to people’s ongoing development is woven into the daily fabric of working life” (Kegan et al., 2014, p. 1). The intervention involved agile cycles of individual and group ITC and polarity map-making process (Johnson, 1992; Watanabe & Watanabe, 2021). As for the ITC work, all participants were invited to conduct individual experiments every week to confirm the accuracy of their big assumptions that have become irrelevant to their present selves. Also, all participants had weekly small group meetings to reflect on their actions.

Using the framework of Taylor and Elias (2012) in their chapter called “Transformative learning. A developmental perspective,” which connects Kegan’s theory and Mezirow’s theory, we conducted pre- and post-program subject-object interviews (Lahey et al., 1988) on 15 participants of the intervention in 2020 (Watanabe & Watanabe, 2021) to explore whether there was a shift in their meaning-making systems or epistemology. We identified seven participants whose meaning-making shifted. We investigated how the transformative and informal learning processes took place for participants who underwent a change in their meaning-making following the intervention.

### **Key Findings**

The major findings are as follows. First, most participants said “disorienting dilemma,” “critical reflection,” and “exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions” were the top three phases they went through for their transformation. Second, when we divided the intervention into formal and informal learning components, all participants described informal

learning components as significant for their transformation. Additionally, the top three examples of informal learning were “reflection,” “trial and error,” and “dialogue.”

### Conclusion

The first finding suggests that, in general, taking action is an essential phase in the transformative learning theory, in addition to the steps of “disorienting dilemma” and “critical reflection.” In the intervention, the participants conducted weekly experiments to verify the validity of their big assumptions that were no longer useful to their current self and reflect on their actions (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). The second finding of this research provides insights into the importance of informal learning in an organizational development intervention. Specifically, in this intervention, informal learning activities that involved dialogue among multiple participants seemed to have fostered the development of new perspectives. The findings reported here shed new light on the connection among the existing body of literature on transformative learning, informal learning, deliberately developmental organizations, and adult development.

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## Troubling Transformation: Research As Auto/Biographical Pilgrimage

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**Abstract:** Our paper draws on actual and metaphorical pilgrimage encounters with the other and otherness, to illuminate the power of myth, metaphor, depth psychology and spirit in complex processes of transformative learning. Encounters with the other who may be an oppressor, and or the oppressed, as in Linden's work in Israel and Palestine. Or with the otherness of cancer, in Libby's writing, and the role of shadow and metaphor in seeking light. It features two profound pieces of art – Fra Angelica's early Renaissance fresco of the Annunciation, and The Annunciation by black artist Henry Tanner as he struggled with the cancer of racism in American life. Both evoke profound meaning and the ineffable in transformation.

**Key Words:** Quest, Depth, Self/Other/Otherness Encounters

The paper embodies a troubled and troubling transformative pilgrimage in research, and by implication, across our whole lives. It is informed by actual pilgrimage and the power of depth psychology, spirituality, dialogue, metaphor and expressive writing. Both of us learned of doing research, partly under the gaze of what we can call scientific literalism: the idea that there is only one truth, whose prime illuminator is the scientific method—a space in which subjectivity, intersubjectivity and spirit can get short shrift. While neither of us wholly bought into that paradigm of research, one cannot complete a doctoral degree in the 1980s or early 1990s without being aware of the dominance at that time of the literalistic scientific paradigm. Nowadays, we are far more open about how our multiple subjectivities inform our research, though there is not always space to discuss it.

In this paper, we explicitly discuss our current research as auto/biographical narrative quest encompassing self/other/otherness encounters, psychological distress, depth psychology, the body, spiritual and religious literatures. It is informed by the work of social and educational philosophers like Paulo Freire, Jack Mezirow, and Axel Honneth; by those who write overtly about pilgrimage (beyond our own work), Cousineau, Morinis, Scriven. It is also shaped by feminist writing like Hélène Cixous's 'écriture féminine' (Cixous, 1975/2007). Cixous challenges conventional social science writing, including the fetishised boundaries between fact and fiction, and the absence of the personal in research. Finally, we consider the poetic realm of myth, literature, art, alongside religious imagery and the power of images from the natural world. In what follows we briefly discuss our background and how we came to work together. Next, we consider preoccupations in our current work, not least the idea of annunciation – of profound life inducing encounters with otherness.

### Background and How We Came to Work Together

We have known each other for approximately twenty years, though we probably knew of each other's research and writing for longer. We met through attending adult learning

conferences together in Europe and in the US, and over time discovered overlaps in shared interest in transformative learning, in the notion of wisdom, and in pilgrimage and spiritual quest.

Linden's starting point were hesitant steps in research under the gaze of scientific literalism as well as what he terms psychosocially fragile historical analysis, shaped by uncertainty and, frankly, the desire to please. For Richard Henry Tawney – a key figure in workers' education in the United Kingdom - the inspiration was Christian Socialism and the incarnation of the 'kingdom' in the best of adult education. I, Linden, was judgemental towards this in a desire to be accepted by then fashionable, mainly secular, and Marxist scholars (West, 2016). This was partly fuelled by anxiety when crossing the contours of the English class system, from a working-class background, into a middle-class university habitus. There was a struggle for voice, authenticity, even for the 'right' accent given the importance of this in English cultural life. Later I used traditional psychological research into working-class student experience that gave little space for students' narratives and subjectivity. But we were challenged by the students on this neglect and superficial interpretation of, in psychological language, the locus of control and well-being in their lives. We hypothesised that students might feel more in control, and better in themselves because of the programme. Listen to us, for a change, some of the students said. 'Yes', we both feel more in control of our lives thanks to the group and tutors, but also less so as relationships and identities were questioned, and well-being became precarious as older relationships fractured (West, 2024).

Eventually, Linden took steps towards auto/biographical narrative research under the influence of European colleagues and feminism (Bainbridge, Formenti and West, 2021). The journey became a more explicit, joyful play of metaphor, engagement with intimacy and depth psychology, cultural politics, and narrative dialectics. It included an actual pilgrimage on the Chemin de St Jacques in France, (the French starting point towards the Camino de Santiago, which Libby explores below). There were experiences of being lost, hopelessness and doubt, alongside moments of profound learning from other pilgrims – in unexpected ways. More recently, feelings of pilgrimage have reasserted themselves in considering the fundamental question of where home actually lies, in cultures of mass migration. Perhaps home is more of as an internal, integrated psychological state, drawing on literature, subjective and unconscious work, writing and religious experience (West, 2016; Formenti and West, 2018). Not least reconnecting with parents, and the gifts provided by an older autodidactic working-class culture of which they were part (West, 2016).

I think differently about research now, Linden writes. A quest, maybe, working in literal and metaphorical terms: of uncertain, messy, unpredictable journeys in which roads are wrongly taken, there is the occasional impasse, and encounters with the unexpected, even ineffable. There can be epiphanies too: turning points in how research is experienced and understood. A pilgrimage encompassing degrees of organising, planning, and charting a route, but always provisionally. We cannot know in advance of the unexpected or how we learn from experience. Linden's work as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist has helped to think about these issues, drawing on depth psychology (Bainbridge and West, 2012). He began to trouble the literature of transformative learning in the neglect of biographies, psychoanalytic and psychosocial interpretations, as well as the ineffable (Formenti and West, 2018).

Words like love, awe, mystery and yearning crept into his language. Doing research is a creative living process, not instrumentalized conformity, as philosopher and neuroscientist Iain McGilchrist puts it (McGilchrist, 2021). Quite different, in fact, to Enlightenment rhetoric of

detached reason as the prime vehicle to meaningful truth. We must rid ourselves, so that argument went, of superfluous language, superstition, magical thinking, religious dogma and even subjectivity. But, as McGilchrist insists, we can't even start on the scientific method without making assumptions and using insight and creativity, hunches, and vague impressions.

Libby spent the earlier part of her career discussing feminist issues in adult education and the importance of attending to diversity and equity issues and multiple ways of knowing (including spirituality) in adult learning. She completed a major research project on how spirituality informs the work of diversity educators, for those who consider it important, and wrote a book about the study (Tisdell, 2003). Later, she walked two significant pilgrimage routes, the first being with two friends/colleagues climbing Croagh Patrick in Ireland in 2009; and then the 500-mile Camino de Santiago in Spain following a divorce in 2012. She has presented at conferences and written about these experiences in conference papers and journal articles (Johnson, Swartz & Tisdell, 2010). Further she began to “trouble” the transformative learning literature in its lack of attention to spirituality (Tisdell, 2017); and discussed the idea of transformative pilgrimage learning grounded in spiritual experience. Then, in 2022, along with one of her Croagh Patrick pilgrimage colleagues, she wrote about how to cultivate living life as pilgrimage through meditation and spending time in nature, and as a way of dealing with love, death, and legacy (Tisdell & Swartz, 2022). So, when she initially missed the deadline for the conference proposal for reasons stated below, Linden invited her to co-author this paper. A theme in some of Linden's more recent writing is Annunciation, and the inspirational painting by Fra Angelico in his Early Renaissance fresco in the Convent of San Marco in Florence (West, 2023). This was a welcome entree for Libby since so many transformative experiences now come as an announcement, or an Annunciation! We want to consider how this concept relates to troubling research.

### **Linden on Annunciation**



Fra Angelico's painting left a profound emotional mark the first time Linden saw it. He was transfixed: partly by its beauty, but also the symbolism. Over time, and in the light of the auto/biographical narrative inquiry, the symbolic importance re-emerged when considering the balance in popular education between annunciation, on the one hand, and denunciation or criticality, on the other. Annunciation encompasses the role of love, affirmation, bodily experience and encounters with otherness; denunciation involves a spirit of critique and fundamental questioning of the established order of things. Linden also began to question the neglect of the spiritual, including liberation theology, in Western interpretations of Paulo Freire. There has, in fact, he suggested, been a sundering of spirituality from rational enquiry in the

academic mainstream. Fra Angelica's painting of the Annunciation can be interpreted afresh as a surprising, deeply embodied encounter with otherness in a surprising space, when a poor peasant woman in first century Palestine meets the Archangel Gabriel. There are traces of this in the narratives of a Jewish Israeli man and a Palestinian woman below (West, 2023).

Freire strove to establish the right balance between critique, affirmation, spirit and encouragement, love and critical action in the world. The roots of his liberation theology lie in profound inequalities, injustice and violence against the poor in Latin America, and more widely, as well as the conservatism and corruption of the Catholic Church. He insisted provocatively that the poor in fact were given the great gift of epistemological privilege within liberation struggles. They knew what it was like to suffer, bringing them closer to a suffering, crucified Christ. And thus, to understanding, experientially, where priorities lie for human flourishing.

The biblical narrative of the annunciation symbolised history turned upside down: new life and hope found not among the wealthy and privileged but incarnated in the experiences of a poor Palestinian girl from a backwater of the Roman Empire. A story of transcendence in imminence, power in the lowly, and ecstatic poetry in the Magnificat (Luke 1, 46-55; Luke 4, 18-19). Paulo Freire drew inspiration from the Austrian born theologian Martin Buber's I/Thou dynamics; of the divine potential in everyone in particular qualities of encounter (West, 2023).

Linden writes of two learners who participated in in-depth auto/biographical inquiry as part of a European Union funded initiative in cultivating active democratic citizenship and values in teacher education in Israel (West, 2023). The first, a Palestinian woman academic called Hanna. The second an Israeli Jewish academic named Elie who also served in the Israeli military. Such an encounter is especially poignant in the present tragedy, as the oppressor, in a certain sense, meets the oppressed: a Palestinian, living in the State of Israel. A different oppressive power, so to speak, replacing Romans in Mary's story. But Elie represented both oppressor and oppression too.

There were interviews and week-long workshops in Canterbury in 2018 and 2019. There was a theoretical and methodological introduction to auto/biographical and narrative methods, agreement reached over ground rules, and a role play of a good narrative interview. The whole group discussed the experience, agreed an interview protocol, and moved into small, deliberately diverse groups of four. Participants interviewed each other and experimented with being interviewees, interviewers, and observers in turn. Over the course of a week, oral material was developed into written auto/biographical accounts of how they became citizens and/or politically conscious.

The project was haunted by trauma and injustice in the bitterly contested space we call Israel or Palestine. In Hanna's story, her family was forced to flee Haifa when the Jewish Haganah (or terrorists in her perspective) arrived in 1948 to ethnically cleanse their district. Elie's family migrated from North Africa towards the end of the last century. Both Hanna and Elie are partly fictional characters, for ethical reasons, composites of various stories told to us by several people, to protect identities. Jewish people suffered of course the catastrophe called the Holocaust, but Palestinians suffered collective trauma too – Al Nakba or the Catastrophe – the forced displacement of the 1948 war unto the present.

For Hanna, Palestinian and Christian, colonisation encompassed a lost home, forced migration, and feelings of continuing humiliation. For Israeli Jews, like Elie, the other, Hanna, is a potential terrorist. Elie's family was made to feel unwelcome in North Africa as Islamism, and before that pan-Arabism, reared their heads. Hanna introduced herself as working in an Arab College of Higher Education near Nazareth. Her immediate family now lives in Nazareth. The

family fled to Nazareth in 1948, she said. ‘Surely Jewish forces would not desecrate a place full of Christian churches, for fear of losing Western support?’ Hanna’s forebears asked. They were right. She talked of continuing humiliations in the West Bank and Gaza.

Elie told a story of Jewish people in North Africa. Persecution, anti-Semitism, and poverty, combined with the ‘Arab struggle’, and later Islamist fundamentalism, provoked his family’s exodus. But his father was a bully and there was abuse in the family. Later, like everyone else, Elie was conscripted into the military, deployed to deal with ‘terrorist infiltration’. He could represent the people responsible for the abuse of Hanna’s relatives. But his military experience meant his personal abuse all over again, this time from sadistic authority figures in the army. Elie quit the military.

Linden witnessed the group with Hanna and Elie. The oppressor momentarily becoming humanised as well as the oppressed in Freire’s language. ‘Was this a fragile moment of annunciation?’, Linden later mused. Memories of Fra Angelica’s painting flooded back in his writing, evoking the potential beginning of hesitant, tortuous pilgrimage - dialogical liberation for both - if time and space had allowed.

There were glimpses of new life in I/Thou qualities of interaction, of deeper intersubjective communication, but it was fragile. For Freire in liberation theology it is the quest that matters, ‘a permanent search’ (West, 2023). It is not that material outcomes are unimportant - clean water, food, shelter and safety – but rather the potential incarnation of new insight and life for oppressors and oppressed in transformative learning or humanisation.

#### **Libby on Annunciation**

“We think you have ovarian cancer” the doctor announced with her two medical residents in tow. It came as an Annunciation, the day after learning that I had had a small stroke, which I now call my “stroke of luck.” While they could see evidence of the small stroke in my MRI, it was not enough to explain either my behavior or my wacky blood levels: Something more was going on. They did a scan of my abdomen and saw a large tumor in my left ovary that they were “pretty sure” was ovarian cancer. The good news is they seemed to have caught it relatively early, as the scan didn’t show obvious evidence of spreading. I had surgery—a complete hysterectomy about a week later on August 29, 2023. Yes indeed, I did have ovarian cancer, Stage 2. But given that it was a holiday weekend in the USA, I was in the hospital for another week to 10 days before I could go home.

When I read Linden’s reflections on Fra Angelica’s painting, I appreciated his reflection, but I thought much more about another favorite painting of mine called “The Annunciation” by Henry Tanner, a black artist. I’ve been familiar with it for several years before I walked the Camino, but it reminded me so much of one of the things I learned from walking the Camino de Santiago because it is so full of incredible light and shadow.





The painting and the concept of The Annunciation once again reinvigorated my passion to live life as pilgrimage, to bring it to my research, and to turn toward the light, but not to ignore the shadows. The painter himself, Henry Tanner, lived his life trying to do so, in spite of the cancer of racism in US society. It invited me to put into action yet again, all I learned from walking the Camino in 2012, to the renewed recognition that I still walk the Camino of life, and have tried to cultivate an awareness of each present moment in approaching life as pilgrimage. When I walked the Camino in 2012, I was guided by two key phrases, one sacred and one secular. The sacred phrase was from one of the Beatitudes from Matthew's gospel: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." Aramaic scholar Neil Douglas-Klotz suggests that this really means "blessed are they who plant peace each season." and for me as I walked, translated this further into trying to "plant peace in every step, and breathe peace in every breath."

The second phrase that guided reflection, was the book by Myles Horton and Paulo Freire -- "We make the way by walking". I always wondered how I would react if I had a cancer diagnosis. I was shocked. It was totally unexpected. But I have been leading meditation for years, and I always say, "Meditation is about 4 things: intention, attention, attitude, and attunement." So, in making my way by walking through this chapter of life as pilgrimage, or the cancer journey, I begin each meditation session with attention. I focus on my breath -- the deep, slow, full breath. I cultivate attitude by thinking of 5 things each day I'm grateful for related to my intention for that session. Then I try to attune to all that is -- especially in nature. -- to the birds, to the trees with their roots going down to earth, and to their branches reaching-reaching-reaching toward the sun. I am stretched vertically up and down, and horizontally in opening my arms to embrace all of life. I am stretched and stretched and stretched -- pulled open -- open at the heart. I am especially attuned to the Ginkgo tree -- a living fossil, that survived Hiroshima. I will live beyond and through ovarian cancer -- by paying attention to The Annunciation, The Wisdom of the Ginkgo tree, and the great mystery of Light and Shadow. May it be so, as I live my life as pilgrimage, in seeing the sunflowers from a distance. Sunflowers are heliotropes and turn their faces toward the sun -- toward the LIGHT. One cannot have light of course without

shadow when walking the Camino. Pilgrimage speaks in both literal and metaphorical terms: as metaphor for uncertain, messy, unpredictable journeys but also life affirming, deeply embodied encounters even with the darkest shadow.

### Concluding Reflection

We have both learned the importance of a more relational, dialogic, deeply embodied sensibility in research on transformative learning, including space for a metaphor like annunciation. This includes learning to live with shadow and not knowing, cultivating what poet John Keats called negative capability. The language we now use is very different from conventional social science. Words like beauty, awe, mystery, yearning, doubt, suffering, wonder as well as annunciation find space. Hélène Cixous says of the liberating writer, ‘her discourse, even when theoretical or political, is never simple or linear or objectivised: she involves her story in history.... using poetry, fiction, and the theoretical idea of the gift in a feminine economy’. Annunciation as precious gift in seeing self, other and otherness afresh: an incarnation of spirit sustaining lifelong pilgrimage.

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emeritus-linden-west-tuesday-14th-november-2023-6-30-8pm-uk-t/

## The Disorienting Dilemmas of Wellbeing in Higher Education: An Educator's Perspective

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**Abstract:** Wellbeing is a significant issue for university staff and students; staff accounts reveal tensions in delivering HE which we frame here as disorienting dilemmas, noting that dilemmas are not restricted to individual epochal events, but may also be 'cumulative, a progressive sequence of insights resulting in changes in point of view' (Mezirow, 2018, p94). Educators have reached crisis in addressing poor mental health and wellbeing in students finding that educational systems and established teaching and learning techniques negatively impact student mental health (Jones et al., 2020; Wilbraham et al, 2024). However, it is firmly established in educational research that students may respond differently to teaching and assessment as they bring their own unique backgrounds and experiences to their educational journey, these play a significant role in shaping their expectations of what education should be like (Guilbault, 2018, Kahu and Nelson, 2018; Wilbraham et al., 2024). The complexity of needs within a student body from a diverse range of backgrounds present a 'wicked problem' (Armstrong, 2017; Rittel & Webber, 1973) i.e. one that is impossible to solve due to shifting definitions, changing requirements and conflicting perspectives. This may be experienced by staff as confusing, contradictory and even oppositional; further reflection may lead educators to examine what is right, question how to practice, and feel intense uncertainty about how to proceed.

**Key Words:** Wellbeing, Higher Education, Teaching, Transformation

In addition to the pressures of university, the demands placed on students outside of academia can significantly impact their wellbeing. For many students, especially those from marginalised or low-income backgrounds, the need to balance academic responsibilities with paid work and care responsibilities is not always well understood or supported by institutions (Patfield, Gore and Fray, 2022). These external demands on students' time and energy can restrict their availability for attending taught sessions, participating in extracurricular activities, and engaging with course materials outside of scheduled teaching and learning time. Ultimately, this highlights the critical distinction between equity and equality in higher education. Policy and practices rooted in equity perspectives recognise that students come from diverse backgrounds and may require different levels of support to succeed (McCowan, 2016). Students' varying resources, whether financial, social, or academic, mean that their outcomes are not solely determined by their individual efforts but also by the opportunities accessible to them (Wainwright and Watts, 2021).

While student wellbeing is often the focus of research, staff wellbeing is also acknowledged as being a key concern for universities; rates of stress, burnout and low wellbeing have been found to be more prevalent than in the general population (Jayman, Glazzard & Rose, 2022). Research on teaching and learning cultures in universities indicate that educators frequently encounter conditions that significantly restrict the support they can provide to students and hinder the possibility of transformative change (Tormey, 2021). These conditions are multifaceted and include factors such as competition, entrenched hierarchy and power dynamics, prejudicial assumptions, and misconceptions about students (Priestly et al., 2022). The combination of increasing demand and staff who are already under strain creates a complex and high-stakes context for wellbeing.

Transformational learning principles can be applied by educators to evaluate methods, challenge their assumptions and seek learner-centered teaching methods. However, focusing on individual practice alone is insufficient for effecting system-level change within the complex ecology that staff operate (Evans, Huxley, Maxwell and Huxley, 2014); we argue it is education that needs transformation. This echoes existing calls to expand Mezirow's individualist framing of transformation to encompass a holistic system-wide perspective (Hoggan, Malkki, & Finnegan, 2017). Taking this stance, instead of acting as street level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 2010; Carroll & Yeo, 2024) educators could seek to transform their organisations using the 'positive deviance' of resistance (Herrington & van de Fliert, 2018, p. 664) to help drive bottom-up change.

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# **“Some Witchcraft You’ve Done in the Past Twelve Months!” An Exploration of the Transformative Value of Learning *Through* the Arts in Professional Education**

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**Key Words:** Transformative Growth, Arts-based Pedagogy, Aesthetic and Creative Experience, Professional Education, Adult Education

## **Extended Abstract**

### **Introduction**

This paper reports on research which has investigated the transformative value and impact of learning *through* the arts in professional education for the lifelong learning sector in the UK. It has explored, and found, that meaningful and transformative learning can be stimulated and fostered through arts-based pedagogy. Key advocates of the arts such as Eisner (2002, 2005) and Greene (1995, 2008) have highlighted the potential for transformation when knowledge is constructed through the arts and aesthetic experience. In adult education, arts-based practices are recognised as playing a part in the field of transformative learning theory (TLT), with their importance in the role of stimulating, fostering and supporting transformative growth and learning acknowledged (Cranton, 2009; Hoggan & Cranton, 2014; Kokkos, 2019; Lawrence, 2012; Lawrence & Cranton, 2015). However, with reference to transformative learning theory, Cranton in 2009 stated that “surprisingly little has been written” (p. ix) about how educators can incorporate the use of creative and expressive approaches into their practice. In addition, Blackburn Miller (2020, p. 349) calls for further research into the connection between arts activities and transformative learning outcomes. My study therefore contributes to a need to extend and develop research in the area.

Whereas an education *in* the arts involves the learning of a specific arts subject, an education *through* the arts (the focus of this study) is where the arts are used as “pedagogical tools” (Bamford, 2006, p. 11).

### **Research Aims and Questions**

The research aimed to investigate and analyse the contribution and value of arts-based pedagogy in professional learning and its potential to foster transformative learning. It aimed to build upon existing knowledge and deepen understanding in the field of arts-based pedagogy in professional education. Research questions asked:

- Can meaningful and transformative learning in teacher education be stimulated and fostered through arts-based teaching and learnings? (for example, through the use of visual enquiry, poetic enquiry, collaged reflections, film, photography, drama, installation, sculptural modelling, musical experience, body mapping, art gallery interventions, storytelling).
- With regard to arts-based approaches used in teacher education and transformative learning theory, “what form transforms?” (Keegan, 2000, p. 35).
- What is the contribution and value of arts-based pedagogy for professional teacher education for the lifelong learning sector?

## **Theoretical Framework**

As a theoretical framework, transformative learning theory (TLT), originally developed by Mezirow (1978, 2000, 2012), frames and informs the research study. However, Acheson and Dirx (2021, p. 295) advise that “little consensus exists” around a definition of transformative learning. It can take many forms (Etmanski, 2018, p. 154), has many themes and variations (Tisdell, 2012, p. 21), and any attempt to define transformative learning, is, says Washburn (2021, p. 308) “exceedingly difficult”. It can be described as an experience or series of experiences which involve a personal examining, questioning and revising of meaning and perception of experience. Things previously unconsidered or unexamined are questioned and looked at in a new way through critical dialogue and critical reflection, and this may lead to transformation (Cranton and Taylor, 2012; Hoggan, 2016). According to Lawrence and Cranton (2009, p. 313), “the essence of transformative learning is coming to see our ourselves and the world around us from different and more open perspectives”.

## **Methodology**

The research was conducted in a UK university over three academic years with 59 students of mixed ages, all of whom were post graduate pre-service teachers in training. A case study approach was used. I designed a series of arts-based pedagogic approaches and interventions for the investigation. Research methods with participants included interview, focus groups, feedback response and field notes including observation, diary notes and memos. Data analysis used a reflexive thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Through the concepts and lens of transformative learning theory, the analysis, interpretation and discussion of data was completed.

Drawing upon a/r/tography (Irwin, 2013), the methodology included a creative aspect in the form of a visual narrative presented as a series of postcard pages within concertina booklets (see figures). This creative work, bridging my identity as an artist, researcher and teacher, was presented as part of my intellectual enquiry for the research study.

## **Findings**

In relation to the research questions, Lawrence and Cranton’s (2015) theoretical framework for transformative growth provided the structure for analysis and discussion. Inspired by Back and Pulwar’s (2012) research manifesto, the “provocations and capacities that reverberate” (p. 6) through the findings are summarised here:

Arts-based pedagogy was found to encourage “preconditions” (Mezirow, 2000, p.12) for transformative learning. It created an ‘invitation’ which offered a protective haven, freedom and liberation, and joyful opportunities for pleasure, play and self-expression. The arts’ capacity to illuminate, challenge and awaken students to new and different perspectives was demonstrated in the research, together with the awakening effect of the arts (Greene, 1995) which brought students “into dialogue with the world” (Biesta, 2017, p. 37).

Arts-based teaching and learning was found to be a catalyst for critical and reflective thinking on values and beliefs. There was an immediacy of impact, or to use the words of one participant, it was “deeper, quicker”. Learning was promoted in the affective domain, such as the development of increased respect and empathy towards others. The development of critical consciousness was found to lead to transformative growth and change. The study also found that arts-based learning in locations which were separate, away from, or which changed traditional classrooms to become alternative pedagogical spaces and terrain (such as art galleries and



museums) was energising and democratising. It was highly effective in developing awareness and increasing commitment to issues of social injustice and social inequity.

### **Implications for Practice**

Significantly, the research clearly reveals that transformative learning can occur through critical witness and response to art, and it does *not* require students to engage in the making or creating of art. Additionally, an educator does *not* need to be a creative arts practitioner to teach *through* the arts. These are key implications for practice. The study demonstrates that the regular inclusion of arts-based pedagogy over a period of time in professional education can have a gradual, incremental and cumulative effect which can lead to transformative growth, change and transformation. The arts have great potential to educate for social justice, strengthening and deepening commitment to values of inclusion, diversity and equality.

### **Conclusion**

The study concludes that arts-based teaching and learning can make an enriching, dynamic and significant contribution to professional education for the lifelong sector, and that through arts-based pedagogy, transformative growth, learning and change can be fostered, stimulated, and realised. My research provides a strong argument for the arts and culture to be an important part of professional education, and for arts-based pedagogy to be in the curriculum of those learning to teach. The arts should not, to draw upon Greene (2001, p. 19), be “relegated to a figurative back alley”, only used as a “decorative device”. Acheson and Dirx (2021) reflect that transformative learning theory has evolved to reflect numerous theoretical lenses and its framework continues to be extended and elaborated. This research study is presented as a relevant contribution to such development and the research in the field, advocating in particular the role of the arts and creative expression in the transformative learning process. The research thus extends and informs a living theory of transformative learning and it finds, to draw upon Greene (1995, p. 133), that:

Art offers life; it offers hope; it offers the promise of discovery; it offers light.

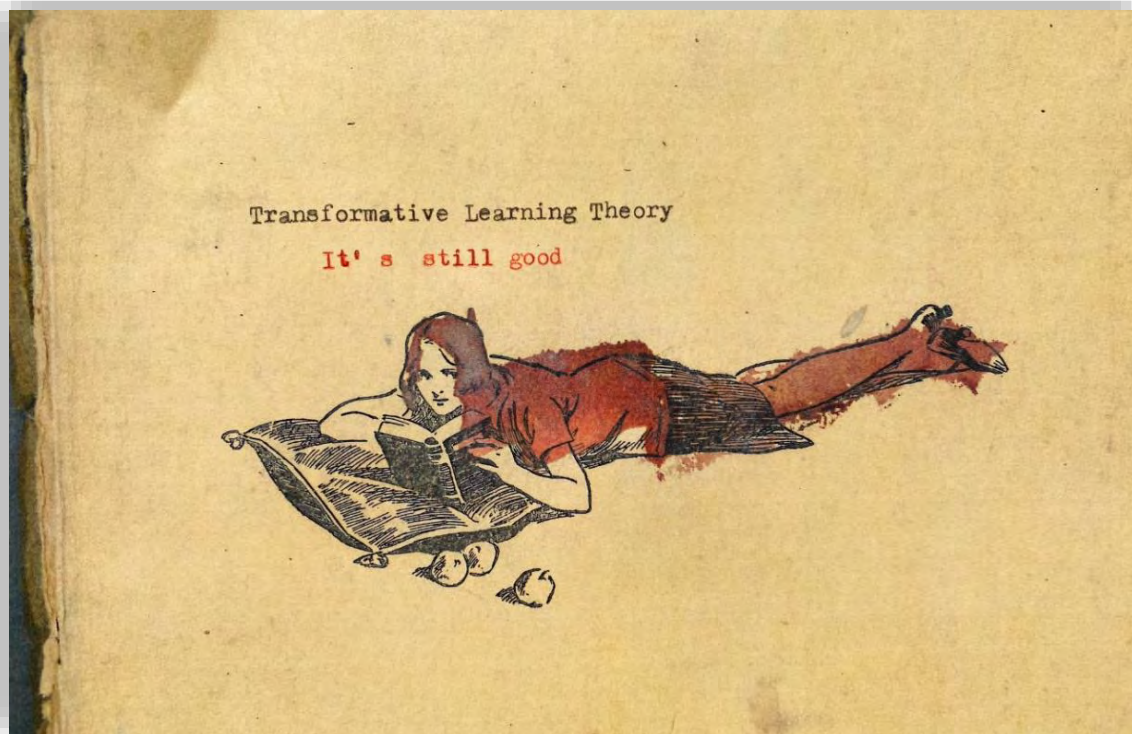
### **Figure 1**

*A concertina booklet from the visual narrative*



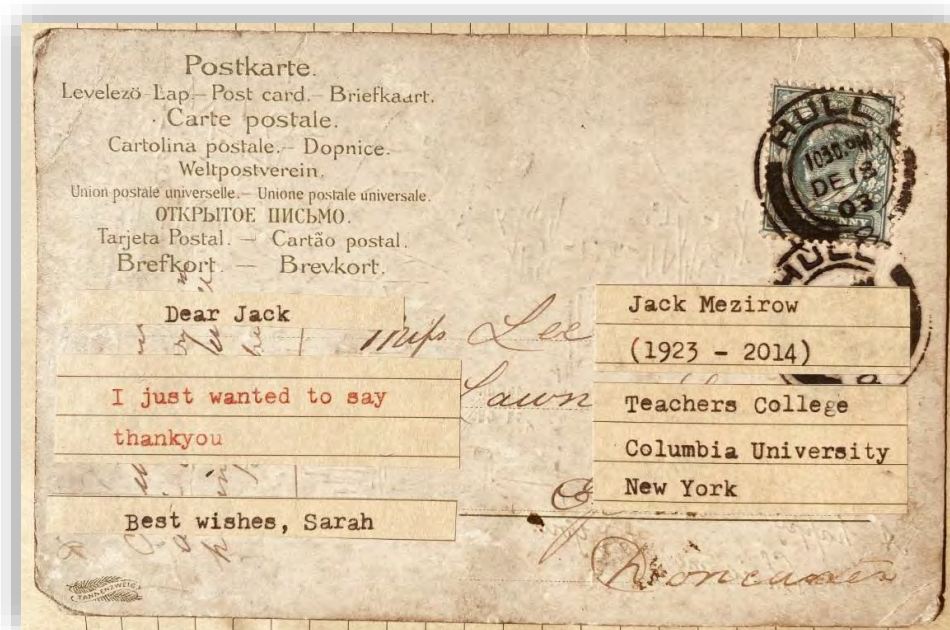
**Figure 2**

*An individual page from a concertina booklet from the visual narrative*



**Figure 3**

*"Thankyou Jack": a final page from the visual narrative:*



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# Emotionally Informed Learning: Feelings Are Scattered Pins Across the Landscape of Learning, Turning on A Point of Possibility, It Has Always Been Me

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**Abstract:** This paper tentatively presents an epistemologically audacious theory that pre-reflective emotions are what transform in transformative learning, thereby challenging long accepted Cartesian duality (Descartes 1972) with the intention to make good trouble for transformative learning theory. In order for something to be perceived as good, I stray away here from notions of morality (Engstrom 1992) and, in line with the premise of my research, posit good as in feeling good about something from an embodied perspective where a joyfulness is attained as the individual 'moves towards an optimal state' (Wilson 2023 p. 145). In relation to trouble, I draw upon Harroway's (2016 p. 18) definition whereby I hope to playfully 'stir up potent response' to the 'potential' (Stein 2000 p. 68), 'as well as settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places' (Harroway 2016 p. 18) through engagement with the poems and fictional extracts representing the findings of my phenomenological enquiry into the perceived lived experience of emotionally informed learning.

**Key Words:** Emotions, Identity, Transformative Learning

## Introduction

This paper presents my phenomenological research enquiry into the lived experience of emotionally informed learning, exploring the role of emotions in informing and transforming learner identity. I present here my rationale for undertaking this research, the data analysis and findings, and I invite you to 'be present' in order to 'stay with trouble' where we may possibly experience 'joy, terror, and collective thinking' (Harroway 2016 p. 48).

## Rationale

This paper raises epistemological considerations regarding the role of emotions in consciousness and transformative learning. This kind of thinking gets anyone into *trouble*, as to raise these questions challenges the culture of emotions in a White Western Society where mind over matter has prevailed, and emotions have long been considered as 'irrational and disruptive forces' (Salovey, Brackett and Mayer 2004 p. 34). My prior experiences working with a range of 'wounded learners' (Wojecki 2007 p. 54) who had disengaged from learning prompted this enquiry and raised the issue that having the will power to engage with learning was not sufficient and those learners remained, despite their efforts, to be disengaged from learning. My experiences across various learning environments demonstrated that a damaged learner identity, perhaps in relation to subject, task, environment, or learning overall, did not appear to be transformable through cognition alone. However, relationships with learning did transform where emotions and feelings in relation to learning were explicitly considered. For instance, the previously excluded young offender who successfully completed national qualifications, or the adult returner to learning who overcame repeated prior exam failures, to thrive in the learning environment, and embrace life-long learning behaviours. I wanted to know why feeling better,

feeling *good*, resulted in a transformative learning experience and therefore undertook this phenomenological enquiry to explore the lived experience of emotionally informed learning.

Additional considerations that prompted this enquiry were raised through the roles that I undertook prior to and during my research. My role in education as a teacher and teacher educator, demonstrated a growing number of interventions such as growth mindset (Dweck 2016) had been adopted by numerous schools with inconsistent results. Teachers are often inundated with different interventions and the lack of reliability of outcomes prompted me to question the role of the underlying learner identity in relation to engagement in learning. I also wished to explore the perception of emotions within education due to the growing discourse regarding emotional regulation (DfE 2019) whereby emotions are positioned as part of the process of learning that requires management rather than as central within learning itself.

My additional role as a player care mentor in a premier league football club exposed me to the complex role of learner identity in elite sport, and the problematic role of emotions where they are seen both as pivotal and problematic in relation to performance. There is a prevailing culture of ‘mental toughness’ (Football Association 2021, Nicholls, Polman, Levey, Backhouse, 2008) which is perpetuated by an outcome focused culture of learning where financial sponsorship is reliant on results and there is a commonly held (but un-evidenced) belief that emotions create *trouble*. These views did not correlate with my lived experience working in elite sport, where emotional acceptance and literacy enabled players to build resilience and improve their learning and well-being. This research hoped to challenge these views and inform the growing movement in elite sport where athletes themselves are calling for further understanding of the role of emotions (BBC Sport 2021).

Managing a specialist provision for disengaged young people I had witnessed the negative consequences of ‘wounded learners’ (Wojecki 2007 p. 54) who were disengaged with learning and was aware of the implications of a negative learner identity on life choices, health and wellbeing (Hegna 2019). This appeared to have particular implications in relation to young offenders whereby those who had been excluded from school were 12 times more likely to be imprisoned in their lifetime (McCara and McVie 2016).

This combination of persuasive factors led me to my main research question:

What is the lived experience of emotionally informed learning? I also considered the following subsidiary questions:

What is an emotionally informed perception of learning and how does this inform learner identity?

What is transformative learning and how does transformation of learner identity occur?

What role does the facilitator of learning play in emotionally informed learning?

## Key Concepts

### Emotions

Emotions are problematic to define (Dixon 2012; Tyng, Amin, Saad and Malik 2017) perhaps because they have historically caused *trouble*. Even from early accounts of emotions, the need to control ‘passions and stirrings’ (Wilson 2023 p. 43) raises questions as to why there is a societal need to not perceive oneself to be enslaved to feelings and emotions and instead believe that rationale and reason can prevail (Dixon 2012). This Cartesian duality exists today, even in light of contradictory neuroscientific evidence of embodiment and the position of emotions as pre-reflective in consciousness (Damasio 2011, 2018, Narvaez 2014, Panksepp 2011, Michael 2020). The definition presented here challenges notions of emotions being something that need

to be measured, managed or controlled (Salovey, Brackett and Mayer 2004, Mayer-Salovey-Caruso-Cherkasskiy 2011) and instead require explicit consideration within emotionally informed learning.

Emotions within this paper relate to:

the embodied events resulting from experiences that are known to individuals as feelings arising through perception of emotions (Damasio 2010). These feelings become somatic 'markers' (Damasio 2010 p.175) for future experiences which strengthen the pre-reflective embodied response (emotion) and in turn reinforce the knowing of the feeling. (Wilson 2023 p. 82)

This internal feeling world informs perception, and repetitions of the embodied events results in the creation of neural pathways, building identity from the inside out, as the somatic marker strengthens (Michael 2020). This process informs all of consciousness and, pivotally, means that pre-reflective emotion, rather than cognition, acts as a driver to perception and meaning making.

## **Identity**

The term identity here refers to:

the self that results from the pre-reflective emotionally informed perceived consciousness of individuals (Damasio 2010, 2018) and is applied in this research in relation to learning. The emotionally perceived self is formed through the emotional encounters as discussed in the definition of emotions whereby somatic markers are created which inform the creation of neural pathways (Damasio 2010). These pathways then inform the identity of the individual (Wilson 2023 p. 95-96).

This definition of identity in relation to learning contrasts with the dominant discourse in this area which focuses on the social or community aspects of learner identity formation (Wilson 2023). Social Identity Theory (Stryker and Burke 2000) and communities of practice (Wenger 1998) take the position that identity is formed through engagement with the external world in order to belong to a particular desired group and gain acceptance. Whilst the definition here does not dispute that the external world is pivotal in influencing the internally created identity. It is through the internal, embodied, emotional self that the identity initially emerges rather than primarily through the will to belong. The relationship between the self and the world is presented here as more complicated, where there may be a contrast between the self internally experienced and the one presented to the world (Wilson 2023, Narvaez 2014).

Other identity theories, such as those by Erikson (1982) and Illeris (2014) are also problematic as they do not believe that identity is truly formed until maturation. My personal and professional lived experience strongly contrasts with this, whereby, pivotal events in childhood have a clear and strong impact on identity from a very young age (Park, Crocker, Mickelson 2004). In Illeris' work there is also the issue that identity is discussed as a concept rather than a human, physical consciousness' (Wilson 2023 p. 95). He places emotions alongside behaviours, resulting from an identity constructed within a social context rather than emotions being at the core of identity (Illeris 2014). His discussion is largely abstract with use of the term 'dimensions' of identity (Illeris 2014 p. 69) which fails to account for the *messier* embodied complexity of identity formation.

## Transformative Learning

Transformative Learning is defined as:

consideration of the pre-reflective emotional response to the learning experience which, in turn, informs the learner identity. The emotion is presented here as being at the core of the identity and also as the focus of the transformation. This aligns with the work of Panksepp (2011) where he presents that a feeling must be '*out-felt*' and that it cannot be '*out-thought*'. (Wilson 2023 p. 63)

This definition clearly places the emotion as the point of transformation in transformative learning. This contrasts with other theorists who posit that cognition is what is transformed. Mezirow (1978, 1991), Illeris (2014), Dirkx (1997, 2006) and Taylor and Cranton (2012) all acknowledge that emotions are **part** of the process of transformation, whether part of the initial dilemma or arising from the transformation, however, they are not portrayed as **the point** of transformation. This may have arisen from the previously mentioned prevailing Cartesian duality whereby cognition is positioned as superior. Mezirow states that 'control of one's thoughts is the ultimate aim of education' (Dirkx, Mezirow, Cranton 2006 p. 134). Taylor and Marineau (2022) concur with the view taken here that emotions drive cognition, however, they still do not identify the emotion as the place of transformation in transformative learning.

The theory of out-feeling-a-feeling from Panksepp (2011) is that which is being posited here. The notion that you cannot out-think-a-feeling arises from the earlier definition of emotions, where they are presented as pre-reflective as the creators of neural pathways that determine beliefs and behaviours. Thinking about a particular belief reinforces a particular pathway, even if those thoughts are negative, and therefore this process is counter-intuitive to transformation. Instead, what is necessary, is to explicitly acknowledge the pre-reflective emotion, in order to reconsider whether the perceived emotion is appropriate, and where it is not, opening up to the possibility of another feeling. Repeated enquiry and openness to a new feeling then allows for the transformation of the pre-reflective emotion resulting in transformative learning.

## Methodology

This research sought to explore the lived experience of emotionally informed learning and therefore a phenomenologically informed qualitative approach was chosen. I aligned with Husserlian descriptive phenomenology focusing on the essence of the experience (Husserl 1913), which I present as perceived through the pre-reflective emotional encounter and subsequently created somatic marker (Damasio 2010, 2018). I approached my research from a position of 'wonder' and 'poverty' (Van Manen 2014 p. 27) and took account of myself within the research through a process of bracketing whereby I was aware of perceptions within the research. This 'meta-awareness' supported my efforts 'to view the lived experience of the other with purity' (Wilson 2023, p. 133).

A phenomenologically informed qualitative approach arose from consideration of my ontological and epistemological belief that pre-reflective emotions inform consciousness and knowing, and that this knowing can be re-known after transformation of the pre-reflective emotion. In order for the transformation of knowing to occur, I align with Stein's (2000 p. 68) perspective regarding 'potential' where there is the potential of what is to **be known**, and an allowance for a new knowing that has not previously been known.



## **Research**

A phenomenological study was undertaken where participants were drawn from those who I had worked with during the prior two years. No other selection criteria were considered. Participants were invited to a semi-structured interview, bringing with them a personally selected image of their choice in order to represent a ‘seized’ (Husserl 1913 p. 31) essence of their learner identity. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in-line with Vagle’s (2018) phenomenological interview process whereby the participant controls the flow of the interview with the interviewer viewing it as a ‘conversation’ (Vagle 2018 p. 80), enabling the participant’s voice and lived experience to remain at the heart of the data. The data was analysed using Vagle’s (2018) whole-part-whole method with member checking and bracketing undertaken throughout the process to alleviate bias.

## **Findings**

The three main themes that arose from the data were emotions, identity and transformative learning. Whilst I used inductive rather than deductive coding, these themes did align with the concepts considered in the literature review, something that I continually questioned throughout the coding process and checked through journaling, member checking and the supervision process. I invite you to connect with the following poems which I created through my analysis of the data to represent the themes of emotions, identity, and transformative learning:

### **Emotions**

Feelings are scattered pins across the landscape of learning, they plot the direction  
a map shaped by my heart, my hopes, my hurts.

We scatter the pins – you and me. You within me, made mine.

The road arcs to tell a story - I can’t... I won’t... I’ll try... I can... I believe...

So simple

So difficult

The courage to try

turning on a point of possibility

How can you help? Connect. (Wilson 2023 p. 204)

### **Identity**

The Riddle: Who am I? Who I am is what I believe and what I believe is dependent on  
what I believe about who I am. Who I will be is determined by who I believe I am who I  
can be.

Open.

Allow myself.

Believe something else. Become someone else.

Possibility.

It has always been me.

Don’t stop me. (Wilson 2023 p. 204).

### **Transformative Learning**

Transformation

Resistance. I stopped making it all about you, about me. I turned.

I chose possible. I owned what I found.

Had fun. Made it all about me. Tomorrow  
I may do it all over again (Wilson 2023 p. 204).

In response to the main research question ‘What is the perceived lived experience of emotionally informed learning?’ I present the following poem:

### **Emotionally Informed Learning**

I invite you  
To feel your feelings  
To think about your thoughts  
To know your knowing was how it was known and not how it must be known  
To play with limitless possibilities  
Of who you are, your identity, the learner  
I challenge you  
To consider another, other  
To allow yourself to feel anew  
different  
you choose.  
I love you,  
For all that you are, will be, have been and can be  
You decide. (Wilson 2023 p. 309-310).

I present that the perceived lived experience of EIL is that a learner identity is created by pre-reflective emotionally informed experiences of learning which create somatic markers, and which, upon repetition, create a learner identity. Transformation of the pre-reflective emotion, somatic marker and subsequent learner identity is possible with the supporting conditions of explicit consideration of current emotions through self-awareness of emotions, meta-cognition, control of the process of transformation by the learner with choice over possibilities, playing with new possible emotional responses to aspects of learning, and professional love from the facilitator of learning. This process is identified aptly as the ‘turning point (DO)’ (Wilson 2023 p. 182) by one participant.

The use of ‘I’ throughout participant statements demonstrates how the learner identity is formed by the individual rather than as part of a group or community ‘I allowed it, it has always been me (RT)’ (Wilson 2023 p. 196). There is a lack of reflection present within the statements and the data as a whole. This contrasted significantly with the work of Mezirow (1978) and others on transformative learning, therefore I member checked with participants for accuracy. They concurred that they had not experienced any noteworthy reflection.

Pivotal to the process being one of joy and less of struggle, is perhaps the process of giving permission to themselves to transform that was discussed by participants, find out what I need and take what I need in order to learn’ (RT) where the participant is demonstrating a sense of empowerment over their own learning. The ‘allowing’ (RT), ‘believing’ (JS) and use of ‘take’ (JS) depict the participants giving themselves permission to transform. (Wilson 2023 p. 193).

Within this permission, I would also suggest is present a sense of possibility, and it is here that the playfulness of trying aspects of a new learner identity arises. This is depicted

through the joyful accounts of their experiences of EIL, ‘I enjoyed (RT)’ (Wilson 2024 p. 174), ‘I bounce (AM)’ (Wilson 2023 p. 242), ‘Open-minded... fun (RT)’ (Wilson 2023 p. 182), ‘excitement (DM)’, ‘one of the best learning experiences (JS)’ (Wilson 2023 p. 186). The challenge within a process of transformation (Mezirow 1978) is depicted here as being ‘Rejuvenating... a shot in the arm... lifts me up (DM)’ (Wilson 2023 p. 190), suggesting that the difficulty is still present in EIL but is an enjoyable rather than disturbing process when encountered through ‘trying (RT)’ (Wilson 2023 p. 242).

Kindness and challenge in relation to facilitators of learning arose as key areas of importance from the data. ‘I will always be consciously positive (JS)’, ‘I just want to build a connection... so he actually likes me (AfM)’ (Wilson 2023 p. 192). Pivotality they should provide the conditions that allow each day of learning to ‘start... afresh (JS)’ (Wilson 2023 p. 182). The facilitator of learning should not control the process of transformation, instead allowing the learner to ‘take ownership (DO)’ (Wilson 2023 p. 182). There is an acknowledgement from the participants of historical negative experiences of those facilitating learning and the possible negative implications on the learner identity, through perception ‘I was very often told I wasn’t good enough (JS)’ (Wilson 2023 p. 194) and how with the right support ‘I changed completely (JS)’ (Wilson 2023 p. 194)

The findings were presented through the previously noted poems, wordles, fictional scripted conversation and a fable where I played with the data and invite others to do so through their engagement with my work. I also created a set of *descriptors* of emotionally informed learning (Wilson 2023 p. 210), however, these felt overly instructional in contrast to the autonomy of the learner that was arising from the data in relation to EIL. Instead, the works of fiction enabled me ‘not to influence, but to invite the reader/audience to become a participant in the research. Invite, problematise and present a choice, present a possibility’ (Wilson 2024 p. 176)

Poetry was utilised to present ‘a window into the heart of human experience’ (McCullis 2013 p. 83). The fictionalised conversation between Husserl, myself and two participants (representing others) drew on precedent from Stein’s depiction of a conversation between Husserl and St Thomas’ of Aquinas – Knowledge and Faith (2000) and Horton and Freire’s ‘We make the Road by Walking’ (1990) which both invite you to become an active observer of their discussions. These approaches to presenting the data align with the phenomenological nature of the research and honour the lived experience of the reader and audience.

### **Conclusion**

This paper presents a new consideration of transformative learning theory. The implications of this are considerable for those involved in education and elite sport. For learners, this presents autonomy regarding learner identity. For those involved in delivering learning in education and elite sport there are questions to consider regarding control, labelling and assessment criteria within the classroom and wider organisation settings. Pivotality there is a repositioning of emotions within learning and the wider control where they move from being *other* to being at the core of learning.

Finally, I end with an extract from the fictional Husserl in the scripted conversation: I leave this process with my own ‘seizing’ of the lived experience. I see the transformation as the drawing out of the essence of the matter (the pre-reflective emotion) into an embodied state that informs the thoughts and actions, creating the identity. And when that essence is drawn out and considered, it can be recognised that it

was only a momentary experience, it was the matter of that moment that does not need to be made the matter of all moments. A choice can be made to feel differently. This feeling makes all of the difference. In that moment we become another. (Wilson 2023 p. 308).

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# The Transformative Power of Sustainable Learning: Facilitating Teacher Professional Development in Displacement, Refugee, and Crisis Settings

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**Abstract:** This paper considers transformative learning (TL) in the context of teacher professional development in displacement, refugee, and crisis settings (DRCS). It demonstrates a broadened view of the “ideal conditions” that facilitate or impede transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997) created by the Sustainable Learning Framework (SLF) (Woolis, 2017). Transformative Learning (TL) in DRCS must attend to collective trauma (Hirschberger, 2018) resulting from catastrophic events that create a crisis of meaning for individuals and learning ecosystems. It must consider the whole scale triggering of disorienting dilemmas (Young et al., 2022). Various traditional and contemporary theories inform the SLF to address current educational challenges. The practice-oriented SLF supports complex and nuanced learning to deal with meaning-making in a world where “*not knowing*” is the new normal (Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2020). The paper documents teacher professional development in Niger, Kenya, and Lebanon and shows how the SLF created the conditions necessary for teacher transformative learning. The authors report from their roles in the learning ecosystem: a teacher, project manager, organization leader, and SLF architect. The project introduced Quality Holistic Learning (QHL) to educators supporting their students and their peer teachers, centering them as leaders and content co-creators and structuring learning within a community of practice.

**Key Words:** Sustainable, Learning, Digital, Refugee, SDG4

## Introduction: Transformation, the Sustainable Learning Framework, and the Quality Holistic Learning Project

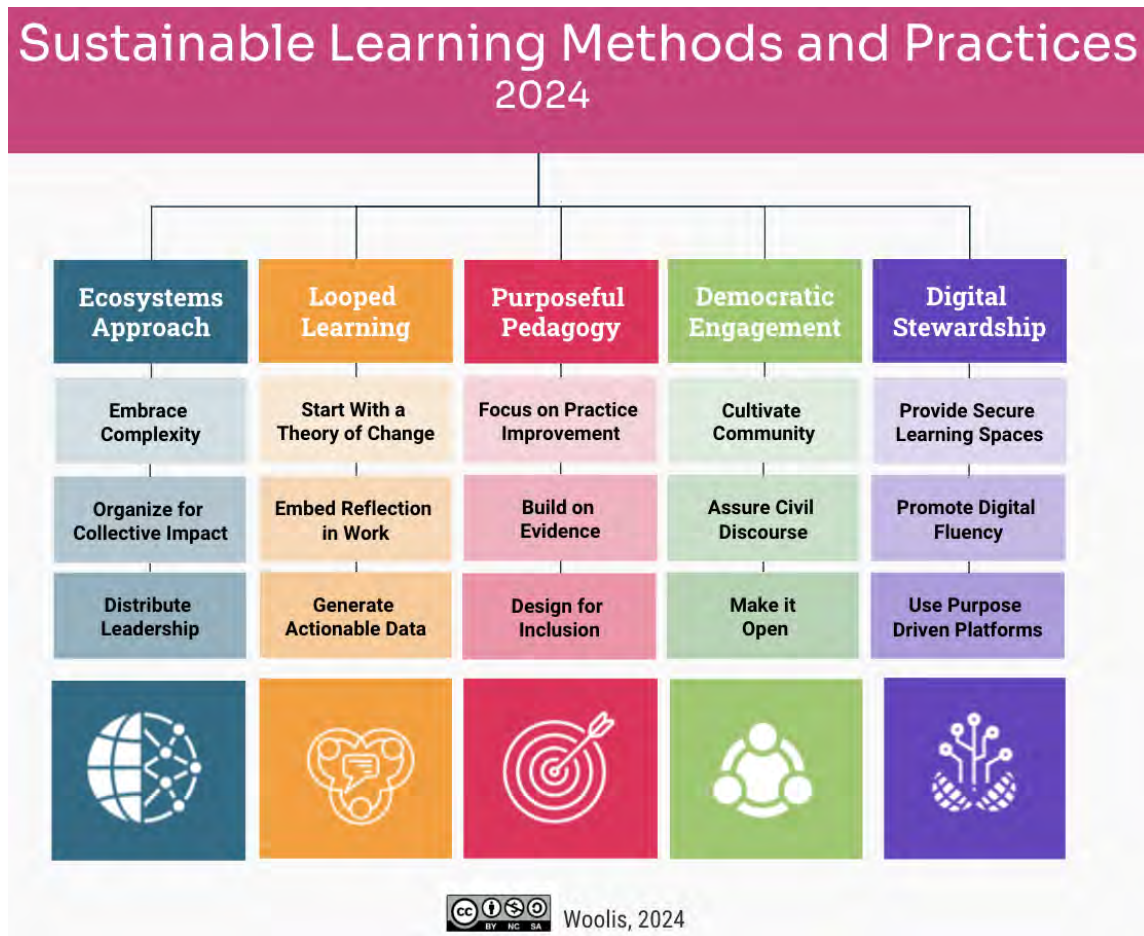
Traditional approaches to teaching and learning have proven inadequate in the face of the highly complex conditions created by disruptions, including war, a pandemic, and technology (Carney, 2022). Such inadequacy calls for a reshaping of Transformative Learning (Mezirow, 1991; Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2020) and a critical reconsideration of the “ideal conditions” that facilitate or impede it (Mezirow, 1997). The education of refugees, among the most complex situations, makes this call clear and urgent.

Four conditions contribute to the high degree of complexity in DRCS education: *scale* - there are over 110 million displaced individuals globally, with 42% being students whose education has been severely disrupted or halted altogether (UNHCR 2024.); *resources* - an anticipated shortage of approximately 44 million teachers worldwide by 2030 (UNESCO, 2024); *preparation* - including the inadequate quality of instruction of refugees in countries of first asylum (Burns, 2015); *limited access* - to the Internet and digital platforms (Abu-Amsha, 2022).

The Sustainable Learning Framework (Woolis, 2017, 2024) offers a conceptual re-alignment of Transformative Learning (Mezirow, 1991). The SLF (SLF) addresses current educational challenges by using various traditional and contemporary theories in addition to Mezirow's. The practice-oriented SLF supports sufficiently complex and nuanced learning to deal with contradictions, ambivalence, and meaning-making in a world where *not knowing* is the new normal (Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2020).

**Figure 1**

*The Sustainable Learning Framework: Methods and Practices*



The Sustainable Learning Framework provided the foundation for the Quality Holistic Learning (QHL) project, which is the subject of this paper. The paper documents the application of the SLF by actors not directly engaged in academic scholarship, working to educate educators in displacement, refugee, and crisis settings.

### **Sustainable Learning in Practice: Designing Teacher Professional Development for Quality Holistic Learning**

This paper looks at how the SLF was used to develop and deliver a professional development program for teachers in Chad, Kenya, Lebanon, and Niger. Transformative Learning in DRCS has many complicating factors. It must attend to collective trauma

(Hirschberger, 2018) resulting from cataclysmic events that create a crisis of meaning for individuals and learning ecosystems. It must consider the whole-scale triggering of disorienting dilemmas (Young et al., 2022) - questioning assumptions that result in transformed beliefs. Transformative learning in DRCS also requires teacher and student resilience - the ability to withstand and cope with challenges and undergo transitions in a sustainable, fair, and democratic manner (European Commission, 2022).

The Quality Holistic Learning (QHL) Project aimed to contribute to efforts to transform education in response to recent global events and shared crises by addressing concerns around quality, equity, and inclusion through holistic learning in education in displacement contexts. It is an example of the SLF method of Purposeful Pedagogy. The program was designed using an Ecosystem Approach, which involves planning for collective impact and distributing leadership. The QHL program situates teachers' practice within larger circles of research, evidence, and impact. Built upon the SLF, QHL was conceived to address challenges arising across the educational ecosystem, including educators and students, families and institutions, communities, and governing bodies at all scales (see Fig. 2).

**Figure 2**  
*Quality Holistic Learning Ecosystem*



The QHL Project aimed to improve learning outcomes for children in displacement contexts, including academic, social, and emotional learning (SEL). The project achieved this using Democratic Engagement in two ways: first, through a participatory process that centered teachers as experts in their local educational contexts who are best situated to guide the



development of professional learning resources, and second, through the provision of co-created, quality holistic professional learning resources and opportunities for educators across Education in Displacement contexts as Open Education Resources (Abu-Amsha, 2022).

### **Creating the Quality Holistic Program Using the Sustainable Learning Framework**

QHL used a mix of SLF practices to achieve its pedagogic goals, measured by key variables.

**Figure 3**

*The Quality Holistic Learning Project Process*



### **Forming Teacher Teams**

The initiation of the QHL Project began using the SLF method of taking an Ecosystem Approach to assemble teacher-fellow teams across four designated countries—Lebanon, Kenya, Niger, and Chad. This process was conducted via collaborations with local community-based and non-governmental organizations, educational institutions’ teacher training programs, international NGO connections, and direct referrals among the teaching community. Selection focused on teachers from various regions within the target countries and with diverse experiences of displacement. The teacher applicants needed to exhibit a strong desire to advance the education of displaced students and have a commitment to the QHL Purposeful Pedagogy. Successful applicants had to possess the skills, minimal equipment, and connectivity necessary for engaging in online professional development, resource development, and facilitation, described in SLF as Digital Stewardship. Despite the numerous limitations, teams were formed in all the target countries except Chad. Twenty educators were eventually selected to serve as fellows throughout the project from Spring 2021 to Spring 2022. A few new fellows joined the national teams for a second round till mid-2023.

### **Co-Creating Teacher Professional Development with Teacher Fellows**

The QHL Project experience of co-creating Teacher Professional Development (TPD) resources with Teacher Fellows in low-resource contexts, brought to light both the engagement and creativity of educators working in challenging environments. Teacher Fellows committed to meetings late in the evening to accommodate blackouts. They reached out to their communities to pilot the materials with their peers with minimal resources. They highlighted additional topics such as teacher wellbeing. They were Democratically Engaged and engaging.

The variation in digital proficiency, connectivity, and prior exposure to digital platforms and EdTech Tools underscored the need to use the SLF method of Digital Stewardship for flexible and adaptable approaches to resource development. These factors directly influenced the types of resources Teacher Fellows could co-create and their ways of engagement with the process. This variability necessitated a tailored approach, where the format of resources — online courses, handbooks, or offline workshops — was determined by the specific constraints and capabilities within each context. Also, the ways of engagement needed to be adapted, and

many conversations were taken from synchronous Zoom meetings to asynchronous WhatsApp discussions.

### **Piloting**

The Teacher Fellows were committed to evaluating the effectiveness and the relevance of the resources they co-developed for their peers required by the SLF method of Looped Learning. They orchestrated and supported the pilot testing of their creations within their communities and with their colleagues. Even in Chad, where digital access severely limited the formation of a local team, materials were trialed with the aid of UNHCR and local NGO partnerships, emphasizing the project's commitment to fostering educational resilience across diverse and resource-limited environments, another example of Democratic Engagement and taking an Ecosystems Approach.

### **Reviewing**

Looped Learning was also evident when teacher Fellows helped gather extensive feedback from their peers during each pilot activity in the piloting period. The collected data and responses allowed the Teaching Fellows and project team to identify areas for enhancement and ensure the resources were aligned with the educators' needs and the realities of their teaching environments.

The Teacher Fellows' engagement in this evaluative process deepened their investment in the project. It transformed their understanding and practices regarding the development of learning materials, demonstrating the efficacy of SLF Looped Learning practices.

### **Publishing**

Once revised, the co-created professional development materials were released as Open Educational Resources (OER) in a repository maintained by Childhood Education International and featured in other open platforms available to a broader audience of educators. The Open Education Resources (published in Arabic, English, French, and Ukrainian) are now available to empower educators in Lebanon, Kenya, Niger, and beyond with valuable tools for their professional development and the enhancement of their pedagogical practices.

The QHL project team and program participants—the Teaching Fellows—took an Ecosystems Approach in developing the QHL resources and considered national curricula, existing professional development opportunities, infrastructure, and local constraints (e.g., internet connectivity, political and economic pressures, legal issues for displaced people, large class sizes, and other classroom conditions).

## **Impact of the SLF Process on Teachers**

The teachers' engagement in the different phases of the project transformed teachers' perspectives not only on what pedagogical strategies work best in their context but also on how they view teachers as professionals, themselves included. Throughout the project, the team had the chance to lead and reflect on their practices inside and outside of the classroom, redefining their roles as teachers. As agents of change, Teaching Fellows are leading collective professional dialogues with other teachers from their context (private, public, semi-private, NGOs) to reflect on their assumptions, convictions, and values. Teacher Fellows are now picking up the resources and exploring a course of action in which resources can be employed to fit the needs of their students and community of teachers. As such, it transforms their understanding of what professional development could look like.

This collective teacher leadership has inspired teachers to work independently in planning ways resources can be used to target the needs of their context. One Teacher Fellow

from Lebanon, a homeroom teacher in an NGO, has been actively exploring new roles in his school and community while employing quality holistic learning approaches with the students and teachers. He has planned with teachers what PD workshops will be needed for the academic year. The dynamic we can see is similar to iterations Teacher Fellows engaged in during the project's first phase. This Teacher Fellow has critically reflected on his role, explored a new course of action, and is now building new relationships with the teachers in his community. He has taken the resources, modified them to fit the needs of the teachers, and delivered the content in ways that teachers can interact and participate in. Then, new community practices were created to ensure conversations on how quality holistic learning approaches can be used best with the students and among teachers.

Another Teacher Fellow has been leading professional learning conversations and workshops with several schools and school principals in their community. They are creating a network of connected teachers outside of the classrooms. Those conversations are centered around needs, challenges, skills, and knowledge acquisition required by the teachers so they can implement quality holistic learning approaches in their classrooms. Teacher Fellows and teachers in their community work collaboratively in planning and implementing the application of quality holistic learning approaches. In the process they look to deliberately transform their own learning experiences.

This openness to challenge traditional hierarchical power dynamics in the community to surface the perspective of “by teachers for teachers” has boosted teacher confidence from passive agents to actors in the transformation process. In all of the mentioned cases, not only have teachers transformed their perspectives about themselves, but the educator leaders have stepped down to allow those teachers to be the agents of change within their communities. This was made possible only when teachers had taken action.

The necessities imposed by the context inspired the Teacher Fellows to ensure the project's continuity and scale it from a small team into a community of practice that includes the eight governorates in Lebanon. Subcommunities from the larger communities are creating a unique dynamic and learning to take place harmoniously. The transformation has shifted the traditional perspectives and perceptions of teachers' and students' roles to include more holistic and inclusive approaches. One Teacher Fellow (in Kenya's Kakuma camp) emphasizes the perspective transformation as he relates shifting from traditional teaching paradigms to embracing more holistic and inclusive approaches in his classroom and how this was transformative for him and his students.

### **Mutual Transformative Learning: The Project Team Perspective**

Based on Sustainable Learning Methods and practices, the QHL Project has been a transformative learning process for fellow teachers and the project team. Throughout the project, the team engaged in participatory practices that led them to challenge and reconstruct their existing understanding of teacher realities in different countries and contexts. The team underwent a significant transformation in their approach as adult trainers; they had to adapt to the different realities, and this not only opened the door to creativity and innovation but also deepened the conviction in the value of participation and co-creation even when the audience is deemed less expert in the topic because they are the ultimate experts in their contexts.

## Outcomes

The Quality Holistic Learning Project's favorable outcomes underscore its potential for success in multiple contexts and demonstrate the potential of the Sustainable Learning Framework more broadly. The external evaluation shows notable changes in beliefs and practices about teaching and learning, reflecting the transformative learning of the teachers. Figure 4 shows that a combination of SLF methods and practices is associated with positive changes in teachers' self-perception of their ability to support students. Teachers report improvements in their relationships with students as they change their teaching practices.

### Figure 4

#### *Quality Holistic Learning Evaluation Metrics*

OUTCOME VARIABLES MEASURED PRE- AND POST-COURSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Belief in need to provide psychosocial support to students</li><li>▪ Use of teaching practices (incorporating SEL into lessons; focusing on learners' strengths instead of challenges)</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Preparation to attend to students' holistic learning needs</li><li>▪ Preparation to deliver trauma-informed, culturally responsive pedagogy</li></ul>
OUTCOME VARIABLES MEASURED POST-COURSE ONLY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Changes in student behaviors ("students are showing more.."):<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Kindness, Calm, Focus</li><li>- Positive relationships with educator and each other</li><li>- Attending school and class more regularly, and engaging actively in lessons</li></ul></li><li>▪ Changes in instructional practices ("I am doing more..."):<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Holistic lesson plans</li><li>- Making connections between students' home lives/interests and formal curriculum</li><li>- Differentiating lessons</li><li>- Collaborating with colleagues</li></ul></li><li>▪ Change in educator's psychosocial outcomes:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Feeling more connected to learners</li><li>- Feeling more confident in teaching</li><li>- Feeling less stress and more joy as an educator</li></ul></li><li>▪ Ratings of QHL resource(s) ("To what extent ..."):<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Course aligns with needs as an educator and students' needs</li><li>- Educator can apply learnings to daily work</li><li>- Course changed how educator works</li><li>- Pilot resource(s) prepared educator to work with refugee, displaced, and vulnerable students</li><li>- Likelihood of recommending the QHL course/resource to colleagues</li></ul></li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Number of hours spent on the course</li></ul>

### Implications: Transformative Sustainable Learning

The authors suggest that the Sustainable Learning Framework offers practical pathways to creating the conditions for transformation in the tradition of Mezirow (1991), Argyris & Schon (1978), and Freire (2018). It also integrates more contemporary research from complexity science (New England Complex Systems Institute) and ecosystems science (Krivy, 2023), making transformative learning better suited for an age of continuous, multiple, and simultaneous disasters and disruption.

Finally, the SLF may help achieve the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), particularly SDG 4.A, of increasing the supply of qualified teachers where they are most needed through sustainable and transformative teacher professional development. Since its creation, the Refugee Educator Academy Woolis (2018), designed using Sustainable Learning methods and practices (Diana Woolis, Julie Kasper principal investigators), has served educators in more than 50 countries and on six continents, directly impacting thousands of educators who collectively reach tens of thousands of learners.

**Figure 5**

*Locations of Refugee Educator Academy Participants*



\*Countries in yellow are those with active, focused projects as of 2023, and countries in blue are those from which participants in courses or webinars have come.

The Sustainable Learning Framework has been used to:

- Develop free online professional development resources for early childhood educators, primary school teachers, and practical psychologists in Ukraine in partnership with the Ukrainian Institute of Education Development and working with representatives from the [Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science](#) and [Teach for Ukraine](#).
- Develop [three micro-credentials](#) on Quality Holistic Learning. These competency-based assessments of an educator's areas of expertise expand the possibilities for self-directed transformative learning. They are rigorous, self-paced professional development opportunities for educators looking for professional development that builds from their context. Micro-credentials allow teachers to personalize professional development and demonstrate their teaching competencies.

- Assess MENA Higher Education Pedagogy, Technology, and the Refugee Experience (2021) focused on Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon. (D. Woolis, Principal Investigator) funded by the Open Society Foundation. The project's overall goal was to foster access, inclusion, and academic success for higher education learners in the Middle East, particularly refugees and other displaced persons, through the effective combination of pedagogy and technology. Current practice, skill gaps, resource needs, and preparation for working with refugee students were identified. A faculty leadership team developed a survey and conducted 15 workshops/focus groups (in Arabic) that included over 200 people to accomplish the goals: a situation analysis, a framework for faculty development, and a blueprint for action.

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# PECHAKUCHA



# PECHAKUCHA

Storytelling using  
presentations of 20  
slides for 20 seconds  
each



# **Collective Transformative Learning: Aligning Social Change Strategies with Cultural Context**

Judi Aubel, PhD

Grandmother Project – Change through Culture

**Abstract:** In the Global South, most programs promoting adolescent girls' education and development reflect concepts and methods from psychology, communications and public health that focus on individual-level change while ignoring the influence of collectivist cultural structures and values on community learning and social change. In these programs, adult education constructs and methods are rarely referred to. In southern Senegal, the Girls' Holistic Development (GHD) program, developed by the NGO Grandmother Project – Change through Culture, provides an example of a Collective Transformative Learning (CTL) strategy that promotes community-wide learning and change to: support girls' education; and prevent child marriage; teen pregnancy; and female genital mutilation (FGM). GHD was developed through a multi-year action research process. It draws heavily on Paulo Freire's work on education for social change and also on insights from community development and community psychology. GHD promotes dialogue and critical thinking between a wide range of community actors to bring about community-led social change. GHD develops key facets of transformative learning often given limited attention related to cultural context and to the need for strong multi-dimensional relationships within learning settings. Research on GHD has documented positive effects of the CTL approach catalyzing collective community action to promote change for girls.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Culture, Intergenerational, Collectivist Cultures

## **Background to Girls' Holistic Development Program**

In many places in the Global South, girls are victims of discrimination that limits their rights and development. In southern Senegal, prevalent problems facing girls include: limited support by families for girls' education; child marriage (before 18); teen pregnancy and FGM. Other prevalent factors that influence Senegalese girls' lives and development are: the loss of cultural values and identity; the breakdown in intergenerational relationships; limited social cohesion and weak leadership in communities.

Most programs to support change for girls reflect communication and education strategies grounded in reductionist concepts from behavioral psychology and linear models of change. Limited impact of past programs supporting girls can be attributed to: girl-centric strategies; the use of directive and individual-focused communication/education methods; and the misalignment between program content and cultural context. Most strategies to promote community learning and change do not draw on concepts and methods from adult education.

## **Collective Transformative Learning (CTL) approach**

In non-western, collectivist cultures, interdependency, and respect for others in the social environment are cardinal values. Individuals' opportunities for learning and change are significantly influenced by prescribed social norms within family and community systems in which individuals are embedded. Recognizing the extensive influence of the group in collectivist

cultures on individuals' thoughts and actions, Nigerian adult educator, Mejiuni (2012) explains that, "In collectivist cultures, individuals see themselves first as members of one or more groups, and they are motivated by the values, norms, duties and obligations imposed by the group" (p.315). In contrast to transformative learning's historical focus on individual reflection as a basis for change, and in light of the strong influence of others on individuals in collectivist cultures, Mejiuni calls for a Collective Transformative Learning (CTL) approach that is both inclusive and participatory. She asserts that in collectivist cultures, an inclusive and dialogical process is required to catalyze learning and social change.

### **CTL Approach to Promote Girls' Holistic Development**

The aim of GHD is both to bring about community-wide change in harmful social norms and to strengthen community capacity to support girls. GMP developed the GHD Program through a process of action research over a 10-year period. The conceptual grounding for GHD draws heavily on Freire's work on education for social change and on several other fields of scholarship and practice, namely, systems science, community development and community psychology, that identify factors that can support community-driven change.

The *CTL approach* adopted in GHD reflects 6 core elements of transformative learning similar to those identified by Taylor (2009): 1) *Individual Experience* as the starting point for all learning; 2) *Collective Critical Reflection* on both past experience and new ideas; 3) *Dialogue for Consensus-Building* both within existing and new communication relationships; 4) *Holistic Learning Experiences* that involve different ways of knowing including cognitive, affective and spiritual aspects of collective interaction and learning; 5) *Learning Experiences that Build on Cultural Context*, specifically on the collective and hierarchical structure of African societies; and 6) *Authentic Relationships* between facilitators and learners, and also between learners themselves.

In GHD, all 6 core facets of CTL are woven into the collective learning experiences organized by GMP that catalyze an inclusive dialogical and consensus-building process. As Taylor (2009) and others have pointed out, often little attention is given to the last three elements. In GHD the most innovative aspects of the approach deal with the in-depth attention given to the last three aspects of the TCL process.

The overarching goal of the GHD program is to build community capacity to take collective action to promote GHD in a sustained fashion. Grounded in the structure and values of collectivist African cultures and inspired by various areas of scholarship outside of education, seven cross-cutting characteristics of the approach have influenced how each of the core facets of CTL has been operationalized to accomplish that goal.

*Culturally-grounded*: it is increasingly recognized that most development programs do not sufficiently build on cultural context. Botswanan adult educator, Ntseane (2011), discussed this oversight specifically related to transformative learning. Echoing Mejiuni's insights, she maintains that in African cultures individuals need the support of the group in order to learn and to change. She contends that "the change process itself has to be a collective one" (p. 318). Reinforcing collective learning, all GHD activities exemplify the African collectivist and relational value of *Ubuntu*. Archbishop Desmond Tutu explicated the relational notion of *Ubuntu* that "everything we learn and experience in the world is through our relationships with other people" (Ngomane, 2019, p.8). GHD explicitly aims to strengthen relationships between community actors. Lastly, GHD reflects a *cultural renewal* approach proposed by Nair and

White (1994) where positive cultural roles and values are reinforced while harmful ones are discouraged.

*Intergenerational:* In African societies, communication between generations is highly valued. At the outset, in all communities where GHD has been implemented a serious breakdown in intergenerational relationships was observed. Collective change within communities requires intergenerational communication. GHD catalyzes communication between generations and between the sexes.

*Inclusive:* Collective consensus-building for change requires community-wide involvement to create an enabling environment around girls. GHD activities involve all categories of community members including three generations and both sexes.

*Leadership capacity building:* Leaders exercise decisive influence on other community members to either support or reject proposed social change. GHD identifies leaders of both sexes and generations and strengthens their capacity and confidence to catalyze the change process.

*Grandmother-inclusive:* In all African cultures, grandmothers play a key role in the socialization of adolescent girls, and they perpetuate social norms affecting them. Alongside the patriarchs, are powerful matriarchs who have strong influence on women's and girls' lives. GHD recognizes grandmothers' role and experience, while strengthening their knowledge and confidence to play an expanded role catalyzing change for girls in families and communities.

*Strengthens women-to-women bonds:* A key feature of collectivist cultures are strong bonds between different generations of women. GHD supports creation of local alliances of women of three generations to generate collective support for change in gender norms affecting girls.

*Assets-based:* GHD promotes change in harmful community norms while strengthening positive community roles and values. For example, the assets-based approach explicitly recognizes grandmothers as an abundant but underutilized social resource to support GHD.

Past community programs to support girls' development have given limited or no attention to these priority characteristics of the GHD strategy that all reflect the structure of and respect for cultural context.

### **Collective Transcultural Learning Activities**

Based on the core facets of transformative learning and the seven cross-cutting characteristics of community programs that are specific to GHD, a series of participatory learning activities were developed. All activities are facilitated by GMP staff, schoolteachers trained in facilitation or by certain community members. These activities are listed in the order in which they were developed.

- Intergenerational community-wide forums
- All Women Forums
- Days of Praise of Grandmothers
- Grandmother Leadership Training
- Days of Dialogue and Solidarity
- Grandmother-Teacher Workshops
- Under-the-tree participatory learning sessions with girls, mothers & grandmothers
- Discussion groups with boys and men
- Girls' leadership training based on African values

### **Emergent Conceptual Framework**

The multi-year action-research process generated understanding of the interface between the CTL approach and the community context. Ongoing process documentation and 8 small qualitative studies examined different aspects of GHD. Through this process of praxis, the CTL framework was developed over time (Figure I.). Given the severe breakdown in communication in all communities at the outset, GMP identified the first priority – to build trust and communication between community members, essential for open dialogue and learning. GHD activities created spaces for inclusive and participatory interaction between community leaders. Subsequent activities contributed to further strengthening relationships and promoting dialogue between the generations and sexes. With increased social cohesion between community actors, transformative learning activities provided new information and challenged participants to critically reflect on how existing norms and practices could be modified to promote GHD. Community groups identified and planned collective actions to promote those changes. In all cases, communities have undertaken some actions to promote GHD and these have contributed to the process of changing deeply ingrained social norms.

### **Results of the Collective Transformative Learning Process**

In 2019/20, the Institute of Reproductive Health (IRH), Georgetown University conducted an extensive evaluation of the GHD program (IRH 2019/2020). IRH researchers concluded that GHD has contributed to shifting deep-rooted social norms related to girls' education, child marriage, teen pregnancy and FGM. A significant conclusion of IRH was, "*the main outcome of this intervention is that it has brought community members together, strengthening community ties*" (p. 5). This important conclusion supports the notion that the CTL strategy in GHD has strengthened communication, trust and connectedness between community members and that this has provided a foundation for community-wide dialogue and consensus-building on GHD issues. The researchers identified key characteristics of GHD that have contributed to the very positive outcomes: the *cultural grounding*; *intergenerational dialogue*; *grandmother inclusion*; and the *participatory methods*.

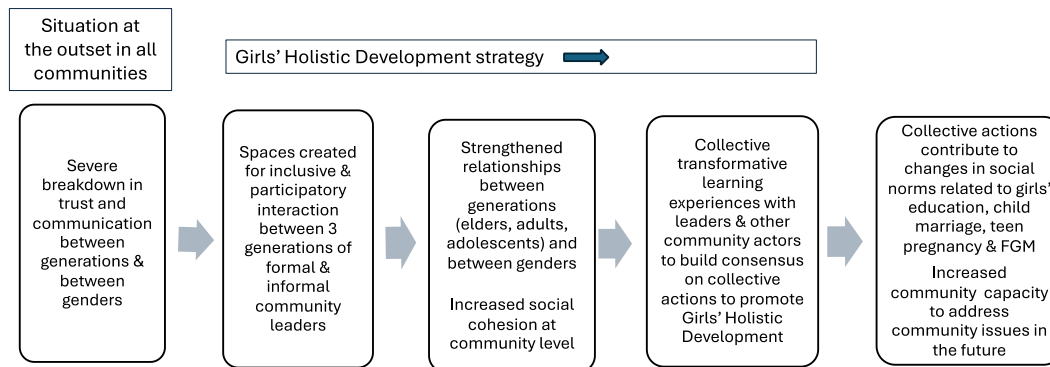
The available evidence supports the conclusion that the culturally-grounded CTL approach has: strengthened trust and communication between generations and the sexes; increased community leaders knowledge and commitment to promoting GHD; increased the capacity of community groups to analyze problems and to collectively take action to solve them.

## Figure 1

### *Collective Transformative Learning Process To Build Consensus For Change*

Figure 1.

#### **Collective Transformative Learning Process to Build Consensus for Change**



Grandmother Project © 2023

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# **A Feminist Collaborative Photographic Study of The Gendered Teachings of Public Monuments and Sculptures**

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**Abstract:** Although easily dismissed as relatively innocuous relics from a by-gone age, scholars argue that the monuments and sculptures that dot urban landscapes have great communicative and educative power. Our feminist collaborative photographic study explored the seen and unseen gendered narratives of these public symbols. We argue that singularly a monument or sculpture may not be all that pedagogically powerful but as chains of repetition they strongly and problematically reinforce binary gender norms. We discuss how they can be part of our feminist adult education classrooms.

**Key Words:** Monuments and Sculptures, Perspective Transformation, Feminist Collaborative Photography, Gender Injustice

## **Introduction**

Nothing in the way most girls are educated encourages them to believe in their own strengths and abilities. They are taught...to look at themselves as delicate and helpless.  
Chollet, 2022, p. 46

Ubiquitous to the urban landscapes of Canada, the United Kingdom and Europe is a plethora of monuments and sculptures. As feminist adult education scholars who teach in the context of gender and social transformation, study cultural practices and use arts-based methods, we were aware of these large-scale public visual cultural representations and symbols of the past. Recent public actions including defacing, toppling, and calling for new more inclusive monuments, however, quite unexpectedly brought them more fully to our attention. What had we missed? What were these monuments doing that inspired such action? These actions for us felt like what Mezirow (1991) called a ‘disorienting dilemma’. They compelled us to think more about contemporary decolonializing discourses and/or to take part in public actions such as the toppling of a monument to Canada’s first Prime Minister, an architect of what is now publicly acknowledged as the genocide of Indigenous peoples (e.g., CBC News, 2018). It also raised questions about the links between these public cultural symbols and gender, something which we discovered was left unanswered in literature and the actions.

Although easily dismissed as relatively innocuous relics from a by-gone age, something we need to admit to here, social actions and studies suggest otherwise. Trilupaityte (2021), for example, found that monuments have great communicative and educative power. Saylor and Mardi Schmeichal (2020) define their import as a visual reflection of “how we see the world and [give us] a sense of who we are as a society” (p. 22). For Arnoldi (2003) monuments matter as tangible expressions of collective memory, identity, agency, and political ideologies. While this can be positive, many of these structures are inherently linked to the priorities and assumptions of those in power.

As we watched the news media, joined the protests, and perused the literature, we realized that most of the critical scholarly debates and social actions against public monuments were in response to their links to the slave trade, colonialism, and imperialism (e.g., Ayubi, 2021; BBC News, 2020, 2024; CBC News, 2018). A few explorations of gender and monuments existed but they tended to focus on the lack of women represented (e.g., Lindsay, 2021). Many studies suggested actions, such as erecting more monuments to women or anti-apartheid activists to create balance in the public sphere and tackle historical biases (e.g., Ayub, 2021; Mohdin, 2021). Public protests and calls for change are what Saylor and Mardi Schmeichel (2020) call contemporary “concern about the absence of certain groups of people from these forms of public art” (p. 22). Speaking pedagogically, protests are a collective ‘perspective transformation’ of normative ‘meaning schemes’ which were defined by Mezirow (1991) as “concrete manifestations of our habitual orientation and expectations” (p. 44). Perspective transformation makes a different world not only thinkable but actionable and we will return to this.

Missing from the literature and debates, however, is a focus on the gendered assumptions, and teachings embedded in the literally thousands of public monuments and sculptures that dot our urban landscapes. An important question for us, to borrow from Bierma (2003), was what is the ‘hidden agenda’ that lies in plain sight? This paper shares findings from our feminist collaborative photographic study of the seen yet unseen gendered narratives of monuments and sculptures. We recognise that singularly a monument or sculpture may not be all that pedagogically powerful. However, what we found is a chain of repetition that systematically across landscapes and time, reinforces binary gender norms. Our findings transformed our own thinking about the ‘innocuity’ of these public visuals, the place and role of sculptures in ‘monumental’ narratives and why they need to be part of our feminist cultural theorising and education practice.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Despite gains from decades of feminist research, education and activism, the gender binary hierarchy of oppression, exclusion and devaluation not only continues but is in fact “far worse than we think” (Vintges, 2017, p. 11). Not only do past oppressions and inequities remain but there is a rise across the globe in new and more diverse forms of violence against women and those who dare to step outside gender norms (e.g., UNWomen, 2023). While there are many reasons for this, the (re)rise of religious fundamentalisms and social media, feminist studies show that visual artistic culture plays a critical role in shaping and maintaining gender injustice. For example McCormack (2021) found that the “horizontal bodies of maidens” that line museum walls have an impact on everything from fashion photography to political symbols to “advertising that glamorises sexual violence against women” (p. 197). A particular power that visual artistic culture has is ‘the seen’ because “what we see is as important, if not more so, than what we hear or read” (Rose, 2001, p. 1).

We took up our research through the lens of ‘perspective transformation’, defined by Mezirow (1990) as “the process of becoming critically aware of how...we perceive, understand, and feel about our world” with an intent to change, grow and/or take action (p. 14). Our feminist collaborative photographic study explored the gendered narratives of both monuments and sculptures in urban areas in Canada (Victoria and Toronto), the United Kingdom (Glasgow, Leeds, London, Oxford) and Rome, Italy, where Sarah happened to be attending a conference. Two key questions guided our explorations: How do monuments and sculptures reinforce normative frames of reference and assumptions about gender? What do they show and teach us

about women and men and their place and role in society historically and why does that matter to the world today?

### **Collaborative Photographic, Postcard and Interventionist Enquiry**

We took a feminist collaborative photographic approach to this study. We chose an arts-based methodology firstly because we were dealing with artworks and secondly, because as the arts “have the capacity to provoke reflective dialogue” and allow for new types of “meaningful actions” (Finley, 2007, p. 75). We chose photography because it was accessible and also, digital. As we took photos of the monuments, we emailed our images and reflections via digital postcards from our different locations. We chose a collaborative approach based on a central tenet of transformative learning: to relate one’s discontent to another’s discontent and realise how these are shared (e.g., Mezirow, 1991). Based on another important tenet of transformative learning – taking action -- we intervened into the gendered narratives of the monuments and sculptures using ArtActivistBarbie (AAB), a trickster figure Sarah has adapted from the iconic Barbie figure. AAB often works with sidekicks Ken and Action Man (e.g., Williamson, 2020). AAB and the postcard construction-reflection offered us a space of both empowerment and respite. As feminist Zobel Marshall (2016) found, using humour, satire and parody helps women to deal with the onslaught of repetitive disempowering gendered narratives, exactly what we were encountering at every turn. With iPhone cameras and/or AAB in hand, we moved about the city centres photographing from different angles and perspectives monuments and sculptures in plazas, parks, and on or in public buildings such as the colleges of Oxford and the Basilica of Rome.

### **Enculturating Gender Injustice**

Before we share our findings through our digital postcards, it is important to make a distinction between monuments and sculptures. The literature focus on monuments but as our study progressed, we began to see a volume of sculptures and it was these that had the most to say about ‘females’ and therefore, added to our analysis and discussions of public symbols. Monuments are of course sculptures, but as we found they are different. Monuments are for the most part, historical commemorations of someone (or something). Sculptures are primarily abstractions, conceptual works that allegorise. In other words, monuments memorialise, celebrate and honour the real whilst sculptures represent and symbolise the intangible. The former, perhaps not surprisingly, is where you find ‘men’ and the latter, where you find ‘the female’, Notice that while we said ‘men’ we did not say ‘women’. Our choice of language becomes clear.



## Heroes on Horseback: Channeling a Masculine Divine



Walking around London for a few days now, I think a fitting description of monuments is “ventriloquists of the masculine divine” because they channel visually what the patriarchy is all about. Over and over – I am seeking the power of Butler’s idea of repetition here -- men sit majestically atop horses leading battles, conquering and dividing.

What these monuments to greatness are teaching me is men deserve to be revered because not only did they do things, but what they did do is superior and ‘immortal’. Below their elevated plinths are often female figures who act as supporting characters and reinforce greatness by gazing up in awe and admiration.

Dear Darlene

As I go about our cities there always seems to be a ‘hero on horseback’ coming into view. The heroes are named men, of course. I’ve noticed they often have a supporting cast of females who are never named. They are generally allegorical beauties, and funnily enough they all seem to all share the same goddess-type wardrobe of a damp sheet. And funnily enough, this wardrobe choice always allows breasts and nipples to be on display.

#HeroOnHorseback alert! The #patriarchy has always taken any opportunity to reinforce & elevate its status & power. A pervasive patriarchal presence dominates all city and civic #statuary. Plinths & horses often feature. So do a supporting cast of females...and their nipples. 1/4




Londonist and 2 others

## Patriarchal Pontificating

<p><b>ArtActivistBarbie</b> @BarbieReports · 1h ...</p> <p>The Patriarchal Pontificate Pontificating! It's everywhere you turn in <a href="#">#Rome</a>. Pontiffs EVERYWHERE reminding you of their great importance and power, with NO expense spared. Some fabulous pontifical outfits though, &amp; we love a fabulous wardrobe at AABHQ! <a href="#">#Roma</a></p> 	<p><b>ArtActivistBarbie</b> @BarbieReports</p> <p>Yet another pontifical patriarchal bore! Blah Blah Blah. Heard it all before. Been expected to listen to it for centuries... <a href="#">#Rome</a> <a href="#">#Roma</a></p> 
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## Being Real

	<p>I found this monument in Toronto. It's quite recent and pays tribute to the fire brigade. The fire fighter is of course male which is at least a respite from the countless men on horseback but nonetheless an addition to my statistics which stand at 98% men, 2% women. Okay, a lot of monuments are of Queen Victoria so that does not count as royalty is a different category. One queen versus god knows how many kings which speaks to longevity so chock one up for women!?! But I digress...</p> <p>The monuments have caused in me to think in divisions of 'real' (of men) and unreal ('the female'). Even when the monument is not a 'real' man (e.g., no name) it is still the representation of a 'real' person or a reflection of a group that exists.</p> <p><i>Fun fact:</i> Countless charges of rape and sexual harassment have been brought against the fire brigade in Canada. That 'minor' detail is so clearly insufficient to disrupt the 'monumental' status quo.</p>
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This monument of a real man (as I said I deliberately ignore their names) is yet another narrative that operates in favour of masculinity whilst the lesser (unclothed) sculpture in the background offers her naked body in aid of that favouring. To borrow from Judith Butler's (1993) notion of performativity, she is merely a supporting actor in the public theatre of masculine superiority.

How many millions of people have stood here and seen this? How many were conscious of what they were seeing? I worry that the normalcy of this is beyond our conscious minds. Maybe it doesn't matter but if not, then why are they pulling these things down? Of course, they are not pulling down allegorical sculptures because that's 'just art'? The female as 'just' art helps you get away with a lot (of nipples as you note!).



## Being Allegorical



I have been thinking a lot about 'othering' and allegory as I move about London and Oxford. Othering is normatively an 'us' versus 'them' in the context of superiority and inferiority. This is so across the monuments and sculptures, but an additional connotation is the other as 'something else'. Almost none of the sculptures are women themselves. Although Queen Victoria features a lot historically, she is not 'herself' but a representation of the monarchy (not a female). They are symbols, ideals. Men are seldom used representationally like this (okay so far never). Oh, and nipples figure prominently as do children.



ArtActivistBarbie  
@BarbieReports

#PrinceAlbert at #HolbornCircus #London is supported by allegorical female figures of Peace & History. Such women have a common problem. They always find their loose drapery falling away. Breasts revealed. Funny that. Because the patriarchy always remain fully dressed. 2/4



ArtActivistBarbie  
@BarbieReports

Female statuary:  
Mainly allegorical.  
Mainly in decorative support around the plinths of named men.  
Mainly wearing loose drapes, that are mainly in the process of falling away.  
All this goes:  
Mainly unnoticed.  
Mainly accepted as the 'natural order of things'  
OUTRAGEOUS !!



ArtActivistBarbie  
@BarbieReports

Surprising (not) how often #sculptural allegories of justice seem to include not only a sword & the scales of justice but also two nipples. #TheNipplesOfJustice: Not just at the #OldBailey #London, but also inside #StPeters #Rome. I rest my case, m'lud.



## Epistemic Injustice



Dear Sarah

Consistently, men are portrayed as 'knowers' -- scientists, clergymen, philosophers, generals. Knowers are so important they have names.

Women are seldom portrayed as 'knowers' because they are seldom portrayed and clearly do not produce knowledge.

Instead, the female tends to frolic (mostly naked) amongst the knowers although sometimes they wrestle imaginary serpents!



Dear Sarah

Interesting find! A woman 'knower'. I think there might be a difference, however. The man in my photograph is 'real'. He actually has a name because he is famous although I choose deliberately to omit his name because why continue to channel the divine?

Your female figure has no name. I suspect she stands for intelligence or maybe literacy. And anyway, she is not real.

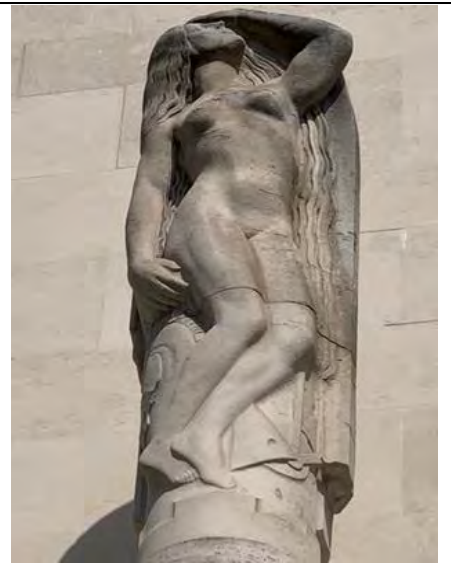
## Too Much to Bare: Naked Majesty Versus Writhing



Dear Sarah

Although we have mentioned this on various occasions I found the perfect contrast. The majority of monuments of men are clothed and the majority of sculptures of females have at least one breast loose (mostly both) or are fully naked.

Even when the men are naked, they stare at me with confidence, proud of their bodies and superiority. Female representations seldom meet my eye; rather, they gaze into the distance or writhe erotically.



## Wardrobe Malfunctions Versus Dressing Up



**ArtActivistBarbie**  
@BarbieReports

While on the subject of H & S, of course it's totes marv that some #Rome gals got lead roles bearing the flaming torch, but really. 'Don't play with fire' didn't come from nowhere. But being practical, when your drapes have fallen off, you do have a fire blanket




**ArtActivistBarbie**  
@BarbieReports

I was thinking the male could be rigged up in full gladiator costume, the woman can just have some looses drapes, you know, falling away. Said the artist. Oh I'm liking it, said the patron, I'm liking it.  
#Nipplegate #London




## Double Standards and Mixed Messages

**ArtActivistBarbie** @BarbieReports · 2m ...  
It's all rather mixed messages in a [#Rome](#) church. Male door police check your 'female modesty', & tell you to cover up. After passing their scrutiny, you get in to find there's public health messages to check your breasts while you say a few prayers. [#Roma](#) [#Chiesa](#) [#PublicHealth](#)

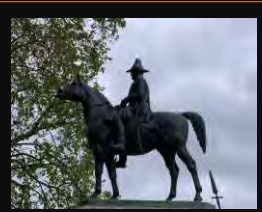
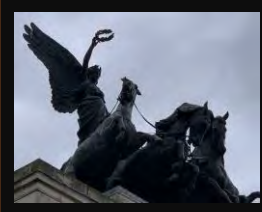


**ArtActivistBarbie** @BarbieReports ...  
Excuse me love, but I don't think they allow breastfeeding in [#StPetersBasilica](#) [#Vatican](#). Male door police don't even let you show a shoulder or a knee, so breasts and nipples are surely a no-no. But then again it's all [#doublestandards](#) in the world of [#patriarchal](#) [#religion](#)...



## Transformative Learning and Action

Does a woman's breast always fall out when she drives a team of horses?  
Is that why the men only have one horse? Would their penis slip out if they were to drive a team?



Monuments and sculptures are public pedagogical devices that teach who and what matters, who should be seen, known, and remembered. Who is real. The aim of our feminist collaborative photographic study was to explore the connections between public monuments and sculptures and gender and more specifically, how these very visible, pervasive cultural artefacts reinforced and normalised male-female binaries. What we found hiding in plain sight was more

disturbing than we had imagined. We conclude this paper with some reflections on our findings, our own process of transformation and ideas of how we will use these structures in our teaching.

Public monuments are most often relics of past yet they matter today because of they convey messages important to the world today. As Lytollis (2024) argues “the unsavoury past of exalted men cast in bronze and carved in marble” clashes with the transformed or transforming perspectives of the present (p. 4). The disaster that was colonialism and symbols that commemorate its ‘great men’ have finally become unpalatable.

Yet not all monuments are being toppled and equally importantly for us, sculptures are ignored, both in action and literature. If issues of racism and slavery and the absence of monuments to women can be tackled, why not the hundreds of allegorical sculptures that feed into notions of female fragility, inferiority, mindlessness, and masculine superiority? There are a number of reasons we believe. Firstly, sculptures can be dismissed as ‘just art’ meaning they are above normal standards (McCormack, 2021). Secondly, sculptures are mainly not ‘real’ people, meaning they are not actually portraying a person, so no harm done. They are simply allegories of things many would agree with such as liberation or justice. Yet only ‘women’ (the female figure) are this ‘not real’. If the ideals the female figure is meant to represent are so valuable, why are men not portraying them. And why must they be naked or nearly so to encapsulate these ideals? Or course the sculptors were male (McCormack, 2021). Thirdly, what both sculptures and monuments show and tell simply mirrors a continuing and pervasive, if less unacknowledged, gender binarized common sense. Men are still over-aggrandized for their deeds whilst women and others are still to be ignored, assigned to supporting roles and stripped of agency. In other words, the distinctions we found are ‘normal’ although we concur that things have change. But in looking at these sculptures we need to ask, how much?

Hundreds of monuments and sculptures litter urban landscapes across Canada, Europe, and the United Kingdom and they operationalise their messages not as individual symbols but through this power repetition. As Butler (1999) reminds us, gender injustice is not a single act but rather a performance played out over and over in many places and through many means. Sculptures play out unbelievably gendered performances, but do they simply reside innocently in our peripheral vision making them of no consequence? We noticed that daily, hundreds of people took photographs, even selfies, of and with these cultural symbols. What is that they see and absorb? Our study cannot answer this but just because something is not ‘obvious’ does not mean it is not absorbed (e.g., McRobbie, 2009). Moreover, singularly monuments and sculptures may have less effect but collectively they are form a chain of gender discrimination and injustice.

A central idea in feminism is the universal and the particular (e.g., McCormack, 2021; McRobbie, 2009). This idea might be someone intangible but the importance of our study is that we found that this somewhat complicated idea is being acted out in plain sight and therefore, can be ‘seen’. What monuments and sculptures show is the universal is male and the particular is female, yet the female stands for universal ideals whereas men are ‘real’ or particular. Being ‘particular’ in this case is better because you are a subject whereas the universal is an object. Adding to this, when we began our study we concurred with Nicoll (2006), who argued that the question was not whether something was real or not but rather the reality it persuaded. Turns out, they both matter because how sculptures are ‘not real’ is persuasive of real patriarchal ideals.

As feminist adult educators teaching in universities in Canada and the UK we, like Dirxk (2012), see our classrooms as spaces for self-formation and deepening our understandings of others and the world. Classrooms are sites for perspective transformation. We can use these public structures to see the old with new eyes which creates an opportunity to see something



unexpected which may galvanise new thinking and action. Including monuments and sculptures into our teaching can offer a visual and embodied way to think about what Chollet (2022) calls “the very idea of ‘norms’ against which all other experience is judged” (p. 203). They will also offer us a platform to discuss everything from gender binary hierarchies to body health and beauty, from patriarchal colonial power to absence and exclusion, from the maintenance of privilege to empowerment and change. Collaborative photography and post cards will be an excellent way to ‘see’ and make meaning from what is being seen more intentionally. This approach is also a source of fun in what proved to be an utterly disempowering context for those of us who do not ride atop the horses.

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## **Inviting Good Trouble Through Performing Justice: Devising Original Theatre as An Opportunity for Constructive Disorientation**

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**Abstract:** The Performing Justice Project (PJP) is a framework for devising original theatre with young people on the topics of racial and gender (in)justice. The arts can act as a catalyst for constructive disorientation (Wergin, 2020). Devising theatre together creates the conditions for transformative learning as young people examine personal experiences related to their individual identities. A particularly potent component of the PJP group-devising process is the opportunity to try on and inhabit another's story, allowing participants to notice and reflect on personal mindsets and behaviors in relation to others' experiences. Devising original performance together offers opportunities to reflect, rethink and rehearse new ways of being. This Pecha Kucha presentation will explore and trouble the process of creating an original performance on racial and gender (in)justice as an example of cultivating and provoking good trouble in youth and adults.

**Key Words:** Performing Justice Project, Transformative Learning, Constructive Disorientation, Performance, Devising

In the past two years, two-thirds of all state legislatures in the United States have introduced hundreds of bills limiting what schools can teach with regard to race, American history, sexual orientation and gender identity (Gross, 2022). Learning to live together and get along with others requires that we navigate differences, but if we are never allowed to discuss difference, where and how do we discover who we are and what biases we hold towards others? Getting in good trouble means offering opportunities for young people to name their identities while concurrently exploring personal mindsets and assumptions.

The Performing Justice Project (PJP) is a framework for devising original theatre about racial and gender justice, creating opportunities for young people to reflect on personal experiences of justice and injustice. Specifically, PJP uses reflection, story sharing, and ensemble theatre making as a catalyst for constructive disorientation (Wergin, 2020) so that young people can explore difference, confront bias, reframe, rehearse, and integrate new ways of being. "Transformative learning approaches that integrate art can empower and engage students in new ways by increasing creative imagination, perspective-taking, social-ecological complexity, resistance and direct action" (Bentz & O'Brien, 2019, p. 6). The process of weaving personal stories of racial and gender (in)justice with embodied, ensemble theatre-making creates opportunities for noticing individual mindsets, assessing if they are desirable, and trying on new ways of thinking and being. "The key to understanding embodied learning is that we do not just learn from experience, we also learn in experience" (Wergin, 2020, p. 27). Devising theatre with an ensemble is an act of experiencing together.

The Performing Justice Project (PJP) describes a process of creating "theatre that supports young people as they imagine, create, and perform their individual and collective stories, and their vision(s) for more just and equitable communities" (Alrutz & Hoare, 2020, p.

1). PJP is a highly structured yet flexible framework designed to engage and support young people as they reflect critically on their own experiences in the world as related to justice and injustice. The PJP framework is based on a variety of participatory and activist-oriented forms of theatre including (though not limited to) Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), developed by Augusto Boal and inspired by the work of Paulo Freire. TO relies on Freire's concept of conscientization, the process of developing a critical awareness of how social, political and economic systems work "so that individuals can take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 1970, p. 19). Boal's (1979) Theatre of the Oppressed takes this goal into "rehearsal for the revolution" generating a system of theatre that actively creates conditions for transformation: "theater is change and not simple presentation of what exists: it is becoming and not being" (p. 28). In this way, Theatre of the Oppressed, and similar forms of activist, change-oriented performance, create openings for transformation of self and of systems in the way they allow participants to actively try on and rehearse new ways of thinking and being. In this way, the PJP process supports the development of critical consciousness of young performance-makers, using theatre as a sociopolitical framework for learning about and responding to systems of oppression (Alrutz & Hoare, 2020). Theatre allows ensemble members to create new ideas, images and stories together—it is an active and embodied way to both consider the past and dream into the future. As Lee Ann Bell and Dipti Desai (2011) argue in "Imagining otherwise: Connecting the arts and social change to envision and act for change,"

The arts can help us remember, imagine, create and transform the practices that sustain oppression as it endures across history and locality. When tuned to that purpose, the arts play a vital role in making visible the stories, voices, and experiences of people who are rendered invisible by structures of dominance. Equally important, the arts confront how we have learned to see and provide new lenses for looking at the world and ourselves in relation to it. (p. 288)

Wergin (2020) posits that we can search out moments of constructive disorientation for ourselves, as well as create the conditions for constructive disorientation for others. Wergin offers a list of necessary "enablers" for creating such conditions: a clear but manageable challenge, a flexible structure, a setting for deep work, and clear criteria for performance and feedback with the freedom to fail. Cranton (2002) also discusses transformative learning conditions and notes that challenge is key: "Although this challenge must be combined with safety, support, and a sense of learner empowerment, it is, at the center, a challenge of our beliefs, assumptions, and perspectives that leads us to question ourselves" (p. 3). The PJP framework provides challenge through a performance-making structure that asks young people to interrogate their own identities, perspectives and ways of being in the world. Though we cannot guarantee that transformation takes place, we can "teach as though the possibility always exists" (Cranton, 2002, p. 6). The PJP performance-making process invites good trouble through experiences of constructive disorientation, imagining and performing justice, and dreaming up and rehearsing new ways of being together.

This Pecha Kucha session will investigate the Performing Justice Project framework for devising ensemble theatre about racial and gender (in)justice as a way to create conditions for transformation.

## **Pecha Kucha Outline:**

- 1) The Performing Justice Project: creating the conditions for Deep Learning
- 2) What is the Performing Justice Project?
- 3) Mapping the current U.S. landscape - Why PJP?
- 4) How does anti-DEI legislation impact PJP projects?
- 5) How do we explore racial and gender (in)justice? PJP core questions: Who am I?
- 6) What is (in)justice and how does it show up in my life?
- 7) How do I perform justice?
- 8) How does PJP create the conditions for transformative, or deep learning?
- 9) Transformative learning theory and deep learning
- 10) Constructive disorientation: opportunities in PJP for youth
- 11) Constructive disorientation: opportunities in PJP for adults
- 12) Transformative learning theory as it relates to Identity
- 13) How do we think about and dive into identities in PJP and why?
- 14) The four “enablers” of creating the conditions for constructive disorientation (Wergin, 2020) and examples in PJP:
- 15) A clear but manageable challenge
- 16) A flexible structure within the PJP workshop process
- 17) A setting for deep work
- 18) Clear criteria for performance, concrete feedback, “freedom to fail”
- 19) Why PJP? How do youth describe their experiences?
- 20) How does this demonstrate PJP as a Transformative Learning process?

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## **Submission Title: Fostering Transformative Learning: A Case Study of an Online Program for Nigerian Professionals**

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**Abstract:** This study explores the implementation of a program designed by JASS Academy in collaboration with TEA, aimed at enhancing the employability of early-career Nigerians through soft skills development. The program integrated TEA's Growth Mindset online course and included elements such as reflective practices, discussion forums, and personalized coaching sessions. Utilizing a qualitative approach, data was gathered through surveys, online discussion forums, and reflection prompts to retroactively assess the integration of transformative learning (TL) core elements: individual experience, critical reflection, dialogue, a holistic orientation, awareness of context, and authentic relationships. Preliminary findings indicate that these elements were present and there is some indication that participants experienced shifts in perspectives. This study contributes to the understanding of TL in digital settings and suggests the potential of technology-mediated programs to foster transformative learning.

### **Introduction**

In April 2022, JASS Academy (a social enterprise founded by the author), designed and implemented a training program targeting early-career Nigerians from diverse professional backgrounds. These adult learners were selected based on demonstration of their interest in and commitment to the program. The program was offered free of charge as part of an ongoing initiative to provide access to high-quality soft skills training and improve employability for young professionals who may not be able to afford it. To help defray some of the costs, we partnered with TEA, a Europe-based education technology company that combines research-based coaching methods, thoughtful content, and deep technologies to improve learning outcomes for professionals and businesses. As JASS Academy and TEA consider future collaborations and opportunities for delivering "meaningful" learning at scale, there is a need to assess the 2022 program, which though unintended, seemed to incorporate several elements conducive to fostering transformative learning.

### **Program Format and Components**

The program was designed to feature TEA's Growth Mindset online course as the core learning component, with wrap-around programming and supports to scaffold learning. The program ran for three weeks, during which participants dedicated approximately 3.5 to 4 hours in total to complete the course. Ten applicants were selected to participate, and eight participants completed the program. There were more women in the program, comprising eight of the ten enrollees.

The JASS Learning Hub (Google Classroom) served as the communication center, resource repository, and discussion forum for the entire learning journey. The TEA Platform (Online) was the primary medium for the self-paced Growth Mindset Course (GMC). The GMC involved 5 self-paced modules. Modules 1, 2 and 3 introduced key concepts as well as TEA's proprietary model (AIRCARS) for developing the Growth Mindset (a total of about 2 hours). Module Four was a 45 minute 1:1 coaching session with a TEA coach. The final module comprised personalized feedback on the coaching experience, with recommendations for each

learner, combining inputs from the coach as well as AI-generated feedback based on analysis of the conversation. Throughout their learning journey, participants received consistent prompts and email updates to guide their progress.

Participants actively engaged in reflective practices and interacted with their peers by responding to questions and prompts on the JASS Learning Hub (online). One of the standout features of the course was the 1:1 coaching session (Module 4). After their session, each participant received customized developmental feedback, which helped them identify and set their growth objectives. Participants completed a survey at the beginning of the program to indicate their degree of familiarity with the Growth Mindset. Additionally, a survey was conducted at the end to determine if learning had occurred based on the Level 2 Kirkpatrick scale (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2005). Open-feedback and specific short answer questions were also included to gather more nuanced data.

### **Exploring Core Elements of Transformative Learning**

Transformative Learning (TL) theory, ascribed to Jack Mezirow (1978), is recognized as a foundational adult learning theory. Mezirow describes TL as, the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide actions (2000, pp. 7-8).

The transformative process involves critical reflection on “*taken-for-granted frames of reference*” which Mezirow (2000) describes as comprising “habits of mind” (p. 17), broad assumptions ingrained through our upbringing and context which determine the meaning we ascribe to experiences, and “points of view” (pp. 17-18). Mezirow proposes the following sequence of 10 stages through which transformation occurs:

- 1) A disorienting dilemma
- 2) Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame
- 3) A critical assessment of assumptions
- 4) Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared
- 5) Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
- 6) Planning a course of action
- 7) Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans
- 8) Provisional trying of new roles
- 9) Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
- 10) A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective

### **TL in Online Environments**

Online learning affords the opportunity for flexibility in learning modalities and self-paced exploration, which can create space for reflection and introspection (Wang & Cranton, 2014). Several studies have sought to determine evidence of TL in online courses through systematic content analysis of students’ reflective writings (Boyer et al., 2006; Provident et al., 2015). In one such study, Boyer et al. (2006) found that, the phases of TL were evident in students’ reflective journals, indicating fundamental changes in their preconceived ideas, beliefs, or assumptions. The study also identified self-direction, collaborative learning, and facilitator guidance as “supporting the potential for transformative learning” based on themes identified in

students' reflections (Boyer et al., 2006, p. 350). While technology continues to gain relevance in learning delivery, application in the TL domain is still largely limited (Merriam & Bierema, 2013).

### **Core Elements of TL**

Taylor (2009) proposes the following “core elements” of TL (p. 4): individual experience, critical reflection, dialogue, a holistic orientation, awareness of context, and authentic relationships. Individual experience highlights the centrality of a learner's prior lived experiences, along with their real-time experience within the learning environment. This includes the introduction of “[value-laden] course content [which] can both provoke and provide a process for facilitating change” as well as “intense experiential activities” (Taylor, 2009, pp. 5 - 7).

Critical reflection “refers to questioning the integrity of deeply held assumptions and beliefs based on prior experience” (p. 8). Dialogue serves as the “medium for critical reflection to be put into action, where experience is reflected on, assumptions and beliefs are questioned, and habits of mind are ultimately transformed” (p. 10) and it involves more than a cognitive treatment of the subject in conversation. Taylor posits that a holistic orientation, another core component, creates a place for emotion in discourse and critical reflection. Awareness of context accommodates the social and cultural factors at play in the process of TL; and authentic trusting relationships (cultivated by the facilitator) bring about transparency and openness while learning.

### **Frameworks for Identifying Transformative Learning**

Assessing programs for their potential or capacity to enable transformative learning requires a systematic approach. Several studies have analyzed written reflections of online program participants (Boyer et al., 2006; Provident et al., 2015) to determine whether the stages of transformative learning can be observed. Kreber (2004) proposes a model for evaluating levels of reflection using Mezirow's (1991, 1997) transformative theory as a basis. It involves identifying reflective thinking across different categories—content reflection, process reflection, and premise reflection. Apte (2009) offers a practical tool for designing and evaluating educational programs that aim to facilitate transformative learning. It emphasizes the facilitator's role in the transformative learning process and includes reflective questions to help facilitators think critically about their practice and its impact on participants.

### **Program Evaluation: Preliminary Observations**

Having observed elements of TL at both the program and the learning levels for the GMC program, we sought to probe these anecdotal observations within the framework of transformative learning (TL), specifically, considering:

- Which “core elements of TL” are present the program design?
- Which levels of critical reflection might be present in students' written reflections captured during the program?

### **Method**

A qualitative content analysis was conducted to identify program elements and participant comments consistent with elements of TL and reflective practice.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected throughout the program through a few channels:

- A survey that served as both the program application tool and a baseline evaluation of participants' prior knowledge and experiences with the concept of growth mindset.



- Discussion forums on the JASS Learning Hub (online classroom environment).
- Reflection prompts at intervals during the program.
- Scheduled conversation with a growth mindset coach towards the end of the program.
- Closing survey upon completion of all modules.

However, due to privacy considerations, only publicly shared comments, as well as permitted (anonymized) participant survey responses are included in this study. Specific feedback from the coaching sessions was only shared with respective learners, and TEA provided some aggregate feedback on the learning during the end of program debrief with JASS Academy.

### **Data Analysis**

Program components were mapped to TL core elements to validate where there might be points of convergence or divergence, as well as identify specific elements within the program that facilitated the TL experience. In addition, students' written reflections from the final reflection prompt and closing survey were assessed and categorized into content, context, or premise reflections.

### **Limitations**

With such a small sample size, the observations from this program cannot be generalized across other populations. Furthermore, since the program was not designed specifically to facilitate transformative learning, the techniques adopted for measuring learning were not specifically designed to identify elements of TL. These were identified retrospectively through analysis of program artifacts.

It is also important to recognize the limitations of the program design. This study joins a body of work seeking to inform a praxis for fostering transformative learning. However, identification or deliberate integration of TL elements in a program does not necessarily constitute transformative pedagogy. Taylor (2009) cautions "that [TL] elements are not a series of decontextualized teaching techniques or strategies that can be applied arbitrarily" but that "[it] is the reciprocal relationship between the core elements and the theoretical orientation of transformative learning that provides a lens for making meaning and guiding a transformative practice.

Finally, the process of analysis for this preliminary study was mediated by the time lag since the program was implemented as well as inability to access primary data from the 1:1 coaching sessions, due to privacy considerations. The current study provides surface observations of the program elements. Future research should involve a more rigorous process involving two or three assessors of program elements and students' reflections to enable triangulation and validation of findings. More refined analyses should be conducted to generate critical insights into how these components specifically influenced learning outcomes.

## **Discussion**

### **Which "Core Elements of TL" are Present the Program Design?**

A program-level evaluation indicated that TL elements were present to varying degrees, including individual experience, critical reflection, dialogue, holistic orientation, awareness of context and authentic relationships. These elements were also reflected in the comments and written reflections of program participants.

## **Individual Experience**

The program was designed to attract young professionals who were employed (including self-employed or freelancing) at the time the program was held, with the hope that the learning would be immediately applicable to their work contexts. The GMC online module content and the online reflection prompts in the JASS Learning Hub invited participants to reflect on prior past experiences.

## **Critical Reflection**

Throughout the program, participants were nudged to think reflectively, including reflecting on their assumptions and frames of reference. Prompts such as “Share something surprising you discovered about yourself through [this] module” in the discussion forum and “When your negative inner voice gets in the way of making progress against your ambitious aspiration, what does that conversation sound like?” in the GMC online module were intended to push participants to critically reflect on their beliefs and assumptions. The critical reflection element was also present in the 1:1 coaching session, where they received personalized feedback encouraging further reflection.

## **Dialogue**

Mezirow (1991) posits that dialogue is not mere discussion but an avenue for challenging conventions. Taylor (2009) writes, “Dialogue becomes the medium for critical reflection to be put into action, where experience is reflected on, assumptions and beliefs are questioned, and habits of mind are ultimately transformed” (p. 9). The 1:1 coaching session, occurring after participants had completed the module content, provided the opportunity for dialogue with a coach, who created a safe environment for sharing, but also challenged participants through questions intended to guide them towards taking action.

## **Holistic Orientation**

The program’s emphasis on a Growth Mindset and the personalized coaching component allowed for emotional and cognitive engagement, contributing to a holistic learning experience. During coaching sessions, visible emotional responses were observed among most participants, triggered by certain reflection questions. Reflecting on her own experience afterwards, the coach expressed some surprise at how deeply affective the coaching sessions were for participants, and how this affected her own frame of reference.

## **Awareness of Context**

In designing the program, JASS Academy leveraged knowledge of the broader social and economic contexts of the learners—early-career Nigerians who are deliberate about growth in their career endeavors. Also taken into consideration was the reality that some participants might have limited access to power and internet supply; the potential communication challenges resulting from these factors were considered. Supports were provided to promote participant success, including a dedicated course coordinator who communicated with participants via the online portal as well as through phone calls, email, and WhatsApp. Having worked across various geographic contexts, TEA also made concessions such as rescheduling coaching calls when technological challenges got in the way or ensuring that time zone differences were accommodated.

## **Authentic Relationships**

As described in Taylor’s (2009) discussion, facilitators can nurture trusting relationships, which in turn will create a sense of safety for their learners and promote transparent and open discourse. Participants in the GMC expressed through open comments in the closing survey that

they had felt supported during the program and had been particularly “encouraged” through their interaction with the coach in their 1:1 sessions.

### **Which levels of critical reflection might be present in students’ written reflections captured during the program?**

While students engaged in written reflection at different points throughout the program, only the text from the final reflection prompt and the closing survey were analyzed for the purpose of this study. The text from other Participants’ responses indicated different “depths” of content, context and premise reflection (Kreber, 2004).

#### **Content Reflections**

Responding to a question about what they had learned specifically from the GMC online module, participants referred to specific information, skills, or factual content engaged in during the learning experience. Examples from students’ written reflections:

- “Making my desired actions into Habits. Not just using my willpower.”
- “I need to silence my inner voice.”
- “Immediate next steps to take from where I’m currently at.”
- The students discussed specific learnings or facts they’ve gleaned from the course, such as the AIRCARS framework stages (a central feature of the course content), and their importance in personal and professional contexts.

#### **Context Reflections**

Participants were asked to reflect on the learning environment and the technology platforms used for learning delivery and facilitation. Examples from students’ written reflections:

- “It was seamless. Everything was planned well. From the classroom experience to the planning of my one-to-one call with [growth mindset coach], it was amazing and practical.”
- “Well, the platforms were new to me... Announcing the platforms that would be used and the major ways to navigate them before the commencement of the program would be amazing.”
- Notably, all the participants referred to how their interaction with the program team and especially the growth mindset coach, enhanced their learning experience.

#### **Premise Reflections**

Premise reflection is more difficult to ascertain, as it involves critically examining one’s underlying beliefs, assumptions, and values that shape perspectives and behaviors (Mezirow, 1991; Taylor, 2009). There were a few comments worth noting which could potentially be further probed or validated through follow up conversations with program participants. Examples from students’ written reflections:

- “The course made me understand better that my past, fears, insecurities, and failures do not define who I am. So I shouldn’t let my doubts prevent me from taking those risks.”
- “Recognising my inner critic, handling it, and knowing how to change the narrative.”

These reflections seem to show students questioning deep-seated beliefs about themselves and their capabilities, and acknowledging the need for personal change, often triggered by the course.

### **Implications and Future Directions**

In contexts where access to high-quality, facilitated learning experiences is limited, technology presents an opportunity to provide such learning experiences at scale, and at an affordable rate, which are goals of both JASS Academy and TEA. Considering the preliminary

observations from the current study, it would be worthwhile to ideate around technology-enhanced learning modalities that have potential to foster transformative learning.

In the present study, the specific dynamics of the coaching context in the 1:1 sessions was not explored. The authors are considering further collaborative work by JASS Academy and TEA to study the potential for technology-mediated coaching practice, in this context, to foster transformative learning. TEA is currently experimenting with a learning solution that guides students through the growth mindset curriculum with the aid of an artificial intelligence (AI) coach. Future iterations might specifically consider integration of TL elements or application of TL facilitation frameworks in the design of AI coach-led, digital learning experiences.

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## **“Playing in the Dark”: Radical Speculative Play Within the Dark Side of Transformation**

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**Abstract:** The goals of transformative education can include ideals such as human dignity, equity, democracy, and a just society (Beaudet, 2022; Hoggan & Hoggan-Klaoubert, 2023). Yet despite these values, many institutions pursuing transformative “change will inevitably encounter barriers embedded in their systems that perpetuate the status quo and reinforce existing narratives” (Beaudet, 2022, p. 612). In the United States, the status quo, history, and narratives of higher education institutions are often in service of perpetuating systemic inequities and exclusion (Labaree, 2017; paperson, 2017), including racism (Brunsma et al., 2012; Love, 2019; Willie, 2003). Subsequently, there is potential for “preservation-through-transformation” (Siegel, 1997, p. 1113), or where formal practices intended for meaningful change later become harnessed for perpetuating exclusion due to the long-standing history of systemic oppression. To borrow from Toni Morrison, it seems that educators striving for transformation may find themselves “struggling with and through” structures “that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and the dismissive ‘othering’ of people and language which are by no means marginal” (1992, p. x). In this context, how might we conceive of practices for transformative learning within educational institutions designed to maintain inequities and resist transformation?

The live possibility of preservation-through-transformation may indeed be the dark side of transformation. Yet, it is here “in the Black,” in the break,” and “in the rupture” where theories and practices of change can be (re)built (paperson, 2017, p. 19). This PechaKucha presentation will draw from Black, indigenous, and decolonial notions of speculation, refusal (Grande, 2018), fugitive pedagogy (Givens, 2021), and retooling (paperson, 2017) to ultimately advocate for the role of radical speculative play (Gunn, 2019) in transformative education. Educators are regularly speculating or envisioning how learners may change in the future (Hoggan & Hoggan-Klaoubert, 2023). However, this speculation is radical when we “imagine futures, reclaim histories, and create alternate realities...unbound by ideologies and structures designed to delimit black lives” (Gunn, 2019, p. 16). As a result, practices like “art, fiction, and theory” help practitioners and learners “play in our futures and pasts, and catalyz[e] action to move in and beyond the present” (Gunn, 2019, p. 16) confines of institutional preservations. Additionally, this presentation will underscore the ways in which the legacy of Black and historically marginalized radical strategies and visions can be adapted for today’s context of teaching and learning. The presenter will draw from their current work with students, faculty, and staff at an historically white institution of higher education (Brunsma et al., 2012; Willie, 2003) in the United States to illustrate how speculative play can ultimately uproot preservationist tactics in order to seed transformation. To “free up” transformative education from the hold of “sinister...and determined chains” (Morrison, 1992, p. xi), we can trouble preservation tactics in the break and in the dark through radical speculative play.

**Key Words:** Transformative Education, Speculation, Speculative Play, Futures, Refusal

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## **Museum and Transformative Learning: Empowering Adult Learning in the Museum Context**

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### **Extended Abstract**

This research explores the contribution of transformative learning in the context of museum activities and educational programs organized for adults. The data were extracted as part of a larger research project about adult learning in museums. The semi-structured interview and the participatory observation were chosen as methodological tools for data collection. Executives from Greek museums participated in the research. The main question was whether a museum could be a place to apply the theory of transformative learning and strengthen critical thinking to benefit an adult audience. A lot of types of museums were selected from each region of Greece. The selection was based on specific criteria. Fifty-four museums responded to the invitation.

Cultural institutions, especially museums, have to adapt to worldwide changes and respond to the multiple needs of their visitors (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994; Hein, 1998; Center for the Future of Museums, 2021). Museums can increasingly be described as places that empower personal learning by serving people's learning needs (Hein, 1995; Falk & Dierking, 2000; King, 2016). Among the roles performed by modern museums, their role as institutions of learning occupies a prominent place. Moreover, museums are not only called upon to meet the demands of the leisure and consumerism industries; they have to provide services for everybody in the crucial area of learning (Ambrose & Paine, 2012; NEMO, 2015), especially for those with limited access to learning (European Association for the Education of Adults, 2019). According to the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums (2004: 24), "...museums have an important duty to develop their educational role and attract wider audiences from the community, locality, or group they serve".

Kokkos (2022) considers that the systematic exploration of works of art may enhance the kind of learning that aims to transform learners' distorted assumptions that they take for granted. Central to the transformation theory, according to Mezirow (2012: 76), is "how we learn to negotiate and act on our purposes, values, feelings, and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others". In the context of the learning process, adults re-examine and re-evaluate, through critical reflection, experiences, perceptions, and beliefs that they have experienced in earlier phases of their lives (Mezirow, 1997). Brookfield (1985) points out, that adults are by nature self-directed learners, which means that the educator should help them realize their already semi-perceived self-direction.

Learning in the museum is supported by museum educators who, through museum activities, serve the learning needs of the visitors. The opinions of

museum executives, submitted during this research, lead to the conclusion that transformative learning has the potential to play an important role, especially in the context of museum activities and educational programs. Adult museum visitors participate in museum programs, special tours, and various activities that provide knowledge, experiences, and stimuli. Through transformative learning, visitors are concerned and motivated. In addition, they achieve self-awareness and perceive dysfunctional assumptions. As a result, they re-examine personal beliefs on many issues.

This research presents the factors that Greek museum executives consider important to strengthen transformative learning in a museum in order to empower adult learning.

According to the findings of the research, “the museum exhibition” (the structure of the space and the way the exhibits are presented) should be transformed in order to provide the appropriate stimuli that will lead to critical reflection and reconsideration of stereotypes and perceptions. Moreover, the meaning of the exhibits and their scientific documentation are factors that could lead a visitor to understanding and awareness. In addition, some executives stated that they seek to combine elements of the past and elements of the present to highlight interpretations through a timeless dialogue.

Transformative learning in a museum is enhanced by the successful planning of an educational activity, too. Museum educators who took part in the research explained the need to use the pre-existing knowledge and experience of adults when carrying out museum activities. They also reported that experiential museum activities combined with the application of adult learning theories are factors that lead to changes and transformations.

Some museum executives also stated that the way a museum communicates and interacts with the public is a factor that facilitates the critical evaluation of assumptions and the exploration and acquisition of knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Museum staff also considers that the seminars that museums organize for educators are important because these seminars provide knowledge, answer questions, and clarify issues in order to enable learning.

The above opinions of museum executives highlight elements that strengthen transformative learning in a museum. The research is ongoing. In the next stage, the experiences and the opinions of museum visitors will be gathered to estimate the contribution of transformative learning in stimulating critical thinking, self-reflection, and meaningful dialogue in the museum context.

**Key Words:** Museum, Transformative Learning, Adult Learning.

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# My Year of Firsts: A Personal Story of Wandering Through an Altered Life

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**Abstract:** I knew it was coming, but I could not know what was next. In this session, I will share and reflect on the story of *my year of firsts* – the first milestones I faced without Merle, my beloved husband and life partner of 25 years.

**Key Words:** Grief, Transformed Life, Biographicity

## Introduction

In a private conversation with John Dirks, he once mused about the difference between a transformative experience, like the loss of a beloved spouse, and transformative learning. Through a Pechakucha presentation, I will inquire into this difference as I share the story of the early days of my widow's journey. This experience has significantly altered my life; whether these circumstances are also transformational remains to be seen.

## Transformative Learning and Grief

In a literature search of the education and psychology databases for resources on transformative learning and grief [1] published in the last 20 years, I was surprised that it produced only 34 articles, with the vast majority focused on educating a range of professionals to help adults process and learn from their grief. Moon (2011) and Ijah & Patrick (2023) were the only authors to examine the transformative learning experiences of bereaved elders. Two studies examined transformative learning in trauma and its accompanying grief (King, 2003; Margo et al., 2009), while one project explored transformative learning in older women, some of whom learned through the early stages of widowhood (Standridge, 2022).

A striking feature of these studies is that they do not account for the transformative experience of the long illness journey that can often precede the death of a spouse. One's life is altered and perhaps transformed by the anticipated grief that is ever-present in the illness journey of a loved one. Montgomery and Kosloski (2009) found that the spouse's identity gradually slips from a spouse to a caregiver. My experience tells me that one's identity shifts again when the spouse dies, and the survivor is left to recapture a sense of self lost to caregiving, anticipated grief, and the inevitable loss of a life partner.

My experience parallels the lack of attention to bereavement in the learning literature. As I gradually re-entered public life after losing my husband, I felt that I made some people uncomfortable. It seemed to me that many people avoided my grief with a quick "... I am sorry for your loss", maybe followed by something like "...it must be tough" before changing the subject. I am sure I am not the only grieving spouse who has experienced this social awkwardness as they carefully and slowly ventured beyond the partnership that was an identity marker for themselves and others.

Alheit, P. & Dausien (2000) offered the concept of biographicity, which in August 2023, the time I wrote this proposal, resonates with my experience of *my year of firsts*. Biographicity is an individual capacity that emerges from the complexity of late modern life when one's biography is no longer dependent on a prescribed life course. In the late modern context, one crafts a biographic sense of self from within and across multiple social worlds. "The 'worlds' (in which learning processes take place as individual and interactive practices) are then not arbitrary

learning environ- but complex and inconsistently organised and multi-'layered' social contexts of varying levels of relevance. "(Alhiet, 2015, p14) Although relevance emerges in the present moment, something is relevant only because it stimulates a memory of the past, 'unlived lives' effused with 'surplus meaning' that can help one navigate and re-frame their identity in a current disorienting situation. If let to emerge, surplus meaning can also be a socially explosive force (Alheit, P. & Dausien, 2000) because it reflexively alters the conventional expectations of prescribed roles codified in tradition. In my case, the role of a middle-aged widow. The story of *my year of first* includes how I wandered the latent margins of my past unlived lives to try on new things and make new meaning in service to my need and desire to reset my life course. How my choices impact the cultural understanding of widowhood is perhaps an empirical question to be explored by transformative learning researchers.

### Getting in Good Trouble

This proposal in and of itself is a stretch for me because although I am open to being vulnerable in intimate settings, it is unusual that I will open up to a large gathering of acquaintances and colleagues. Putting it out there is my response to the conference invitation to step outside my comfort zone and become vulnerable as a researcher and learner. Gregory Bateson (2000) talked about how this process of relating in a community is sensitizing or re-sensensing the world so that it is possible to experience it from many perceptions. He believed that this process of integrity, generosity, and learning to heal is *mutual and ongoing*. If not transformative, the experience of creating and sharing my personal story certainly is good trouble that will push me a little beyond the margins of my sense of self and hopefully challenge others to rethink the way they relate to another's grief and their culturally derived understanding of widowhood.

[1] The search was delimited to the abstract.

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## Japanese Spiritual Practices: A Path to Transformative Learning

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**Abstract:** In this PechaKucha Session, we will first present a series of beautiful photos of Japanese spiritual practices such as Zen Buddhism (Suzuki, 2019), Zazen (Zen meditation) (Suzuki, 2019), Shugendo (Hasegawa, 2021; Rill, 2011), Takigyo (Takemoto & Takahashi, 2019), Shinrin-yoku (walking meditation) (Antonelli et al., 2022; Hansen & Jones, 2020; Park, 2010), Chanoyu (tea ceremony) (Surak, 2012), Ikebana (flower arranging) (Wiseman, 2022), Shodo (calligraphy) (Wiseman, 2022), Aikido (martial arts) (Stevens, 2002), Kintsugi (Keulemans, 2016), and Wabi-Sabi (Koren, 2008; Wilkinson, 2022).

In the end, we will summarize key points of the presentation and invite the audience to a short Zazen meditation so that they can experiment the practice for their own personal growth. Many of Japanese spiritual practices such as Zazen are not limited to Japan and have gained popularity worldwide. This PechaKucha presentation supports the audience to consider how individuals from different cultural backgrounds approach and benefit from Japanese spiritual practices, highlighting the universality of self-examination as a transformative learning experience.

**Key Words:** Japanese Spiritual Practices, Transformative Learning, Zen Buddhism, Zazen, Self-Examination

### Extended Abstract

In this PechaKucha Session, we will first present a series of beautiful photos of Japanese spiritual practices such as Zen Buddhism (Suzuki, 2019), Zazen (Zen meditation) (Suzuki, 2019), Shugendo (Hasegawa, 2021; Rill, 2011), Takigyo (Takemoto & Takahashi, 2019), Shinrin-yoku (walking meditation) (Antonelli et al., 2022; Hansen & Jones, 2020; Park, 2010), Chanoyu (tea ceremony) (Surak, 2012), Ikebana (flower arranging) (Wiseman, 2022), Shodo (calligraphy) (Wiseman, 2022), Aikido (martial arts) (Stevens, 2002), Kintsugi (Keulemans, 2016), and Wabi-Sabi (Koren, 2008; Wilkinson, 2022).

Then, we will explore the connection between Japanese spiritual practices and transformative learning. We will highlight the role of self-reflection and inner exploration in Japanese spirituality (Wiseman, 2022) based on the processes of personal growth through transformative learning developed by Jack Mezirow (2008, 2012). For example, Zazen (Zen meditation) is a fundamental practice in Japanese Zen Buddhism and is known for its deep focus on self-examination (Suzuki, 2019). In Zazen, individuals sit in a specific posture, typically in a quiet and serene environment, and concentrate on their breath and present moment. Individuals may begin practicing Zazen because they are experiencing stress, anxiety, or despair. This discomfort they feel in their daily lives serve as disorienting dilemmas. During Zazen, individuals are encouraged to nonjudgmentally observe their thoughts. They become keenly

aware of the mental chatter, distractions, and emotional states that arise during meditation. This self-observation is the beginning of self-examination. As they continue to meditate regularly, they start to critically reflect on their thought patterns and emotional responses. They may realize that their thoughts and emotions often drive their stress and anxiety, leading to a deeper understanding of their own mental processes. Over time, individuals may come to realize that their previous ways of reacting to stress were based on automatic and unexamined responses. This recognition is the first step toward a shift in perspective. Encouraged by their meditation practice, individuals may explore alternative ways of responding to stress and challenges, such as mindfulness, self-compassion, and acceptance to the present moment.

In this way, Zazen's focus on self-examination allows individuals to confront their inner turmoil and question their habitual responses. It serves as a platform for self-awareness and the initial stages of transformative learning (Mezirow, 2008, 2012). Overall, Zazen can be a crucial catalyst for self-examination, leading individuals toward deeper transformative learning experiences as they explore new perspectives and integrate these insights into their lives.

In the end, we will summarize key points of the presentation and invite the audience to a short Zazen meditation so that they can experiment the practice for their own personal growth. Many of Japanese spiritual practices such as Zazen are not limited to Japan and have gained popularity worldwide. This PechaKucha presentation supports the audience to consider how individuals from different cultural backgrounds approach and benefit from Japanese spiritual practices, highlighting the universality of self-examination as a transformative learning experience.

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## ROUNDTABLE



## ROUNDTABLE

Relaxed conversations  
to explore research in  
progress and its  
implications



## **Creative Discomfort: Brave Spaces for Transformative Learning**

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**Abstract:** Creative Discomfort involves an educator or facilitator introducing intentional disruptions in adult learning or arts-engaged environments. These disruptions, such as participating in artistic activities, may create discomfort, especially for those inexperienced in these areas. Similarly, discussing sensitive topics like race, class, and gender may be uncomfortable for those confronting their own privilege, oppression, and bias. Creative discomfort as a pedagogical tool creates 'good trouble' that can potentially lead to transformative learning.

**Key Words:** Discomfort, Arts-based Learning, Embodiment, Creative Community Engagement

### **Introduction**

Creative Discomfort centers on what happens when an educator or facilitator of adult learning intentionally introduces a disruption or disorienting dilemma into their learning environment or arts-engaged space. These disruptions may cause a certain degree of discomfort. For example, being asked to participate in embodied or artistic activities may cause a great deal of anxiety for those who do not have experience with such activities or see themselves as non-artists. Similarly, discussions of positionality (e.g., race, gender, identity, class) can be very uncomfortable for many learners as they begin to question their own privilege, oppression, and even ability. Furthermore, shifts in power dynamics and responsibility in learning environments and communities can create a level of anxiety for those not accustomed to sharing power.

While some learners experience this discomfort as paralyzing, others consider it productive. Acknowledging this shift in perception prompted us to consider this question: What if this discomfort was reframed as good trouble, offering an opportunity for transformative learning? In this paper, we invite readers to reflect on issues related to creating spaces where discomfort as an embodied sensation can be used not only as an indicator but as a positive and supportive force for transformative learning.

### **The Nature of Discomfort**

Mezirow's theory, originally referred to as perspective transformation (1978), began with a disorienting dilemma. Something shakes us up and disrupts our way of knowing and being in the world. This disruption can come from-external events, i.e., the death of a loved one or job loss, or internal dissonance, such as the realization that one has outgrown a relationship. The disruption often causes significant discomfort as one is challenged to critically reflect on taken-for-granted assumptions.

Salient factors that catalyze discomfort include the environment and positionality. Specifically, "non-diverse spaces are likely to be informed by dominant cultural values that

uphold norms of 'rational discourse' and the qualities of 'self-containment, self-mastery, and control' with which this discourse is associated (Bordo, 2003, p. 209). In the next section, we discuss three ways that educators create productive discomfort: Discussions of positionality, a shift of power dynamics, and engagement with the arts.

### **Discussions of Positionality**

Discussions of positionality can be uncomfortable for many students as they begin to question their privilege and oppression. As educators and facilitators, we aim to lead learners out of their comfort zone by creating opportunities for "good trouble." This approach encourages exploring new growth possibilities. For example, cultural critic and educator bell hooks (1994) intentionally created spaces where her students considered issues of race and gender in her English classes. She realized that these topics were causing her students much discomfort. "We take your class. We learn to look at the world from a critical standpoint, one that considers race, sex, and class. And we cannot enjoy life anymore" (hooks, 1994, p. 42). She reflected: "I saw for the first time that there can be, and usually is, some degree of pain involved in giving up old ways of thinking and knowing and learning new approaches." (p. 43). Rather than sparing her students from experiencing the pain, she used it as a teaching tool.

Transformative learning often comes with significant loss as people give up their old ways of seeing the world to embrace new perspectives. As in many transformative learning situations, there may be a significant gap between the disorienting dilemma and transformative change, or the change may not occur. Many learners may not be ready to confront the pain of domination and marginalization. They may not feel safe in the learning space. All an educator can do is to raise awareness by planting seeds. It is important to be sensitive to the unknown spaces where learners reside and to allow the seeds to germinate in their own time. The teacher becomes the "gardener" in these processes.

### **Power Dynamics**

In traditional educational settings, educators maintain a great degree of position power. They structure the class and develop learning objectives, lesson plans, and assessment rubrics. Learners are socialized into this way of learning for most of their lives. When learners are asked to share responsibility for their own learning by developing learning tasks and objectives or deciding how best to demonstrate competence, there is often a great degree of discomfort, distrust, and even resistance. They feel at a loss to respond. It is much easier to be told what to do.

Once they learn to embrace the discomfort and think seriously about what they want to learn and how they can best use their talents to create a meaningful learning experience, learners undergo a huge shift. Rather than embracing Freire's (1970) concept of "banking" (p. 58), they engage in "problem-posing" (p. 66). Education is no longer about pleasing the teacher and following directions but instead about learning how to think, creating meaning-making in learning, and taking personal responsibility for their knowledge creation. When power dynamics shift, learning can become an "interactive process" between teachers and students but at the same time creates challenges in fostering a learning environment where "opportunities for self-expression and enthusiasm for learning" are foregrounded (Ottey, 1996, p. 12).

## Engaging with the Arts

Using art as an entry point into discomfort may be complex, yet art's explorative properties with material and movement provide an opening to engage with discomfort. Art is a language that "recognizes the socially and culturally situated nature of discomfort and how social relations condition and mediate affective responses" (Rush, 2023, p.120). Discomfort catalyzed by art includes social justice art installations, public art memorials, community art engagements, documentary films, protest music, spoken word, dance performances, and theater (i.e. Theater of the Oppressed).

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., by artist Maya Lin, serves as a profound tribute to the sacrifices of war. It offers a space for reflection and healing for veterans and their families while providing the public with insights into the complexities of this period in American history. Chinese artist Ai Weiwei's "Remembering" is an impactful art installation commemorating the 2008 Sichuan earthquake victims, using 9,000 school backpacks forming the words "She lived happily for seven years in this world" on the facade of Munich's Haus der Kunst. The sentence, from a grieving mother, memorializes the children lost due to poorly constructed schools, critiquing government oversight and advocating for accountability (Weiwei, 2018). The "Murals of Philadelphia" initiative revitalizes city areas into lively representations of communal identity, boosting local pride and cohesion. These artworks are meant to evoke strong emotions for viewers, where pain, sadness, and outrage can occur. Still, they also represent spaces where discomfort becomes an opportunity to engage in meaningful discourse. Through participatory workshops, joint engagements, and public showcases, community art involvement empowers people, strengthens community ties, and adds aesthetic value to neighborhoods (Moss, 2010). These works confront viewers with discomfort, delving into political oppression, social struggle, and human loss, urging critical reflection on the uncomfortable realities within communities.

Dance in its historical context often caused aesthetic discomfort when the perception of beauty was challenged. For example, one of the modern dance pioneers, Isadora Duncan, danced barefoot at the beginning of the 20th century when it was regimented to use ballet slippers or point shoes in concert dances. This stepping out of the norm is often hailed and rejected simultaneously. Choreographers Katherine Dunham, an African American, and Jose Limon, a Mexican American, among others, challenged the whiteness of the Eurocentric modern dance perception with the influences of their heritages. Viewing the expression of race in an embodied way is a visceral, often discomfoting experience for the dominant culture or hailed as "exotic" and different by others without horizontally aligning with it. Perpener (2000) points out that innovations follow "a Eurocentric 'normative' paradigm-even when it is cast as avant-garde, postmodern, or some other categorization that indicates a remarkable break with tradition" and "privilege whiteness" (p. 67). An unfamiliar context threatens the status quo and the equilibrium that a dominant culture wants to maintain. Thus, performances or installations confronting viewers with social injustices or taboo subjects can create discomfort. They can prompt audiences to reflect on their beliefs and societal issues and open conversations they would not otherwise participate in. Additionally, images of vulnerability, pain, or trauma can prompt people to share their own stories.

Creating with new or unconventional materials or techniques that push the boundaries of traditional art forms (e.g., recycled, organic, or bio art materials) can raise awareness about the site of the engagement and challenge participants to consider their impact on the environment. Often, the exploration of materials and movement engagements occurs with embodied learning.

This approach is used in community-engaged projects and can shift participants' body awareness and sensations. Thus, initial discomfort can dissipate in a shared and inclusive environment. Non-textual and non-verbal ways of communication "call upon the ideational and any of the sensory resources we use to experience the world" (Eisner, 2002. p. 19). With a heightened sensitivity to our bodies in community spaces, transformational shifts in our perceptions of otherness can be registered in our minds and bodies. Considering our bodies as a source of intrinsic knowledge can empower a sense of belonging and engage in questioning who is included or excluded in the community. And why?

Stavrou (2019) highlights storytelling and drama as transformative pedagogy, while Jacobs (2023) speaks of the transformative role of affect in teacher education, exploring social justice through dance, visual, and musical arts. In her example of pre-service teachers, the teacher-participants experienced a sense of challenge and discomfort during arts encounters, which was countered by a pedagogy of joy<sup>1</sup> embedded in each arts-based learning environment. All art projects aimed to uplift, inspire, and actively engage, leading to heightened emotional and affective experiences that left participants with a lasting positive impression. Combining joy to remedy discomfort can serve as a transformative pedagogy, altering perceptions and promoting advocacy (Jacobs, 2013). Thus, despite the discomfort, art can offer opportunities to question broader themes such as power relations, subjectivity, identity, and gender discourse.

### **The Risk of Creating Discomfort**

Creating discomfort involves taking risks. Risk requires a safe space that not only supports artistic creation but also paradoxically encourages greater aesthetic risks. These risks result from the tension between established processes and unpredictable outcomes in learning spaces where participants navigate the interplay between safety and risks, such as openly expressing emotions, potentially prolonging conflicts, or resolving them and losing the right to indignation, all while experimenting with and challenging aesthetic norms (Hunter, 2008).

Time constraints, sociocultural pressures, pre-prescribed expectations, and spatial limitations generate tensions that can transform creative risks into successes or failures in projects involving diverse artists and community members. How these risks are managed is essential for maintaining a safe space (however defined) and, therefore, achieving positive social and artistic processes and outcomes. This intricate balance of risk and tension in collaborative performances prompts a critical question: does creating a 'safe' space mean reducing or enhancing risks? (Hunter, 2008)

### **Theoretical Framework**

As this paper is focused on the concept of a disorienting dilemma, we consider Mezirow's (1978) seminal work on transformative learning along with extrarational dimensions (Dirkx, 2006) and embodied perspectives (Schlattner, 2022).

Mezirow developed his theory when his wife returned to college as an adult and realized that other women did not have the need to be home for their families and were free to pursue their own interests. Today, this would not be earth-shaking. However, the idea that such a dilemma could significantly change one's worldview has become a standard for most transformative learning theories.

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<sup>1</sup> The pedagogy of joy is an educational approach that integrates positive, engaging, and uplifting experiences into the learning process to enhance motivation, deepen understanding, and foster an overall sense of well-being among learners.

Mezirow has been critiqued as having an overreliance on cognitive reasoning, neglecting the intuitive and affective domains to which Dirkx responded by adding emotions, unconscious symbols and imagery to our understanding of the transformative learning theory. “Engaging emotion-laden images within the learning experience in an imaginative rather than a literal way helps facilitate the movement of individuation by attending to the unconscious meaning-making processes at work within the human psyche. As such, it contributes to powerful processes of transformation” (Dirkx, 2006, p. 20). He moved towards spaces where “cognitive, affective, somatic, and spiritual components” may lead to individual transformation in which “one’s awareness or consciousness of being in the world” shifts (Dirkx, 2006, p.19).

Schlattner (2022) found that embodiment shifted her participants’ “self-concept” to an increased “self-worth” (p. 841). She highlights, “An embodied conception of transformative learning recognizes the inseparability of rationality, movement, emotion, and other related conceptions such as spirituality, creativity, or intuition.” (p. 834). This paper is further grounded in the pedagogy of discomfort, (Boler, 1999) which provides opportunities for both educators and learners to “take risks, experiment and imagine other ways of doing things” (Stavrou et al., 2021, p.101).

### **Transformative Pedagogy**

In transformative pedagogy, instructors and facilitators encourage learners to explore their beliefs and consider how they shape their work, often revealing gaps in understanding between different social experiences. This process can be uncomfortable but is crucial in design education for broadening perspectives (Mercer & McDonagh, 2021). Transformative Pedagogy includes Pedagogy of Discomfort (Boler, 1999) and Dialogic Pedagogy (Wegerif, 2019).

#### **Pedagogy of Discomfort**

Pedagogy of discomfort provides opportunities for both educators and learners to “take risks, experiment and imagine other ways of doing things” (Stavrou et al., 2021, p.101). Boler (1999) describes pedagogy of discomfort as both an invitation to inquiry and a call to action. As a form of inquiry, it prioritizes “collective witnessing”<sup>2</sup> over individual self-reflection, distinguishing witnessing from mere spectating as a pathway to collective engagement and learning to perceive differently. This discussion centers on the emotional reactions that often surface when examining deeply held beliefs and assumptions, including defensive anger and fears of change or loss of personal and cultural identities. An ethical goal of the pedagogy of discomfort is to foster a willingness to embrace a more ambiguous and flexible self-concept.

Furthermore, the “pedagogy of discomfort” coined by Boler (1999) was influenced by Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970) and hooks’ emphasis on equitable transformative education and advocates for acknowledging uncomfortable ideas and advocates for critical thinking, reflection, and dialogue (Boler, 1999; Chetty et al., 2016). Role-playing and simulations in subjects like colonial history involve students reenacting events or simulating conflict resolutions to provide different perspectives, helping audiences grapple with historical or social issues’ complex emotions and realities. For example, cultural immersion projects expose students to unfamiliar cultures and experiences that feature celebration and joy, such as Mardi Gras or diverse cultural celebrations that require embodiment, potentially leading to discomfort and enhancing understanding of global cultural viewpoints. Merleau-Ponty (1962) argues that ‘the theory of the body schema is, implicitly, a theory of perception’ and, of course, vice versa is

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<sup>2</sup> Collective witnessing occurs when a group observes or experiences an event together, creating a shared understanding or collective memory

also applicable (p. 239). Simply put, without the ‘lived body,’ conscious experience of the world ceases (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

In transformative pedagogy, educators offer learners opportunities to delve into their beliefs, values, and norms, examining how these influence their work, both unconsciously and consciously. While this approach may sometimes lead to discomfort, it is precisely this unease that highlights the presence of knowledge gaps between an individual’s social experiences and those of other social identities, underscoring its pedagogical value in design courses (Mercer & McDonagh, 2021).

### **Dialogic Pedagogy**

The understanding of dialogic teaching and pedagogy was first introduced by Robin Alexander, professor of education, in his study and book *Culture and Pedagogy* in 2001. His research examined in different cultural contexts how (dialogic) classroom talk affected pedagogy and, subsequently, students and teachers. Dialogic pedagogy, included in the transformative scope of pedagogy, supports “cultivating awareness of relationships” with which educators and students shift traditional roles of authority and increase a shared responsibility for change and individual transformation (Stinson, 2015, p. 31). With a shared sense of learning outcomes, coercion and external pressure of learning are reduced, and the joy in learning is increased. Embodiment, a body/mind connection, in dialogic learning and teaching creates references to one’s inner dynamics and *felt* states of our bodies, from comfort to discomfort, in the spaces in which we interact with others.

### **Conclusion**

This paper explored what happens when an educator or facilitator intentionally introduces discomfort into a learning experience. While discomfort can be challenging, we believe it is a form of ‘good trouble’ inviting learners into a process of critical inquiry (Boler, 1999) that is a necessary prerequisite for transformative learning (TL).

Creative discomfort needs to happen in a brave and safe space that gives room for students to try out new identities (Mezirow, 1978) and experiment with creative ideas and learning strategies. These strategies may be embodied through critical self-reflection or artistic expression.

While discomfort does not automatically lead to TL, neither does complacency. An educator needs to consciously and gently lead participants out of their comfort zone. Managing the space where engagements occur can be a first step in scaffolding discomfort. Verduzco-Baker (2018) recommends that facilitators supplement the learning environment with primary readings that relate the experiences of marginalized or oppressed groups, practice “calling in” to challenge existing assumptions, and model “brave” in their own responses (p. 585). Once exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences is established, practicing compassionate and critical self-reflection can deepen learning and decrease anxiety.

Discomfort can be pivotal in cultivating awareness, yet discomforting encounters require strategies of care. By supporting “structured discomfort,” we can facilitate experiences, engage in open dialogue in a brave space, expose diverse perspectives, encourage empathy and understanding, empower participants to reflect critically, and promote transformative learning.

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# Representations that Hinder the Use of Informal Learning in Work Contexts

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**Abstract:** This paper is set within the theoretical framework of informal learning studies (Marsick & Watkins, 1990; 2023; Yang, Watkins & Marsick, 2004) and sociomateriality studies (Fenwick, 2008), in particular the focus falls on Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (Engeström, 1987; Engeström Miettinen, Punamäki, 1999; Fenwick, 2003; 2008). Starting from the observation that workplaces represent informal learning spaces (Watkins & Marsick, 2023) and that learning is characterized as a social process, taking place in an expanded (material and immaterial) space, mediated by the perspectives of the actors within them and by (explicit and implicit) roles and norms (Fenwick, 2010), this research aims to outline what constraints hinder organizations from considering informal learning as a resource. Starting from multiple case studies (Creswell, 2012) involving three organizations, two located in Italy and one in Germany, the limitations and constraints that hinder the valorization of informal learning within organizations will be discussed. Some representations that do not allow informal learning to be considered a resource will be illustrated.

**Key Words:** Informal Learning, Sociomateriality, Work Contexts

## Introduction

Informal learning is a crucial component within work contexts. Unlike learning in institutional settings, such as schools and universities, it does not follow structured pathways, may be encouraged by an organization, or may occur despite an environment that does not cultivate learning (Marsick & Watkins, 2001).

The basic idea of this contribution is to consider work as one of the most relevant informal educational and learning experiences in a person's life (Rossi, 2011). The work environment, being configured as a learning setting from a social, personal, cultural, and professional perspective, plays a crucial role in influencing people's modes of interpretation, their choices, the actions they pursue, and consequently, the learning that is generated (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). Informal learning can be a resource and a catalyst for organizational innovation. Such organizations can support innovation and sustain performance by considering learning as a strategic resource and valuing informal learning to exploit the opportunities it can offer (Eraut, 2004). However, professionals are not always prepared to self-manage their learning, and not all managers have the resources to support and value it. Based on this, this paper aims to understand what constraints hinder organizations from considering the informal learning they generate as a resource.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical and conceptual anchors to which the research is linked are informal learning (Marsick & Watkins, 1990; 2018; 2023; Yang, Watkins & Marsick, 2004) and Historical Cultural Activity Theory (CHAT) (Engeström, Miettinen, Punamäki, 1999; Engeström, 1987; Fenwick, 2003; 2008). The studies conducted by Mezirow (1991) have also been used to



investigate innovation processes within organizational contexts, examples of which are the studies undertaken by Faller and Marsick (2023), Fabbri (2018), and Melacarne (2018). The origins of the informal learning model (Marsick & Watkins, 1990) connect to related concepts such as learning “*en passant*” (Reischmann, 1986), the distinctions made between formal, informal and non-formal learning (Jarvis, 1987), social modeling (Bandura, 1986), experiential learning (Boud, Choen & Walker, 1993; Kolb, 1984), self-directed learning (Knowles, 1950), action learning as a variant of experiential learning (Revans, 1982) action science (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1978) and reflection in action (Schön, 1983), critical reflection and transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991), tacit knowing (Polanyi, 1967), situated cognition (Scribner, 1986; Lave & Wenger, 1991) and communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) (Marsick & Watkins, 2001, p. 26). Marsick and Watkins (1990) define informal learning as an intentional process that does not follow structured routes. It is characterized by being primarily experiential and non-institutional (p.7). It is the subject that initiates learning, not the organization. Moreover, it can follow two logics: an additive one, i.e., knowledge acquisition, and a transformative one, i.e., of the ways in which knowledge is constructed (Mezirow, 1991). The focus is, therefore, on the cognitive, reflective, and active dimensions of informal learning events, focusing on individual agency. In 2018 this model was augmented (Marsick & Watkins, 2018) by showing how individuals learn from experience informally or incidentally within the social contexts they inhabit; this is because, although workplace learning can be individualized or self-directed, it is often collaborative and social. Informal learning is circular, triggered by needs, challenges, or opportunities that take shape through interaction with other professionals.

Cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) (Engeström, Miettinen & Punamäki, 1999 Engeström, 1987) has its roots in classical German philosophy (Kant and Hegel) and the writings of Marx and Engels (Di Masi & Miolli, 2019). However, it goes beyond binary representations of activity as one-dimensional spaces of social class struggle alone. Lev Vygotsky (1978) is considered the founding father of CHAT. Other authors later took up and developed his studies (Leont’ev, 1974, 1981; Daniels, 1996; Engestrom et al., 1999; Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006). CHAT foregrounds the sociopolitical analysis of human activity, including constructs related to the division of labor and the community (Fenwick, 2010; 2011). The focus is on the activity itself, which is based on the understanding of learning, human development, and education about how individuals do things together, in what way (cooperative or conflictual over time), and what is understood as social, material, and historical phenomena. Based on this, Fenwick (2008; 2011) states that learning is a collective activity in which the interaction that takes place within workplaces engages and gives visibility to the professionals who are part of it. Furthermore, we find objects mediating actions and dialogue within work contexts, subjects co-constructing challenges, and emerging practices and solutions. Learning is characterized as a social process taking place in an expanded space (material and immaterial), mediated by the perspectives of actors within them and by (explicit and tacit) roles and norms (Fenwick, 2010).

### **Methodology**

The methodological framework lies within the family of qualitative methodologies (Creswell, 2012). To conduct this research, a case study with convenience sampling was adopted (Creswell, 2012). The study was conducted over the two years 2021-2022. The objective of the research was to answer the following question: What are the constraints that hinder organizations from considering informal learning generated as a resource?

The sample consists of three companies: two in Italy (Company A and Company B) and one in Germany (Company C). All three companies have specific in-house structures (Company Academy) for managing the training processes of their professionals. Data were collected through documentary sources (public and private), semi-structured interviews, and informal conversations. In total, n=14 semi-structured interviews were conducted: specifically, n=11 in Company A, n=2 in Company B, and n=1 in Company C.

These in-depth interviews involved executives, human resource managers, and administrative figures. The research question aimed to explore how training courses are designed, daily practices, and the management of critical incidents.

Each interview was transcribed ad verbatim. The collected textual units were subjected to manual Thematic Analysis developed by Braun & Clarke (2006). Using TA, it was possible to systematically identify and organize thematic information across a dataset.

## Results

Table 1 summarises the main findings from the analysis of the interviewees' data, restricting the discussion to the thematic areas of the interview. For the sake of synthesis, only the narrative segments considered most significant, and representative have been reported.

### Figure 1

#### Data analysis

<b><i>How they learned to do what they are doing (practice)</i></b>	
Narrative segments describe how professionals learned and acquired the core competences for their professional profile. Training is not the only prerequisite, observation, experience and practice are also important: observing an experienced colleague, experiencing the professional community and immersing oneself in practice. Training, therefore, must be accompanied by observation, experience and practice. One learns as in a workshop (Sennet, 2008). This aspect is transversal at all levels, from administrative to governance figures.	<p><i>“In my case it is called learning by doing; you learn in the field, by working. Training is important but it is also important to practice.”</i></p> <p>Manager</p> <p><i>“There has always been this thing of wanting to stimulate people’s personal growth, alternating training with practice.”</i></p> <p>Human Resource Manager</p>
<b><i>Management of training courses</i></b>	
The management of training courses - design, implementation, delivery of training activities, evaluation and reporting - is characterised by being situated and a process co-constructed with professionals:	<p><i>“Each manager is asked to define the competences required for the roles performed by his or her employees and the relative degree of importance. Subsequently, each manager asks the employees to indicate the degree of</i></p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• training courses are designed on the basis of data collection tools. Examples of this are questionnaires or interviews that are administered to professionals;</li> <li>• are situated as they are designed by role and by professional profile.</li> </ul> <p>From the interviews it emerges that the training courses provided aim to acquire and consolidate one or more skills. There is a greater focus on skills defined as soft, such as communication skills, team building and time management. However, the criterion that follows the design and implementation of training courses approaches a problem-solving logic in which a specific need or gap is filled with a training course. The construction process involving all professionals at different levels and the focus on transversal competences are innovative, but the possibility of using critical incidents occurring in practice as a resource for training does not emerge.</p>	<p><i>knowledge for each competence and the relative frequency with which it is used.”</i> Training manager</p> <p><i>“We alternate theory with practice, training courses allow you to experience what you read in books, theory within practice.”</i> Human resource manager</p> <p><i>“There are colleagues who do not know how to prioritise or do not know how to manage their time well, especially in smart working. We need training courses in which time management issues are addressed.”</i> Administration</p>
<b><i>Critical incidents</i></b>	
<p>Critical incidents and disorienting dilemmas that professionals encounter in practice, if supported, can be opportunities for learning and change. It emerges from the interviews that yes, critical incidents represent a learning opportunity, however, the typology seems to approach an instrumental logic.</p> <p>From the first narrative segment, it is evident how a role-promotion (disorienting dilemma) follows a problem-solving logic rather than a reflective logic.</p> <p>The second narrative segment shows how a critical incident was not thematised as a resource within the</p>	<p><i>“Maybe you become manager of several structures, there is a need to create a training path that allows you to acquire skills in planning and organising activities, managing time and resources, dealing with resources and coordinating them.”</i> Training manager</p> <p><i>“Years ago, we had to set up a network of sites, one of the first sites, I was given the task of taking care of the realisation and the design but above all also the concrete realisation; there was a person who had an intermediate role in the company, he opposed this</i></p>

<p>professional community but remained as an individual practitioner's "experience".</p>	<p><i>realisation, he didn't favour it, he probably wanted a different role... I resolved it on the one hand by taking the situation head-on, think I was outside, I took a flight and came here day and night to put the necessary software in place, at the same time in an involuntary manner - today I treasure this - I tried not to belittle him, make him understand the goodness of what was in the project, in a situation of disadvantage I tried to get the best out of this other person, he became a valuable person in the management of the network, it was more my personal difficulty than the approach of the people of the projects."</i> Administration</p>
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**Findings and Reflections**

The results do not claim to be generalized; however, they have been reported because they allow some reflections to be developed. From the data, it emerged that the leaders who manage training processes have two visions: a) the training models that are developed turn out to be classic; b) the contents of the training activities turn out to be both technical-specialist and transversal and knowledge management, an element that should, in any case, be considered innovative. Training practices are characterized by being situated, socially constructed (Fabbri, 2007), negotiated based on interactions between human actors, material and technological artifacts, immaterial artifacts, norms, and rules, implicit and explicit (Fenwick, 2008; 2010). However, the leadership of the three organizations: a) need to mention how a specific knowledge has become a community; b) do not thematize critical incidents as a resource. The possibility of using informal learning as a resource for the community and how learning from and giving meaning to experience implement the possibility of action has yet to emerge (Marsick & Watkins, 1990; Watkins & Marsick, 2018). This leads us to further reflection. Today, learning requires changes in the entire organizational system, not just how professionals learn (Watkins & Marsick, 2023). To rethink organizational practices that enhance informal learning, organizations must first innovate leadership practices that can support practitioners' learning. Leaders themselves must set up methodological devices that can enhance informal learning.

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## **Redefining the Disorienting Dilemma as Existing on a Continuum Between Peak and Trauma**

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**Abstract:** Transformative learning theory (TLT) and practice, as it is currently conceptualized, is premised on the idea of a catalyst--a disorienting dilemma--that triggers a cascade of learning opportunities motivated by the learner's need to reconcile feelings of dissonance. The disorienting dilemma might be emotionally surprising, perplexing, or jarring--different from an uplifting experience or a peak. As four scholars who have examined transformative learning (TL) in different domains, we propose that the catalyst for TL might best be portrayed as a continuum between a peak and a trauma, as has been observed by pioneers such as Abraham Maslow and Joseph Campbell. This session places this lesser-examined assumption into question because TL can arise out of experiences between polarities during experiences such as boredom, stalling, or indecisiveness. In our roundtable discussion, we will share some of our findings about the catalysts of TL and invite inquirers of TL and psychology to join in a dialogue about the nature of a transformative catalyst and precursors that support or preclude transformation. As a group, we will examine our underlying assumptions about how the transformative catalyst within TLT, per Mezirow, has been conceptualized.

**Key Words:** disorienting dilemma, peak transformation, transformation through trauma, transformative continuum, integration

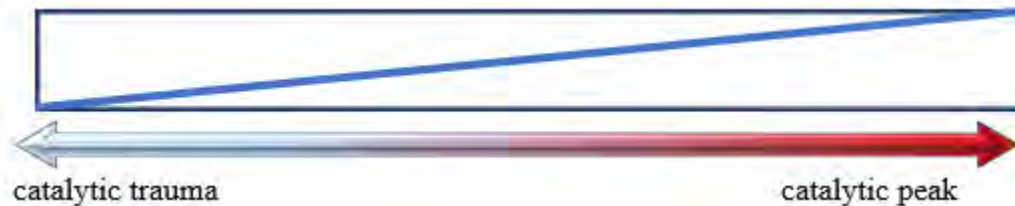
### **Background and Purpose**

What makes disorienting dilemmas 'defining moments' (Devine & Sparks, 2014) that catalyze transformation? Humans can experience the extremes of joy and suffering; yet not every experience produces a change in how we see ourselves, relate to others, or act in the world. How can peak experiences (Maslow, 1971) traumatic events (Maslow, 1962), or experiences somewhere between, set us on a journey toward perspective transformation and TL? In this roundtable, our group will propose the notion that the catalyst for transformation, identified in seminal theory as a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1991), might not always be disconcerting and may more accurately be characterized as existing on a continuum between trauma and peak experience (see Figure 1). The four presenters will illustrate these assertions by sharing stories from our research that exhibit positive peak transformative triggers, i.e., those resulting from moments of great happiness and fulfillment (Maslow, 1971), traumatic transformative catalysts, i.e., those resulting from shocking or traumatic experiences (Maté, 2022), as well as those that lie

between these extremes. Specifically, we will share participants' transformative experiences of being plurilingual, enduring substance addiction, experiencing shame, and adventuring through study abroad.

### Figure 1

*Transformative Learning Catalyst: Continuum Between Trauma and Peak Experience*



Mezirow's (1991, 2000) TL theory outlines a rational process of accessing and critically examining previously unconscious underlying assumptions, beliefs, and values to improve understanding of others, the world, and one's self. The missing part, often critiqued by numerous scholars, has been connecting this rational conceptualization of transformation with an explanation of how emotions, social connectedness, and spirituality come into play. Around the time when Mezirow's crucial work was published (1991), Boyd and Myers (1988) published a different perspective on TL that was informed by Carl Jung's analytical depth psychology and titled transformative education. This psychological approach described transformative education as "a process of bringing the unconscious to consciousness as individuals differentiate self from other, and simultaneously integrate self with the collective" (Kreber, 2022, p.140). Additionally, a seminal understanding of transformation that exists beyond TL literature, specifically the work of Joseph Campbell (1968) in mythology, states that transformation is prompted in one of three ways: by trauma, surprise, or intention.

The purpose of this discourse is to examine various perspectives about the catalyst and the subsequent journeys learners take toward transformative learning. In addition to the dilemmas set forth by Mezirow, we will examine insights from depth psychology (Dirkx, 2001, 2006, 2012) and the role of emotions (Mälkki & Raami, 2022) and peak experiences (Maslow, 1971; Ross, 2020). In this dialogue that includes perspectives about how to foster TL, we aim to entertain the utility of holistic ways of knowing that include rationality, emotions, social connectedness, somatic, and even spirituality.

### Discussion Format

This discussion will be centrally informed by examples in our practice and research that exemplify how TL might be sparked by diverse types of experiences that could be plotted on a continuum and range from traumatic, to unpleasant, to mundane, to peak experiences. Moreover, we aim to highlight that the form (what exactly happened in the person's life, e.g., falling into the hopelessness of addiction, being stuck long-term in an uninspiring job, or an uplifting experience as a result of immersion into a language in a particular country) and intensity of the catalyst can vary and invite discussion about the implications of both. We assert that in addition to examining the catalyst, it is important to question avenues to process, reflect, and act after transformative experiences and to enlist multiple ways of knowing to support TL among our participants.



We culminate the discussion by challenging underlying assumptions embedded in prevailing TL theory, giving attention to the limitations of the disorienting dilemma as it has been generally conceived. Moreover, we examine what might happen if we assign less importance to very positive or extremely distressing moments. We will discuss the differences and similarities in processing diverse types of transformative experiences on the continuum between trauma and peak in supporting TL, to better understand the emotions ‘behind the scenes’ that activate and contribute to transformative learning.

### Questions for Discussion

- To facilitate this roundtable session, we will ask the group the following questions:
- In what ways do the extremes of peak (Maslow, 1971) troublesome (Mezirow, 1991) or even traumatic catalysts affect the pedagogy, content, process, and outcomes of TL?
- Research indicates that integrating transformative experiences follows a recognizable process of nine distinct phases regardless of the location of the catalyst along the continuum between peak and trauma (Ross, 2017, 2019). How might this information, if it has merit, influence and/or inform how we facilitate TL?
- How does the quality and/or the meaning we assign to the transformative catalyst affect our integration into daily life?
- Does the notion of the catalyst as a continuum benefit or hinder TL or reveal previously unknown possibilities?
- Might TL result purely through intention to change without a requisite experience along the trauma/peak continuum?

### Timeline and Format

- To facilitate the interaction among the participants, we envision the following structure for the workshop with a suggested percentage of time:
- Self-introductions with each participant, stating their interest in the topic and their experience (5%)
- Introductory presentation by facilitators with a short background of concepts to be discussed, with examples (40%)
- Open discussion with responses to the presentation and participants’ examples (45%)
- Responses by roundtable facilitators and summary (10%).

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# **Adult Learners' Transformative Learning Experience Through Theater-based Pedagogy: Flourish in Shifting Paradigms and Building Relationships with Others**

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**Abstract:** Adult learners' ability to understand different perspectives of others and build constructive relationships despite the differences in beliefs and perspectives is particularly critical in a world with polarization in perspectives and beliefs. Theater-based pedagogy, a form of aesthetic learning, has been found to be able to foster a shift of perspectives in transformative learning. However, not much research has been done on the ways in which theater-based pedagogy influences adult learners during times of mass polarization in higher education settings. This qualitative research conducts interviews in a private university in the U.S. through a course that applies theater-based pedagogy to facilitate the embodying and understanding of others. The research goal is to outline how theater-based pedagogy in adult learning settings facilitates learners to understand and embrace alternative and conflicting views and ultimately transform paradigms, and therefore, allow learners to build empathy and understanding, flourish in relationship-building, and be prepared to solve conflicts in the real world. Findings can be applied across the adult education field, offering insights into how theater-based pedagogy can effectively support adults' transformative learning journey, especially when faced with conflicting views from others.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Theater-Based Pedagogy, Shift of Paradigm, Aesthetic Learning, Higher Education

## **Introduction**

Mass polarization in beliefs and perspectives has increased in the United States (DellaPosta, 2020), dividing people from being able to see each other with empathy and understanding or develop cooperative relationships with others. Such a problem in classrooms is amplified in higher education particularly, as it is more and more challenging to host difficult conversations around ideological, social, and political differences in classrooms. Open discussions around critical issues require adult learners to shift away from a traditional paradigm that considers binary distinctions such as truth and falsity (Elqayam, 2016), especially in a world with polarized beliefs where connections and cooperation are needed.

Transformative learning involves the perspective transformation of a frame of reference (Mezirow, 1985). Scholars connect art to the shift of paradigms and the understanding of alternative epistemologies and ontologies (Brookfield & Holst, 2011) as artistic encounters shift people away from their everyday experiences. The involvement of cognitive, affective, somatic, and spiritual domains in aesthetic learning (Kokkos, 2010; Lawrence, 2005) provides possibilities for adult learners to deepen their understanding of self and the world (Lawrence, 2005). As one of the artistic expressions, theater prompts learners to try on different perspectives (Bassett & Taylor, 2007), open awareness to other ways of being (Blackburn Miller, 2020), and build multicultural competence (Lewis & Viato, 2007). The most common theater techniques

applied in adult education are role-play (Ballon, et al., 2007; Bassett & Taylor, 2007; Kadric, 2017; Sestigiani & Pechenkina, 2022), improvisation (Hobson et al., 2019), theater of the oppressed (Boal, 2000), and the use of listening, vocalization, posture, and verbal and nonverbal expressions (Dow et al., 2007). These theater techniques require learners to actively listen, be present, and be ready to engage in real-time interactions with others (Huffaker & West, 2005), stimulating both an active cognitive learning curve and an emotional curve (Kadric, 2017) as part of a transformative learning experience.

### **Problem, Purpose, and Research Question**

Research on the relationship between transformative learning and theater-based practice has been conducted in a broad range of contexts. Higher education, relevant research has been conducted in business education (Huffaker & West, 2005; Moshavi, 2001), language learning (Sestigiani & Pechenkina, 2022), and medical education (Dow et al., 2007; Watson, 2011). However, limited research has focused on building cooperation and connections in a time of mass polarization in higher education settings. Further empirical work is called upon to explain *how* artistic engagement fosters cooperative relationships and more constructive engagement with conflict in difficult situations (Bang, 2016).

This study aims to understand how theater-based pedagogy in higher education settings in the time of mass polarization, if at all, influences learners' paradigms in understanding and accepting alternative and even conflicting views and therefore, building cooperative relationships with others. The research question that guides this study is: *How do adult learners experience a theater-based class concerning changes in their perspectives and their ability to build relationships with others?*

### **Research Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative methodology (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to understand the experiences of participants who are enrolled in classes that use theater-based pedagogy to explore difficult topics through in-depth individual interviews. This study aims to recruit 12 participants with different majors and backgrounds in full-time academic programs in a course that applies a theater-based pedagogy at a private university in the U.S. In this semester-long course, learners will be paired up with someone with a different profile and background and perform one another by simulating others' tones, accents, body language, and emotions when addressing a prompt that invites self-reflection.

Three rounds of interviews will be conducted before, during, and after the theater-based activities to capture participants' theater-based learning experience from a transformative learning perspective. Additional field notes will be included as supplementary data for triangulation.

### **Expected Outcomes**

This research aims to outline how, if at all, theater-based pedagogy in university settings facilitates adult learners to understand and embrace alternative and conflicting views and ultimately transform paradigms, and therefore, allow adult learners to build empathy and understanding in relationship building, and be prepared to solve conflicts in the real world. The findings have the potential to benefit adult educators and human resource development professionals in understanding how theater-based pedagogy can effectively support adults' transformative learning journey, especially when faced with conflicting views from others.

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# Advocating for Transformative Learning: Preparing Teacher Candidates to Become Culturally Responsive Educators

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**Abstract:** We advocate for the intentional integration of transformative learning into teacher preparation programs to help foster teacher candidates' identities as culturally responsive educators, as well as promote cultural and global competencies necessary to engage in a diverse, rapidly changing, and interconnected world (Asia Society/OECD, 2018; Muñiz, 2020). We provide an overview of the transformative learning theory and how it can foster culturally responsive beliefs and practices within teacher preparation. Next, we discuss three features of transformative learning that may promote teacher candidates' identities as culturally responsive educators: (1) intense shared experiential activities that provoke meaning making and act as disorienting dilemmas; (2) critical reflection of one's belief system; and (3) ongoing dialogue within the context of supportive relationships. We conclude by discussing how teacher educators can advocate for integrating transformative learning into teacher preparation programs and consider implications for program design.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Culturally Responsive Educators, Teacher Identity Formation, Teacher Educators, Teacher Preparation

## Introduction

Transformative learning is the process of intentionally reflecting on “problematic frames of reference (mindsets, habits of the mind, meaning perspectives) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change” (Mezirow, 2006, p. 92). This process involves a deep shift in one's beliefs and perspectives through critically reflecting on assumptions, challenging ideas through dialogue, and evaluating these ideas (Mezirow, 1997, 2006). Transformative learning can promote candidates' identities as culturally responsive educators by promoting cultural and global competencies necessary to engage in a diverse, rapidly changing, and interconnected world (Asia Society/OECD, 2018; Muñiz, 2020). Culturally responsive educators consider the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of diverse students (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Although preparing teacher candidates to meet the needs of diverse PK–12 learners is critical to teacher preparation programs, they may experience challenges enacting this aim. Culturally responsive educators are needed to address current challenges facing the education profession, including heightened disparities in schools due to a dual pandemic (Stolberg, 2020), teacher attrition, and burnout (Madigan & Kim, 2021).

As teacher educators, we advocate for integrating transformative learning within teacher preparation programs as a way to promote the development of culturally responsive educators. This extended abstract provides an overview of transformative learning theory and how it may serve as a framework for teacher educators. We will discuss three features of transformational learning that promote culturally responsive educators: (1) intense shared experiential activities;

(2) critical reflection; and (3) ongoing dialogue. We conclude with a discussion of how teacher educators can advocate for integrating transformative learning into teacher preparation programs.

### **Transformative Learning for Culturally Responsive Educators**

The inclusion of transformative learning within teacher preparation programs may serve as a way for teacher educators to promote teacher candidates' identities as culturally responsive educators, especially given the challenges and constraints many educators currently face. Transformative learning provides opportunities for teacher candidates to reinterpret experiences from a new viewpoint and engage in personal and professional development (Mezirow, 1994). However, given that candidates' perceptions of teaching and learning may be resistant to change, transformative learning must be intentionally integrated within teacher preparation programs.

#### **Intense shared experiential activities**

Intense, shared experiential activities allow candidates to undergo potentially disorienting explorations of a more diverse and complex world. Experiential activities that can inform teacher candidates' cultural and global competencies are service-learning projects, cultural immersion experiences, and clinical experiences in PK–12 schools. Teacher educators can intentionally structure experiential activities that allow candidates to confront educational issues and to make meaning of disorienting dilemmas within a secure and trusting learning community (Taylor, 2000). Teacher educators can consider how to balance candidates' vulnerability and discomfort with a sense of safety in the learning environment (Goodwin & Kosnik, 2013).

#### **Critical Self-reflection**

Transformative learning allows individuals to identify problematic beliefs and mindsets, critically reflect on the reasons supporting these beliefs, and revise or construct new, more inclusive beliefs that guide behavior (Mezirow, 2006). Teacher's beliefs about cultural diversity shape how they instruct, connect with students, promote educational equity, and close opportunity gaps among diverse learners from historically marginalized backgrounds (Gay, 2015). Promoting teacher candidates' openness to critically reflect on their beliefs about cultural diversity may allow them to gain greater insight into implicit beliefs about oneself, others, and how the world works, as well as specific contexts including classrooms, schools, and communities (Taylor, 2007). Asking critical reflection questions, reflecting on experiential activities, and teacher inquiry projects are three strategies teacher educators can use to promote critical self-reflection and openness to diversity, social justice, and equity among teacher candidates (Gay, 2015).

#### **Ongoing Dialogue**

Dialogue flourishes when there is a shared vision and common goals, as well as a clear and honest communication of one's emotions (Taylor, 2009). Through ongoing dialogue, teacher educators can help candidates manage potential tensions or discomfort that may arise to ensure they have a sense of ownership and agency. Establishing supportive, trusting relationships and an inclusive environment can help candidates identify and critically reflect upon their attitudes and beliefs. Teacher educators can set the stage for ongoing dialogue by being aware of and validating others' emotions, for instance, candidates can authentically share their "social, political, and cultural histories" in relation to a shared topic or experience (Taylor, 2000, p. 11) which can foster empathy towards others and engaging in perspective-taking (Jacobs & Haberlin, 2021).



## Conclusion

We advocate for the intentional integration of transformative learning into teacher preparation programs to help foster teacher candidates' identities as culturally responsive educators. We established that teacher educators can incorporate aspects of transformative learning into their programs, through intense shared experiential activities, critical reflection, and ongoing dialogue. As transformational practitioners, we suggest teacher educators can advocate for transformative learning in their programs by (1) investing in transformative relationships, (2) engaging in transformative coaching, and (3) acknowledging sociocultural, political, and historical influences on their teacher preparation program, institution, and broader society.

Teacher educators can invest in transformative relationships with their colleagues and teacher candidates by reflecting on how their own lived experiences, identities, beliefs, and practices (Taylor, 2000). They can do this by engaging in self-study to develop and reflect on their pedagogy of facilitating transformative learning. This allows teacher educators to engage in internal reflection and dialogue – two critical elements of transformative learning. Additionally, transformative coaching, involves discerning teacher candidates' readiness to experience transformative learning and supporting them throughout the process. Teacher educators can learn how to recognize when a candidate is receptive to revising their beliefs by watching for signs of change and instability in beliefs and responding accordingly. They can provide a balance of guidance, support, and autonomy throughout the transformative learning experience so that candidates can develop their own insights and understandings (Taylor, 2007). Thus helping candidates process emotions in a developmentally responsive and systematic way throughout their teacher preparation program. Teacher educators must acknowledge sociocultural, political, and historical influences on their teacher preparation program, institution, and the communities they serve in order to advocate for the integration of transformational learning in their programs (Goodman, 2022). For instance, teacher educators can critically reflect on the status quo in how diverse candidates are prepared, recruited, and retained in their teacher preparation program (Buczynski, 2021). Teacher educators can also stay up to date regarding legislation being adopted throughout the United States that restricts the use of culturally responsive pedagogies within education, and resources to support anti-racist education, training, and research (Alexander, 2023; Golden, 2023).

Transformative learning can be a powerful vehicle for teacher educators to help promote teacher candidates' identities as culturally responsive educators. They can utilize transformative learning to advocate for and invest in impactful relationships with their colleagues and teacher candidates. This purposeful integration of weaving together transformative learning and tenets of cultural responsiveness can foster self-awareness and potentially promote ownership of teacher candidates' development as culturally responsive educators.

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## **Engaging with Power, Privilege and Social Justice as a Means of Transforming Disaster Management in a Climate-changed World**

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**Abstract:** This proposed roundtable is sparked by an initial conversation between faculty and graduate students who have jointly participated in a graduate course focused on the Human Dimensions of Disasters. The course challenges the traditional, hierarchical approaches to disaster and emergency management (Incident Command Systems) by exploring a more horizontal and equity-focused approach that relies on transdisciplinary learning, critical self-reflection (critical theory, feminist theory, [Cho et al., 2013]), and the examination of blind-spots and unquestioned assumptions in behaviours. During the course, students are supported in analyzing and unpacking an intensive disaster case study employing the lens of social identity and location to explore how these construct vulnerability and resilience in the context of disasters and climate change. Students journal their reflexive learning process, situating their response to disasters in relation to their own social location, the social determinants of health, eco-determinants of planetary health and how disasters amplify existing patterns of individual and community vulnerability and resilience. The sessions' initial fishbowl conversation will spark the larger roundtable conversation by offering real-time insights into the transformative learning potential of challenging dominant theories and practices and centering diversity, social equity, and identity as the foundation for learning and practice.

**Key Words:** Transformational Education, Equity, Feminist, Disrupt

### **Extended Abstract**

This proposed roundtable session is sparked by an initial fishbowl conversation between faculty and graduate students who have jointly participated in a graduate course focused on the Human Dimensions of Disasters. The course challenges the traditional, hierarchical approaches to disaster and emergency management (e.g., Incident Command Systems) by exploring a more horizontal and equity-focused approach that relies on transdisciplinary learning, critical self-reflection (drawing on critical theory (Finlay, 2008), feminist theory (Crenshaw, 1997) and practice, Cho et al., 2013), and the examination of blind-spots and unquestioned assumptions in behaviours. During the course, students are supported in analyzing and unpacking an intensive disaster case study employing the lens of social identity and location (Crenshaw 1997) to explore how these construct vulnerability and resilience in the context of disasters and climate change.

The process of critical self-reflection on identity and power within the course (Crenshaw, 1997; Finlay, 2008) is designed to intentionally disrupt and challenge dominant discourses of disaster and emergency management and to invite students into a more self-reflexive practice. Students journal their reflexive learning process (Hooks, 2014), situating their response to disasters in relation to their own social location, the social determinants of health (SDoH), eco-

determinants of planetary health and the ways in which disasters amplify existing patterns of individual and community vulnerability and resilience (Ray, 2021). By encouraging an internalized intersectional and transdisciplinary approach to the discipline of disaster management, students are better able to bridge the divide between theory and practice in their development as so-called ‘pracademics’ (Barsky & Horan, 2014). Simultaneously, they are developing the critical self-reflective (Hooks, 2014) competencies necessary to operate in and potentially transform a field that needs to adapt to the climate-fueled increase in disasters and increasing calls for climate justice.

The sessions’ initial fishbowl conversation will spark the larger roundtable conversation by offering real-time insights into the transformative learning potential of challenging dominant theories and practices and centering diversity, social equity, and identity as the foundation for learning and practice.

### **Proposal**

This roundtable discussion will begin with a fishbowl discussion, in which two faculty and two students engage in conversation about their experiences in the course. During this conversation, the discussants will unpack and explore the learning process, querying what about this learning experience encourages students to be vulnerable, to examine issues of power and privilege and how systems of privilege and oppression are or can be, centered in disaster management (Ray, 2021). Through this fishbowl discussion, we will explore in real time what aspects of the learning journey led all four panelists to describe this course as transformative while also acknowledging and examining the “aftermath of transformation” and the discussants’ often challenging experiences of applying a non-dominant approach to disaster management out of the classroom and back into their professional lives and practice.

Following this fishbowl conversation, we will expand the discussion to include all participants as we explore the questions that touch on and are inspired by the conference’s focus on exploring how we can “tackle our blind spots, chase our curiosity, explore our uncertainty and not-knowing, shed some light on the dark side of transformation, and engage with ambiguity, being out-of-control, and the dangerous, risky, and existential dimensions of transformation.” We propose the following questions as a starting place to guide this larger discussion:

- How does the naming of systemic oppression (Ray, 2021) become an example of ‘trouble’ forcing educators and students to step out of their comfort to engage in discourse that moves the conversation forward for socially responsible and socially-just disaster management?
- What is the impact of asking students to engage with their power and privilege? What is the impact of and barriers to students questioning themselves and faculty to engage with their power and privilege? How did resistance show up in the classroom discussions?
- How do we create safe and brave spaces to allow for the deconstruction of long-held beliefs and value systems for all?
- How do we remove ego from a population (e.g., disaster responders) who have historically been groomed to lead from within a top-down structure?
- How does or might the reflective process of journaling and iterative group feedback with faculty create productive uncertainty amid the risk of existential questions about who they are in their professional roles (e.g., as disaster responders)?

- How can we encourage students to re-imagine how they tackle big issues such as climate change and disasters with social responsibility and reflexivity?

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# A New and Unknown World ss Coming: Transformative Learning for Older Adults

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**Abstract:** Aging society is a complex worldwide issue with both challenges and possibilities. This phenomenon presents an opportunity to make the intra-action between aging adults and society more visible by treating this challenge as an opportunity to generate new ecologies for transformation (Bateson, 2022). To meet the complex demands of the aging society, adult educators must inquire more broadly: *What if we reimagine an aging society as a social ecology that activates lifelong learning to meet the complexity of our times?*

**Key Words:** Aging Society, Adult Learning, Transformative Learning, Ecological Transformation

## Background

Global society faces the challenge of a considerable increase in the population of older adults (Wilmoth et al., 2023). This trend results from declining mortality and fertility rates (Findsen & Formosa, 2011). For example, South Korea has one of the fastest-aging populations and the lowest fertility rate; the percentage of adults aged 65 and over is predicted to reach 39.4% by 2050 (Richter, 2024), and the fertility rate has become the lowest in the world at 0.72 children per woman as of 2023 (Buchholz, 2024). This demographic shift impacts all aspects of human life, including the individual, social, economic, cultural, and political domains.

The aging population implicates unprecedented societal challenges, such as public pension shortages (Morris, 2022), an aging workforce (Pilipiec et al., 2021), or ageism (Nelson, 2005). These challenges put pressure on both individuals and societal infrastructures to accommodate older people (Fragoso & Fonseca, 2022). Many countries have attempted to address the issues through policy reforms (e.g., pension reform) or legal interventions (e.g., retirement age increase).

Despite these attempts, they have yet to have the intended impact. Australia, for instance, increased women's pension age from 60 to 65 to reduce government expenditure; however, it disproportionately impacted poorer households, raising relative poverty rates and inequality measures significantly (Morris, 2022). Pilipiec et al. (2021) investigated the empirical evidence on the effects of increasing the retirement age on older adults' health, well-being, and workforce participation. They suggest the increase has led to higher labor force participation, but the effects on health and well-being are limited.

Similar polarities are seen in adult education research. While instrumental learning has been found to satisfy intellectual fulfillment, social cohesion, and leisure (Findsen, 2007), critiques of formal learning environments have been made as older adult enrollment declines (Chen et al., 2008). Innovations in technology learning have been designed to improve one's quality of life, as older adults need coping skills to address age-related concerns such as retirement, health, and death (Fisher & Wolf, 2000). However, Purdie and Boulton-Lewis (2003) reveal that technological learning is the least of older adults' priorities. While recent literature has

proposed intergenerational learning contexts (Peterson, 2023), generational conflict persists (Fragoso & Fonseca, 2022).

Nowadays, older adults are generally referred to as those who have retired from work or have little or no involvement in family-raising responsibilities, as chronological age is no longer salient (Findsen & Formosa, 2011). Negative aging perceptions continue to exist due to negative depictions of older individuals in the media (Nelson, 2005). The myth that they are fragile and lack meaningful contributions to society is pervasive (Merriam & Kee, 2014). Yet in adult education, older adults are seen as functioning and self-directed learners, and stereotypes toward them are fading away (Chen et al., 2008). Despite these liberating attempts, we still have not made significant societal changes. A new approach to older adult learning seems required, necessitating a reimagination of an aging society.

For Bateson (2022), our epistemological understanding of change attempting to approach complex issues with linear and predictable solutions alone is what constrains us. No single person or part cannot and does not have all the answers to the challenges we face (Bateson, 2016). Our world continuously evolves in interconnected ways, increasing its complexity and revealing relationships at all levels, including micro-, meso-, and macro-levels (Pendleton-Jullian & Brown, 2018). We now encounter a new and unknown era — where multiple contexts and layers of society interact with an uncertain future.

From a young South Korean woman context, these matters deeply concern me as I am not fully prepared to face the challenges of the aging population. Older adults – including my parents as they are aging – once held important roles in society, but now, they feel like they are losing their space in society. They have so much potential to flourish and make a meaningful impact, but societal pressures limit their opportunities. Seeing so many individuals struggling to find meaning in society is disheartening. I remain hopeful an aging society is not a constraint, but rather an enabling possibility for the transformation of self and society.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this roundtable is to generate a dialogue in response to the emerging challenges of an aging society through the lens of transformative learning (TL) theory. Within TL, Mezirow's (1978) theory of perspective transformation states if individuals become aware of their assumptions and beliefs, then they can critically reflect on and eventually change their limited perspectives. Yet, TL has also been criticized because it focuses on epistemological transformation with less discussion on consequential social action (Findsen, 2007). Hoggan (2016) points out that TL should be used as a meta-theory that captures the different typologies focusing on personal, social, and cultural transformation.

I hold both Mezirow's individual approach and Hoggan's macro-critique by turning to generative knowing (Nicolaidis, 2022) and ecosystem (Bateson, 1972/2000). Aging society presents a chance to bring to light the intra-action between self and society and use this as a platform to generate a new ecological society (Barrad, 2007; Bateson, 2022). Entanglements of self and society may reveal a new pathway for the aging society (Barrad, 2007; Bateson, 2022). By reimagining an aging society with an ecological and transformative view, we aspire towards a readiness to create new ecologies of transformation (Bateson, 2022; Nicolaidis, 2022). Combining individual perspective transformation and societal ecological transformation will lead us to create conditions for the emergence of social ecology. If we, as adult educators, are to navigate this complexity, my inquiry is: *What if we reimagine an aging society as a social ecology that activates lifelong learning to meet the complexity of our times?*

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# Disney Films as Disorienting Dilemmas. Exploring Race and Gender Through the Representation of Non-White Female Disney Main Characters

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**Abstract:** This roundtable aims to, first, present the findings of the Bachelor's Thesis "From Jasmine through Mulan to Raya. Representation of non-white female Disney main characters focussing on the dimensions 'race' and 'gender'"; second, discuss the potential of Disney films as disorienting dilemmas which can trigger transformative learning; lastly, devise a simple method with application in secondary and/or tertiary education settings that the participants can then take home and put into practice.

Drawing on works by Stuart Hall on race and Judith Butler on gender, the portrayals of seven non-white "Disney Princesses" were analysed: Jasmine (1992), Pocahontas (1995), Esmeralda (1996), Mulan (1998), Tiana (2009), Moana (2016) and Raya (2021). The results divided the characters into three phases: "sexy", "no-sexy/yes-hetero" and "loves-no-man". Since most audiences were exposed to these films in their childhood, it is not unlikely that they uncritically assimilated their representations of race and gender – thus, revisiting them with sharpened awareness and critical reflection holds the potential to generate a disorienting dilemma in them.

**Key Words:** Disney Film, Disorienting Dilemma, Race, Stuart Hall, Gender, Judith Butler

## Background

The Walt Disney Company is a hegemonic conglomerate on its way to dominating the entertainment industry; its portrayals of race and gender have informed and continue to inform the identity formation of its usually young audiences. As part of a Bachelor's Thesis in the field of Social Work, the representation of non-white female Disney main characters was analysed focussing on the dimensions of "race" and "gender".

Seven Walt Disney Animation Studios films starring non-white female characters were analysed: *Aladdin* (1992) with Jasmine, *Pocahontas* (1995), *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996) with Esmeralda, *Mulan* (1998), *The Princess and the Frog* (2009) with Tiana, *Moana* (2016) and *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021) with Raya.

## Theoretical Framework

Drawing on Stuart Hall's works *Race, the Floating Signifier* (1997), *The Spectacle of the Other* (1997) and *The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power* (1992) for the "race" dimension, three evaluation items were selected:

- *Discursive concept of race:* Stuart Hall argues that race works as a language or discourse, organising and giving meaning to the physical differences which can be observed – in his words: "the body is a text" (1997a, p. 15).
- *Manifestations of the racialised discourse,* including binary oppositions, naturalisation, stereotyping, orientalism and fetishisation (Hall, 1997b).
- *Discourse of "the West and the Rest"* (Hall, 1999, pp. 209–210) and the figure of the "noble savage" (p. 218).

Drawing on Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1999) for the "gender" dimension, four evaluation items were selected:

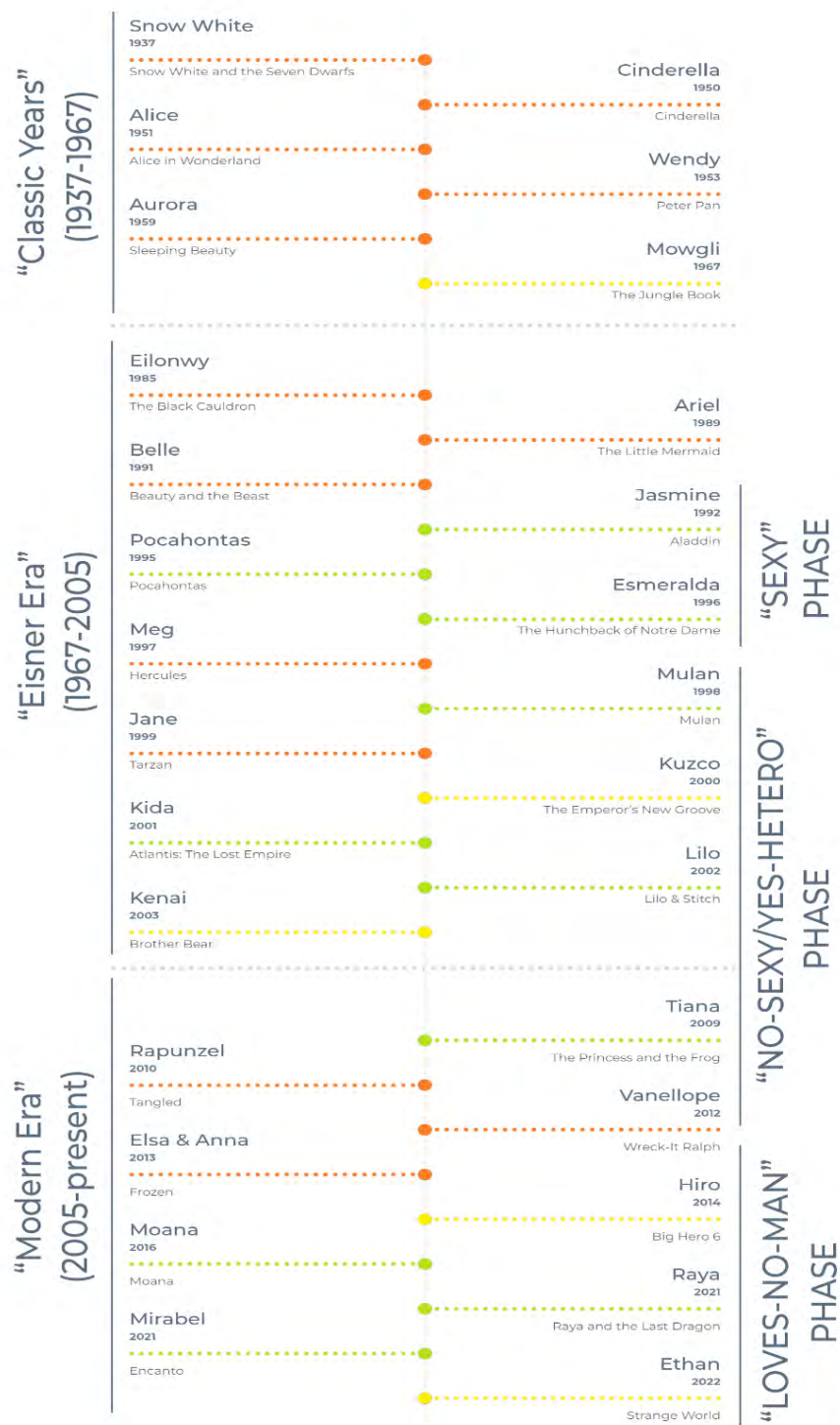
- *Distinction between sex and gender*: although the former is usually understood as being based on biology and the latter as being shaped by culture, Judith Butler argues that both are actually culturally constructed (1999, pp. 10–11).
- *Heterosexual matrix*, or the assumption of binarity, cisgender identity and heterosexuality as "natural".
- *Prohibitive and generative effects of power*, or the idea that, paradoxically, power restricts and creates at the same time. As Judith Butler argues, any construction, even if elaborated for emancipatory purposes, has coercive and regulatory effects (p. 7). The same is true in the case of repression: every time something is forbidden, it is at the same time being constructed (p. 119).
- *Performativity of gender*, or the notion that gender identity is actually an illusion created by repeated acts and gestures interpreted through the frame of gender (Butler, 1999, pp. 43–44).

## Results

After analysing a total of 3863 screenshots, three phases were identified (which interestingly do not coincide with the "Classic Years", "Eisner Era" and "Modern Era" suggested in the literature, as show in *Figure 1*):

- The "*sexy*" phase (including Jasmine from *Aladdin*, Pocahontas from *Pocahontas* and Esmeralda from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*), with characters with high degrees of sexualization, exoticization, fetishism and stereotyping in their designs, as well as romantic involvement with male characters.
- The "*no-sexy/yes-hetero*" phase (including Mulan from *Mulan* and Tiana from *The Princess and the Frog*), with characters not as stereotyped and fetishized as their predecessors, but still pursuing heterosexual romance.
- The "*loves-no-man*" phase (including Moana from *Moana* and Raya from *Raya and the last Dragon*), with characters not being portrayed as having a male love interest.

**Figure 1**  
*Timeline of White Female, Non-White Male and Non-White Female Disney Main Characters*



*Note:* This timeline includes all white female (coded in orange), non-white male (coded in yellow) and non-white female (coded in green) Disney main characters identified in the Bachelor's Thesis. On the left side, the conventional classification; on the right side, the phases identified in the Bachelor's Thesis. Own work.

## Disney Films as Disorienting Dilemmas

The potential of films as instruments for transformative learning is well established in the literature (Hosen, 2022; Gouthro, Holloway & Jarvis, 2018; Jarvis, 2012; Kokkos, 2011).

The author believes that revisiting these films has the potential to generate a disorienting dilemma for audiences that viewed them in their childhood and uncritically assimilated their values, beliefs and assumptions. This would be the case for adults from the generation Y (born in the 1980s and first half of the 1990s), which might have grown up with films from the “sexy” and “no-sexy/yes-hetero” phases, as well as teenagers and young adults from the generation Z (born in the second half of the 1990s and the 2010s), which might have grown up with films from the “no-sexy/yes-hetero” and “loves-no-man” phases.

A possible method, still a work-in-progress, would be as following: prior to the viewing and with consent of the participants (for example, students of secondary or tertiary education), a designated person (for example, a teacher) would give a brief introduction to the seven aforementioned evaluation items, in order to help them in becoming aware, critically reflecting and deconstructing the portrayals of race and gender in these films (including, but not necessarily or limited to, the inevitability of heterosexual romance or the extent of sexualization and stereotyping). After the viewing(s), a discussion would take place among the participants, with special care to fostering *dissensus* and *non-teleological dialogue* (Wildemeersch, 2017) – avoiding the impression that there is “the one right conclusion”, and instead respecting the plurality of experiences, feelings and thoughts resulting from the viewing(s). Ideally, after the viewing(s) and discussion, the participants’ point of view on gender and race would be “more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change” (Mezirow, 2003, p. 58).

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# **Transformative Learning and Psychological Contracts: The Impact of Perspective Transformation on Millennial and Gen Z Working Mothers' Work Expectations**

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**Abstract:** The increasing rates of women choosing to not have children and young mothers leaving the workforce highlight a critical need for a better understanding of the challenges of working mothers in the U.S. (Motherly, 2023; U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Drawing on Mezirow's transformative learning theory, specifically perspective transformation, and Rousseau's psychological contract theory, this ongoing research aims to understand the impact of perspective transformation on the psychological contracts of Millennial and Gen Z working mothers by elucidating how experiences during motherhood lead to changes in the individual's beliefs about their reciprocal obligations with their employers. Through interviews with working mothers, the researchers seek to understand the subjects' experiences of disorienting dilemmas, transformative learning, and the resulting influence on their relationships to their work organizations. The study has both practical and academic significance. Practically, in its potential to help organizations attract and retain young working mothers through a better understanding of their unique needs and expectations. And academically, in its conceptualization of motherhood as a context for transformative learning and in exploring renegotiated psychological contracts as a result of perspective transformation.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Motherhood, Psychological Contract, Working Mothers, Perspective Transformation

## **Introduction**

In the United States, many young women seem to be choosing to either not have children or to leave the workforce soon after having children (Motherly, 2023; U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). For several years now, there has been a declining national birth rate and Millennial and Gen Z women, who make up a significant portion of the US labor force, are self-identifying as 'stay-at-home-mothers' in increasing numbers. The confluence of these two trends indicates that work and motherhood may be at odds, which is a concern for the economic future of the U.S., as well as the personal and professional lives of working mothers. Millennial and Gen Z mothers cite financial, mental health, and childcare concerns as areas with insufficient structural support (Motherly, 2023). Our society needs to more broadly address the shortcomings in our supportive frameworks that hinder gender equity, economic independence, and the ability for families to thrive. Additionally, organizations must gain a better understanding of working mothers' psychological contracts, the beliefs they hold about the reciprocal obligations with their employer, in order for organizations to attract and retain them as employees (Rousseau, 1989). This study seeks to remedy this gap in understanding by examining how motherhood generates perspective transformation that evolves the psychological contracts of Millennial and Gen Z working mothers in a cyclical process of transformation and change.

## **Problem, Purpose, and Research Questions**

While there is some psychological contract literature that addresses the unique expectations of Millennial and Gen Z employees in contrast to previous generations (Hess & Jepsen, 2009), there is a notable gap in how motherhood impacts an individual's psychological contract. To date, the psychological contract literature has largely focused on antecedents and outcomes of an organization's breach or violation of individuals' psychological contracts, such as layoffs or major organizational change (Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2019). Most studies are aimed at helping organizations prevent or recover from a misstep, while very few studies investigate how the psychological contract is formed. By examining the impact of motherhood on an individual's psychological contract, we are attempting to understand the psychological contract as it changes, rather than as a stable outcome of the individual's characteristics, experience, and sociocultural context.

The purpose of this research is to explore motherhood as a catalyst for perspective transformation and, using Mezirow's transformative learning theory (1994), gain a deeper understanding of its potential impact on the psychological contracts of working mothers. The study's research questions are aimed at exploring how working mothers' experiences challenge their prior assumptions about work and motherhood and, through perspective transformation, renegotiate their relationship to their work organization. The study's research questions are:

- 1) How do the changes associated with motherhood influence working mothers' expectations of their work organizations and of themselves as both workers and mothers?
- 2) What challenges do working mothers experience and,
- 3) How, if at all, do they perceive that these challenges lead to new perspectives?

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study employs transformative learning and psychological contract theories to understand the experience of working mothers. Beginning with a disorienting dilemma, transformative learning involves a process of critical reflection and discourse about existing worldviews towards a new, more integrative and open-minded perspective (Mezirow, 1994). This perspective transformation is not only an individual process but involves the renegotiation of assumed sociocultural roles and rules that can impact both private and professional life (Kitchenham, 2008). Mezirow's addition of "renegotiating relationships and negotiating new relationships" to the original 10 phases of perspective transformation highlights that the transformation is not just cognitive, but also relational. Whether through a set of progressive transformations or a more epochal and sudden transformation, the evolving priorities and constant learning required for balancing motherhood and employment present a potential source of perspective transformation that has seemingly been neglected in the transformative learning research but could be mapped onto the phases of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1994).

Today's technology and the proliferation of online communities have allowed mothers to engage with a global community and reach their support network at any time. As a result, women are able to access a more diverse set of worldviews and critically reflect on pre-existing beliefs and limiting societal expectations. Motherhood has been characterized as a continuous developmental process, with significant emotional, social, physical, and neurological changes, comparable to adolescence (Athán, 2016; Barba-Müller et al., 2018). The transition to motherhood presents a potentially transformative experience for women, impacting their self-perceptions related to identity, values, and their social role (Athán, 2016). Neurobiological



research supports the idea that emotions and reason are interconnected in the cognitive process and integral to transformative learning (Taylor, 2001). Peripartum hormonal changes and direct interactions with the infant have been found to cause structural and functional neurological changes including increased brain plasticity, empathy, and theory of mind, all of which have the potential to enhance perspective-taking and communication skills (Barba-Müller et al., 2018). These emotional and behavioral adaptations associated with motherhood would aid in the process of perspective transformation.

The renegotiation of psychological contracts will be explored as an outcome of perspective transformation within the context of motherhood. Psychological contracts are an individual's unilateral belief in an obligation of reciprocity between themselves and their work organization (Rousseau, 1989). While researchers have shown interest in how the individual's professional profile might affect their psychological contract (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2006; Rousseau, 1989), less attention has been paid to how one's psychological contract might evolve through personal identity development (Driver, 2017).

The authors are interested in engaging with roundtable participants in the discussion of several questions related to the theoretical framework, such as:

- Could the “renegotiation of relationships” step of perspective transformation be exhibited as a change in psychological contract?
- Are there less formal, incidental, or unconscious ways of holding discourse that can lead to perspective transformation?
- Can individual transformations collectively inspire new perspectives in organizations and communities?

### **Methods and Significance**

This ongoing qualitative study will employ semi-structured interviews with working mothers, born since 1980, who have at least one dependent child in their home, and have engaged in full time employment within the past year. The authors hope to gain a better understanding of how women experience perspective transformation triggered by the life changes of motherhood, and how this new perspective impacts their perceptions about their reciprocal relationship with their work organization. The ultimate goal of the research is to supply organizations with the information needed to provide better support structures for working mothers to help them remain and thrive in the workforce.

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## **“Redeem the Soul of America”: Trauma-Informed Transformative Learning in Police Training**

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**Abstract:** The United States has a long history of the misuse of police forces (Mazeski, 2023). Salient examples in recent times include acts of police brutality against members of the Black community. Concurrent with the changes in scope and mission of policing, police training modalities have evolved (Mazeski, 2023). Political and social leaders pressure police agencies to establish competencies and skill sets that meet the needs of the communities. However, there appears to be disparity between police and community expectations of the police’s role (Mazeski, 2023). These myriad factors confound the issue of police training. The “us versus them” mentality between police and the community reinforces oppressive systems and structures of power. The values, beliefs, and assumptions that police and community members have about each other have been constructed through experience and often go unexamined (Mazeski, 2023). Officers with trauma history may struggle with the transformative process due to the neuropsychological effects of trauma. We propose a reimagining of transformative learning theory in amalgam with trauma-informed practices and storytelling to inform police training, hopeful that a more empathetic, self-aware, and transformed police force fosters hope for redeeming the soul of America.

**Key Words:** Police Training, Trauma-Informed, Transformation, Storytelling, Police Reform

The United States has a long history of the misuse of police forces (Mazeski, 2023). Salient examples in recent times include acts of police brutality against members of the Black community. Media coverage of such events has raised public consciousness about police violence (Greene, Urbanik, & Samuels-Wortley, 2022). Responding to the imbalance of power observed in policing, reform movements such as community-oriented policing (COP) (Mazeski, 2023) attempt to improve the community-police relationship. Showing modest success in some rural, White-populated areas, COP is largely ineffective in urban areas with high Black and Hispanic populations (Gau & Paul, 2019; Mazeski, 2023).

Concurrent with the changes in scope and mission of policing, police training (PT) modalities have evolved (Mazeski, 2023). Political agendas have influenced training models, resulting in corruption among police forces. The reform era of PT established police academies and basic PT, which normalized para-militaristic training (Vodde, 2009) and brought with it a “policing culture [that] included a socialized ‘us versus them’ mentality” (Mazeski, 2023, p. 7). The community-policing era developed as a response to the problematic aspects of its predecessors. Political and social leaders pressure police agencies to establish competencies and skill sets that meet the needs of the communities. However, there appears to be disparity between police and community expectations of the police’s role (Mazeski, 2023). Political and social pressures coupled with a lack of clarity regarding the role of the police confound the issue of PT.

The 1965 Selma civil rights march, led by activist John Lewis, ended when marchers were assaulted by police. Fifty-five years later, Lewis urged, “Get in good trouble, necessary trouble, and redeem the soul of America.” We continue to witness discord – too often violent – between the police and community members (particularly Black folks). bell hooks (2003), reflecting on John Lewis’ autobiography, pressed:

To many black people who had dreamed the dream, who had believed that racism could be changed by law and interaction, this was cause for despair. In their eyes, racist white people were betraying democracy, contemptuously making light of the oppression and pain black people had suffered. (p. 52)

The “us versus them” mentality between police and the community reinforces oppressive systems and structures of power. Police training reform potentially plays a role in answering hooks’ calling for the eradication of oppression suffered by Black people. We propose a reimagining of transformative learning (TL) theory in amalgam with trauma-informed practices and storytelling to inform PT. We envision this approach as good, necessary trouble that has the potential to “redeem the soul of America.”

Cranton and Taylor (2012) note “at the center of transformative learning theory is the notion that we uncritically assimilate our values, beliefs, and assumptions from our family, community, and culture” (p. 7). Relatedly, the values, beliefs, and assumptions that police and community members have about each other have been constructed through experience and often go unexamined (Mazeski, 2023). An important first step towards reconciliation is the disorienting dilemma - encountering beliefs that differ from those that are held (Kroth & Cranton, 2014). Thus, when a police officer or community member experiences a disorienting dilemma that challenges the views they hold of the other, there is potential for transformation. However, when disorienting dilemmas are framed in the societal context associated with trauma, a common experience of officers (Craddock & Telesco, 2021), the transformational process may be thwarted.

Mazeski (2023) posits that “the practice of transformative learning cannot come at a better time in the law enforcement community... as a scaffolded process, moving from the individual to the organization and hopefully to a societal change overall” (p. 29). How should officers’ trauma inform this scaffolded process? How do we adapt TL to be trauma-informed, particularly in PT?

To appreciate the impact that trauma history can have on TL, it is important to understand the neuropsychological effects of trauma. We each have a window of tolerance that allows for clearer decision making, judgement, and connections (Ogden et al., as cited in Larsen, 2022). Disorienting dilemmas move us toward or into liminal space, which may be “the edge of knowing [or] the threshold of understanding” (Berger, as cited in Larsen, 2022, p. 372). When pushed beyond our window of tolerance, our prefrontal cortex becomes compromised as our brain prioritizes basic survival, impeding the cognitive processes associated with moving through the transformative process. Using trauma-informed practices can facilitate the transformative process, ideally leading to perspective-change that results in culturally-responsive, justice-informed policing.

Taylor (2014) suggests that empathy is the “stepchild and missing construct” in TL, further noting that empathy plays a key role in the transformative process (p. 5). Because storytelling can foster empathy (Brookfield, 2014), and empathy is necessary for the neuromodulation that allows for transformation, storytelling as a trauma-informed practice can

lead to transformation. Storytelling may help police officers to engage empathy, creating the space to explore alternative perspectives and change basic assumptions.

The longstanding divide between police and the community is partly due to unclear expectations of the police. Influenced by historical and sociopolitical factors, PT often overlooks the role of meaning-making and perspective-taking. Transformative learning challenges values, beliefs, and assumptions, although this approach may be inadequate when applied to PT where officers are carrying the weight of trauma. Implementing trauma-informed practices alongside transformative learning pedagogy is a promising approach to PT. A more empathetic, self-aware, and transformed police force fosters hope for redeeming the soul of America.

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## ‘A Practice of Freedom’: The Good Trouble of Self-grading

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### Extended Abstract

Since its naming by Jack Mezirow as a “theory-in-progress” (2000) and its tentacled reach across and within fields related directly to adult learning and beyond (Dirkx, 1998; Taylor, 1998; Torosyan, 2001), transformative learning theory has opened hearts and hands and minds to the possibilities of learning grounded in radical encounter. For practitioners of transformative learning and teaching – students and teachers, and students-as-teachers/teachers-as-students (Cates, et al., 2018) – the stuff and substance of learning and growth resides in the promise that we may be changed by bringing what we (think we) know against that which we decidedly don’t (yet) know, but might begin to understand through our willingness to engage in the disorienting dilemma of encounter. In the literature about what these encounters may entail, however, there has been a lack of attention paid to a fundamental feature of most courses in most educational settings, and the potential they hold as sites for the navigating of productive disorienting dilemmas: grades or, more pointedly, the mechanism by which grades get determined.

As an educator, I take as gospel Mezirow’s (2000) assertion that my role requires “fostering liberating conditions for making more autonomous and informed choices and developing a sense of self-empowerment...[by] creat[ing] protected learning environments in which the conditions of social democracy necessary for transformative learning are fostered” (pp. 26 & 31). And as an educator (who was once a student) in the United States, where many, if not most, are socialized to be passive consumers of education, I am keenly aware that one of the mechanisms through which this passivity is reinforced is the grading system, in which we are encouraged to externalize our expectations of the rewards of learning by appealing to an outside arbiter of value. Even if we overachieve as students – and perhaps *especially* when we overachieve – we are encouraged to locate the value of our learning in the grade that we receive from some person or institution perceived to be authorities and to have authority over our learning and the meaning it has for us. In a world marked by the building drumbeat of authoritarianism; the revived specter of totalitarianism; and the seemingly relentless approach of social, political, and ecological collapse, directly sharing power in reckoning with the value of our efforts and accomplishment seems to me to be a fundamental way to practice, in the words bell hooks (1994) took from Paulo Freire (2000), “education as the practice of freedom” – a practice that, if it is genuine, is also ambiguous, disorienting, and nothing if not transformative.

As a teaching practitioner, I have developed over a long period of time a comprehensive approach to self-grading (Fitzmaurice & Reitenauer, 2017; Hall et al. 2023; Reitenauer, 2019; Reitenauer et al., 2020) as a strategy for contributing to the transformative power and potential of my university courses – both for students, and for myself. This practice is rooted in critical self-reflection (engaged in by all learners, i.e., by students and teacher alike). As it fundamentally reworks the power dynamics within a

learning environment, the practice of self-grading provides for a clear disorienting dilemma with which all learners must grapple. Committing to the principles and practices of self-grading, whether in wholesale or partial ways, requires a willingness on the part of practitioners to question the received power relations within learning communities and to engage in a constant critical conversation about the right and best uses of power for and among those of us seeking to change ourselves (and the world).

In 2024, the practice of freedom is nothing *but* trouble. This session, grounded in the power of collective critical inquiry, invites us to come together to examine one approach for transforming our grading practices in ways that trouble us all, for the good of us all.

**Key Words:** Self-grading, Liberatory Education, Critical Reflection, Power, Accountability

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## SYMPOSIUM



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exploring contradictory  
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points of view

# Looking for Philosophical Resemblances with Transformation Theory: How Socrates, Peter Jarvis and Maxine Greene Relate to the Work of Jack Mezirow

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**Abstract:** This paper delves into the intersections between Transformation Theory and the philosophical perspectives of Socrates, Peter Jarvis, and Maxine Greene regarding personal and social change. By juxtaposing Mezirow's framework with the philosophical insights of the other three emancipatory scholars the paper uncovers nuanced parallels and disparities. Mezirow's theory posits that transformative learning occurs through critical reflection and discourse, leading to profound shifts in beliefs, perspectives, and actions. Socrates, with his emphasis on questioning and dialectic, lays the groundwork for transformative dialogue and self-examination. Peter Jarvis's pragmatic approach underscores the importance of experiential learning and continuous development, resonating with the iterative nature of transformative processes. Maxine Greene's aesthetic and imaginative stance highlights the transformative potential of encountering the unfamiliar and engaging with multiple perspectives. Furthermore, this paper argues that although there are some resemblances in the learning theories of the four scholars, it is difficult to identify clear similarities. However, all of them are highly concerned with fostering social change through individual introspection and collective action. While each philosopher offers distinct perspectives on this issue, their ideas converge underscoring the symbiotic and dialectical relationship between personal and societal transformation.

**Key Words:** Transformation, Personal Change, Social Change

## Introduction

This paper aims to seek points of convergence and divergence between Transformation Theory and the views of three major philosophers of learning: Socrates, Peter Jarvis, and Maxine Greene. Our intention is, through the exploration of the interconnection among these perspectives, to enrich the understanding of the view of each of the four thinkers and, more broadly, to contribute to the development of a more integrated theoretical framework of learning for change. The first sections of the present text compose an overview of the relationship of Transformation Theory with the work of each one of the other philosophers. The next section focuses on the issue on which the four thinkers' views seem to converge to a large extent: the relationship between personal and social change. The approach of the association of Mezirow's theory with the work of the aforementioned scholars is part of the exploration that is included in the book *Expanding Transformation Theory: Affinities between Jack Mezirow and emancipatory educationalists*, edited by Kokkos (2020). The book also includes chapters that relate the work of Mezirow' with the perspective of Argyris, Dewey, Freire, Gould, Illeris, Kegan and Marsick.

### **Associating the Four Theorists' Perspectives**

Socrates lived in classical Athens in the era of Pericles, between 470/69 - 399 BC. He did not write any books of his own. Everything we know about his life and ideas today and to which we refer in the following sections comes from indirect sources. It is without doubt that Socrates has been a point of reference in the development of Western thinking, contributing to the formation of the future thinking and epistemology of the Western world. Mezirow's theory could not have been an exception, since it is rooted in philosophical, social, and psychological approaches. It is of great interest that Mezirow himself claimed in an interview that the teaching of Socrates was one of the foundations of his theory. Both Socrates and Mezirow elaborated on issues pertaining to community and, in general, to areas of study beyond the narrow educational context (Kostara, 2020). Also, they both felt that knowledge is the result of a painful procedure that is characterized by periods of confusion, query, and perhaps conflict with the learners. We cannot evaluate the degree to which Mezirow probed into the Socratic philosophy. However he mentioned it in his work, in a brief, yet quite appropriate way, four times in total (Mezirow, 1996a, p. 164; Mezirow, 1996b, p. 5; Mezirow, 2003, p. 62; Mezirow, 2006, p. 96), in relation to: a) the notion of assumptions as an object of reflection; b) the concept of discourse as a means of critical assessment; and c) the issue of citizenship and social change.

Peter Jarvis is a typical example of an adult learner. All his studies took place in his adult years, and he faced all the obstacles that characterize adult learners (family, social and professional obligations, demands of social roles, etc.). It was therefore of no surprise that he devoted himself to developing the field in which he had many personal positive experiences and in which he himself found a second chance, since as a working-class child he could not have equal opportunities to access education in post-war Britain. His writing, which in the last years of his career focused mainly on the issue of the learning process and the philosophy of learning, is particularly large and covers the whole spectrum of adult education and lifelong learning. His work has a deep anthropocentric philosophical approach, that dealt with almost all the dimensions of learning, by examining it holistically as an existential phenomenon (Koulaouzides, 2020). In the context of this search, he tried to describe every form and version of it, something that he finally presented in one of his most important works towards the end of his academic journey (Jarvis, 2009). Mezirow knew the work of Jarvis and vice versa. However, in their major works it is not easy to find some direct references that could assume convergence in their points of view on learning. However, at the heart of their philosophy lies the human and at the core of the practices they propose we find their dedication to the reflective and democratic integration of the members of society.

Maxine Greene was a philosopher in the Lincoln Center Institute for Arts in the Lincoln Center Institute for Arts in Education and Professor of philosophy and education at Teachers College, Columbia University. Her work focuses on the role of imagination in the emancipatory view of reality. According to her, activating the imagination allows us to discover alternative realities and conceive interpretations beyond the taken-for-granted. Through this process, imagination becomes a driving force for both individual critical awareness and social change, in the sense that it offers "visions of what should be and what might be in our deficient society" (Greene, 2000, p. 5). Greene (1990, 2000) considers the aesthetic experience—our contact with works of art—as a privileged vent for the activation of the imagination. Thus, her work is permeated by the exploration of how the contemplation of artworks contributes to the conception of multiple realities and understandings. Mezirow found in Greene's work reciprocity with his view. He states for example that "'Imagining how things could be otherwise' (Greene, 1998) is

central in the initiation of the transformative process” (Mezirow, 2009, p. 28). Also, Mezirow (1991) shares Greene’s view that the unexamined presuppositions idealize the state of affairs and weaken effective inquiry into both social institutions and personal conditions. However, other references to Greene are minimal, and, conversely, in his work there is no extensive treatment of the issues of imagination and aesthetic experience, although he recognized their crucial role in the context of transformative learning.

## **The Issue of Personal and Social Change**

### **Jack Mezirow’s View**

From what has already been said above, it follows that although there are some affinities in the learning theories of the four scholars, it is difficult to identify clear similarities. However, an explicit point of convergence concerns the relationship between personal and social change, an issue that will be examined in the following paragraphs.

According to Mezirow (1989, 1991), personal and social change are in a fully interdependent relationship. On the one hand, the individuals undergoing a process of perspective transformation are likely to realize that the problems they face are also relevant to many others, and that this is because there are social practices and institutions which reproduce the oppression and support distorted belief systems. By extension, the individuals are likely to engage in forms of collective social action because they realize that changes in the public sphere are a prerequisite for the removal of the oppressive conditions they personally experience. For example, a woman who is oppressed by sex stereotypical roles may perceive these cultural assumptions “as a collective rather than only a personal problem. She may come to see that the institutions which represent the negated value system must be changed, and this can be done only through collective action” (Mezirow, 1985, p. 149).

On the other hand, according to Mezirow, participation in a social movement can contribute catalytically to the acquisition of a comprehensive alternative perception of various aspects of social reality and to the transformation of one’s personal view (p. 194): “Social movements can significantly facilitate critical self-reflection. They can precipitate or reinforce dilemmas and legitimate alternative meaning perspectives. Identifying with a cause larger than oneself is perhaps the most powerful motivation to learn.” (Mezirow, 1991, p.194)

### **Socrates’ View**

As already stated, Mezirow mentions Socrates in his work, in a brief, yet quite appropriate way, four times in total. Among these, and in one of his latest chapters (Mezirow, 2006, p. 96), he refers to the way the Socratic teaching influenced his position regarding the relationship of his theory with collective action, and, in particular, his conception about the relationship between personal and social change. According to Socrates, the person has to approach reflectively his assumptions, as they are the result of the authority’s unconscious influence. Only through critical reflection upon taken-for-granted assumptions will lead the person to acquire the necessary skills and values that will develop him to the ideal citizen. As the ideal citizen he will then be able to engage in collective actions and achieve social change:

As Dana Villa notes in *Socratic Citizenship* (2001) [...] Socrates’ original contribution was the introduction of critical self-reflection and individualism as essential standards of justice and civic obligation in a democracy. [...] He sought to distance thinking and moral reflection from the restraints of arbitrary political judgement and action- to move to a disposition of critical reflection on assumptions and the citizen’s own moral self-formation as a condition of public life (Mezirow, 2006, p. 96).

According to Socrates, in order to achieve a balance between being an individual and a citizen, the person should engage in continuous self-reflection, self-examination and self-improvement. This procedure would require the person's isolation from the routines of everyday life. According to Socrates, citizenship would begin in the individual's private life and would then be applied to the city. For example, justice wouldn't be achieved within a society unless it was first practiced in the private lives of its citizens. This would involve gaining real knowledge of justice by dispelling distortions and adopting relevant practices. Similarly, other virtues can also be acquired in a similar manner. As a conclusion, Socrates would emphasize the importance of integrating these qualities harmoniously, both as an individual and as a citizen, for the improvement of society and would set as priority personal change as a prerequisite for social change (Villa 2001; Kostara, 2020).

The person's transformation as a painful transition from the darkness of distorted assumptions to the light of truth and independent citizenship is described quite eloquently by Socrates in Plato's *Republic* and, more specifically, in the allegory of the Cave. The image of the Cave (Plato, *Republic* 514a-518d)<sup>1</sup> is one of the most renowned depictions of learning. By referring to the allegory of the Cave, Mezirow once again indirectly marked the relationship of his *Transformation Theory* with Socrates teaching as depicted by Plato: "we remain prisoners in the cave – part of a "mass" – only so long as we lazily allow the frescoes on the wall to define who we are as political and moral beings." (Mezirow, 2003, p. 58).

#### **Peter Jarvis's View**

As a sociologist of education, Peter Jarvis dealt with the concept of change both as the outcome and as the starting point of a learning process (Jarvis, 1985). He considered that change (social and personal) lies at the heart of the sociology of learning since "learning is actually about processes of change" (Jarvis & Parker, 2005, p.118). For the distinguished British philosopher of adult education social change is a process that unfolds gradually and is influenced by market dynamics, the evolution of production systems, and the emergence of new knowledge especially technological (Jarvis, 2007). As such in many cases it generates disjuncture and this feeling of deep disharmony forces us either to learn in order to re-engage with what is going on in our society or to disengage and decide "to seek for a world of the familiar in which we are not so challenged to learn new things" (Jarvis, 2009, p. 192). However, many of us, decide to learn. And through learning, we undergo personal evolution. The more we learn, the more experienced we become, and this leads to growth and personal change. However, as he eloquently points out participating in learning processes especially in formal or non-formal settings can pose challenges, as acquiring new knowledge reshapes our perspectives and can strain relationships lacking support and awareness. Learning is not merely about acquiring information; it is about transformation of perspectives. It is both individual and individuating, altering people's very essence. Yet as not everyone embraces change some prefer the comfort of stagnation. However, for those who do change, they may become catalysts for societal transformation within their social circles (Jarvis, 2012).

While adult learning may change individuals, its integration into organizations and relationships is not a guaranteed process. To believe that a learning process even a transformative one may automatically generate social change is according to Jarvis a case of naive behaviourism. Negotiating change within personal relationships and small social groups may be easier than within large bureaucratic structures and the broader society. If personal change

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<sup>1</sup>Translation of Plato's *Republic*: Emlyn-Jones, C., & Preddy, W. (2013). *Republic* (Loeb classical library). Harvard University Press.

resulting from learning is to become a force that will influence wider social dynamics, then deliberate, planned action, often extending beyond personal relationships is absolutely required (Jarvis, 2012). For Jarvis there are two types of learning: reflective and non-reflective. And while reflective learning processes fosters growth and may lead to actions for social change, Jarvis warns adult educators not to be overoptimistic for their efforts since the allure of stability – which in many cases is the ultimate goal of the ruling social elites - often impedes progress. In quite predictive manner he stated “However, it is to be questioned whether adult education would continue to be provided by the state if it produced critically aware people who sought to oppose the governing elite to any great extent” (Jarvis, 2005, p. 77). Jarvis considered that social change, predominantly evolutionary, seldom occurs through radical revolution. For him in modern societies the educational systems as agents of social conformity offer learning processes that inadvertently act as a social sedative, placating dissent rather than powering societal progress. However, and although learning alone does not guarantee a flourishing democracy or societal advancement, social change may indeed be the outcome of learning if conscious application of knowledge is coupled with informed collective action. This combination may actually shape the trajectory of social change and sustain democratic ideals (Jarvis, 2008).

### **Maxine Greene’s View**

Greene did not focus, as Mezirow and Socrates did, on the interaction between personal and social change. However, she highlighted that the awakening of the imagination through aesthetic experience - the main theme in her work - is a process through which both personal and social limited, stereotypical assumptions can be re-examined and possibly transformed. Contact with artworks allows recipients to explore multiple realities and imagine an alternative state of things for themselves and the world. Within this process, changing perceptions of personal and social issues is a single coin with two sides. In the context of emancipatory education, the goal of using artistic narratives should therefore be twofold and should be about expanding awareness of both personal and social situations:

To help the diverse students [...] is not only to help them pursue the meaning of their lives – to find out *how* things are happening and to keep posing questions about the why. It is to move them to learn the new things Freire spoke of, to reach out for the proficiencies and capacities, the craft required to be fully participant in this society. (Greene, 2000, p. 165)

Through this double dimension of consciousness, Greene points out, it is possible to conceive “another state of affairs in which things would be better” (Greene, 2000, p. 5) and undertake action towards a more meaningful personal and social order.

### **Concluding Remarks**

From the exploration of the perspectives of the four thinkers some insights can be drawn related to the theoretical field of transformative learning. The first is that the works of thinkers such as Socrates, Jarvis, or Greene, who have an emancipatory dimension in their theoretical understanding of learning but in the literature are not categorised in the transformative learning area, have affinities and sometimes strong associations with the theory of transformation.

Accordingly, further exploration of the interconnection among emancipatory and transformative learning theorists may enrich and expand transformative learning theory and, more broadly, learning for change. In particular, with regard to the relationship between personal and social change - which this paper has focused - it was shown that the theorists we examined

share the view that these are interconnected processes. Of course, each theorist has a unique position on how individual learning may contribute to social change. Nevertheless, their insights may contribute to alleviate the dichotomy that sometimes appears in the literature, which consists in emphasizing in one of the two processes at the expense of the other.

Finally, we think that the findings of our investigation contribute to revisit the widespread impression that Transformation Theory is almost exclusively focusing on the individual and overlooks the importance of social context and social change. Perhaps in this way we may reconsider the protest his response to this kind of critique:

This is totally off the wall. I have never written about consciousness *per se* nor have I ever been so blind as to imply that it is not determined by social being [...] Transformative learning is about emancipating ourselves from these taken-for-granted assumptions about social being. It involves bringing the sources, nature, and consequences of this received wisdom into critical awareness so that appropriate action- including social action- can be taken (Mezirow, 1998, p. 70).

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### **Translation of Plato's Republic**

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## **Dimensions of Disorientation and Transformation: How Does Transformative Learning Occur and Manifest in Cross-Cultural Contexts?**

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**Abstract:** In the contemporary global landscape characterized by increased cross-cultural interactions and migration, scholars have shown a renewed interest in investigating the educational requirements within migrant communities, emphasizing the transformative nature of learning in such societal contexts. This paper presents a scholarly inquiry centered on understanding transformative learning processes in cross-cultural environments, specifically focusing on the factors that prompt personal transformation and the contextual conditions conducive to transformative learning. Utilizing a cross-cultural dialogic methodology, this study explores the transformative dimensions of migrants' cross-cultural experiences, drawing insights from multiple models of transformative learning theory. Through the analysis of narratives from migrants originating from diverse backgrounds and residing in various host countries such as the USA, Italy, and Germany, this research sheds light on the pivotal role of overcoming linguistic barriers, engaging with diverse cultures, accessing supportive networks, adapting to new economic systems, and reflecting on bicultural identities in facilitating transformative learning experiences. These findings contribute significantly to the scholarly discourse by enhancing our understanding of how adults navigate and undergo personal transformation within diverse cultural settings.

**Key Words:** Cross-Cultural Contexts, Migration Society, Disorientation, Transformative Learning, Multinational Comparison

### **Introduction**

Learning happens within several forms of settings, including cross-cultural and/or migration contexts, which are continuously and rapidly created by globalization phenomena. As Hoggan and Hoggan-Kloubert (2022) declare, “We all are migrants,” and our present world is a migration society (p. 1). This declaration echoes the nexus between adult learning and education and the reality of an adult who lives, works, or learns in a cross-cultural context. Recently, scholars have renewed their attention to studying the learning needs of a migration society, especially from transformative learning perspectives (Eschenbach, 2020; Hoggan & Hoggan-Kloubert, 2022; Olatunji & Fedeli, 2022). For instance, the position that “the learning required in a migration society is transformational in nature” is the premise of *Adult Learning in a Migration Society* (Hoggan & Hoggan-Kloubert, 2022, p. 4). This premise and the renewed commitment to

understanding and extending the nature of transformation informed the contributions in this paper because there is a need to know more about the dynamics of transformative learning in migration and cross-cultural contexts. Hence, the central question is: How does transformative learning occur and manifest in cross-cultural contexts? Comparing results and insights from five empirical studies that investigated various issues concerning transformative learning in cross-cultural contexts, this symposium paper contributes to the discourse of developing theoretical and practical tenets for researching and facilitating transformative learning in cross-cultural contexts.

### **Theoretical Framework**

We combined Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory (TLT) and other multiple strands of transformative learning processes and outcomes (Hoggan, 2016; Stuckey et al., 2013) as a framework to analyze our data to understand the meaning-making processes of adult migrants and individuals in host societies. To attain perspective transformation—evident in profound shifts in worldview, openness, and discernment—the adult must go through a series of processes that center on critically reviewing the taken-for-granted assumptions that underpin one's habits of mind and consequent points of view (Mezirow, 2000). The result is significant and irreversible changes in the way the person experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts with the world (Hoggan, 2016). The process often begins with a disorientation or disorienting dilemma, that is, an experience where a fundamentally held certainty becomes uncertain (Ensign, 2019; Mezirow, 1991). A part of Mezirow's description of disorienting dilemmas is “efforts to understand a different culture with customs that contradict our own previously accepted presuppositions” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 168). This indicates the uniqueness of cross-cultural contexts, wherein adults experience peculiar opportunities and challenges. Indeed, “migration is revealing and highlighting important societal questions: of solidarity, of identity, of transition and transformation, of human rights and obligations” (Hoggan & Hoggan-Kloubert, 2022, p. 2). The foregoing shows that TLT is the most adequate learning framework to understand the dynamics of disorientation and other aspects of transformation in cross-cultural contexts at individual and community levels.

### **Methodology**

This paper explores the transformative learning experiences of migrants in cross-cultural contexts, aiming to understand the conditions that drive personal transformation. Through a cross-cultural dialogic method and the lens of transformative learning theory, insights from five empirical studies featuring migrants from China, Nigeria, Syria, and Colombia, living in countries like the USA, Italy, and Germany, are analyzed. While all our studies explored transformative learning experiences across cultures, each one was situated in a unique context and centered on a different demographic. The dialogic analysis involved reading and scrutinizing the five studies and gaining a more comprehensive and profound insight into transformative learning in cross-cultural settings. This method facilitated a series of active dialogue sessions among us with a view to identifying and comparing themes in the five studies. It fostered mutual agreement on the terminology and concepts utilized across the studies. For instance, we chose to use the terms “migration” or “migrants” to denote cross-cultural experiences, regardless of whether they were temporary or permanent migrations.

### **Findings – Emerging Themes Across Studies**

The synthesis of themes across five studies on adults experiences revealed key insights into the transformative learning opportunities migrants and host nationals encounter in new cultural contexts. One, language and communication emerged as significant barriers, affecting migrants' ability to integrate and access opportunities, as highlighted by the experiences of Nigerian and Chinese immigrants struggling with language barriers and cultural adaptation in Italy and the USA. These linguistic challenges often lead to social isolation, professional stagnation, and disorientation, yet also present opportunities for transformative learning through efforts to overcome these obstacles. Two, intercultural contacts, facilitated through various social interactions, emerged as crucial catalysts for transformative learning. They play a crucial role in cultural exchange and relationship building, aiding migrants in navigating the complexities of new cultural environments and fostering intercultural competence essential for navigating diverse cultural settings among migrants and host nationals. Three, the importance of community and support networks, both formal and informal, provided crucial resources and emotional support to help migrants acclimate and thrive. Fourth, socio-economic status and career prospects were pivotal, influencing migrants' experiences and opportunities for professional advancement. Finally, critical reflection and biculturality were highlighted as mechanisms through which migrants engage in deep personal introspection about identity, values, and cultural integration, promoting a bicultural identity that navigates between heritage and host country norms. These themes collectively underscore the complex interplay of socio-economic, cultural, and personal factors in the transformative experiences of adults in cross-cultural environments.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Using dialogic analysis, this paper synthesizes themes from five studies to explore transformative learning in cross-cultural contexts, emphasizing the complex process of deriving meaning from such experiences. The findings underscore the role of linguistic proficiency, opportunities for connection, and critical reflection in navigating cross-cultural challenges. Socio-economic status and language barriers are identified as pivotal factors influencing migrants' experiences and potential for disorienting dilemmas (Laros, 2015). The findings show the centrality of disorientation emanating from cross-cultural experiences and how it may serve as “the seed of transformation” (Ensign, 2019, p. 123). They suggest that migrants in precarious socio-economic situations, lacking adequate support systems, are particularly prone to transformative learning, driven by disorientation. Also, not all migrants experience transformative learning as individual circumstances influence learning outcomes. We agree with Marsick et al. (2017) that cross-cultural contexts can provide socio-relational instances and can lead to the micro-socialization of knowledge. We call for targeted interventions to facilitate integration and advocate for spaces that encourage open, transformative conversations (Eschenbacher, 2020). By enhancing support mechanisms like language classes and cultural orientation programs, stakeholders can foster migrants' successful integration and empowerment, contributing to a more inclusive society. In conclusion, our contributions collectively illuminate dimensions of disorientation, transformative processes, and outcomes to further our understanding of transformative learning and push the boundaries of existing theories, perspectives, and practices.

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## **Jack Mezirow's Thought: Roots and Branches**

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**Abstract:** The present symposium focuses on the relationship between Jack Mezirow's theory and John Dewey's, Roger Gould's, and Chris Argyris's work and attempts to explore and highlight the relationship of the above with transformation theory. Dewey and Mezirow considered that a prerequisite for the functioning of democracy is the level of education of the citizens and their degree of awareness regarding their choices. Mezirow and Argyris emphasize the significance of challenging established belief systems and emotions as integral to the learning process. Mezirow and Gould agreed on the psychological dimensions of the assumptions that may hinder transformation. The symposium strives to find the analogies between all of the above, moving from the general ideas of democracy, social change and transformation to changes introduced in organizations and finally to the psychic distortions that seem to hinder all, individual, organizational, and social transformations. It further suggests that democracy is at the core of change for all: society, organizations, and individuals.

**Key Words:** Transformation, Democracy, Beliefs, Dilemmas

### **Introduction**

The present paper focuses on the relationship between Jack Mezirow's theory and John Dewey's, Roger Gould's, and Chris Argyris's work. Dewey and Mezirow focused on democracy. Mezirow and Argyris emphasize the significance of challenging established belief systems and emotions and Mezirow and Gould agreed on the psychological dimensions of the assumptions that may hinder transformation. The paper strives to find the analogies between all of the above, moving from the general ideas of democracy, social change and transformation to change. It further suggests that democracy is at the core of change for all: society, organizations, and individuals.

### **Talking About Democracy in Times of Turbulence Under the Light Of Dewey and Mezirow Contributions**

About five years ago in a book whose inspirer and editor were Alexis Kokkos, the authors of this paper had attempted to explore the influence of John Dewey's ideas on Jack Mezirow's work and his shaping of transformation theory (Raikou & Karalis, 2020). In the process, we found that this was only the beginning because exploring this influence proved to be an endless endeavor as new challenges kept emerging the more, we studied it. We then decided to limit ourselves to trace this effect to key concepts of Mezirow's approach (critical thinking, habits of mind, interpretation of experience, disorienting dilemma, and the steps of the reflective process)

concluding that (Raikou & Karalis, 2020, p. 38) “Mezirow broadened, transformed, and creatively incorporated into the field of adult education several of Dewey’s ideas”. But we had already established that at the core of both Dewey’s and Mezirow’s approach was the concept of democracy. We also quote from our work (o.c., p. 46): Marsick and Finger (1994), consider that Mezirow’s starting point was Dewey’s conception of democracy. They even quote a phrase from the first interview, which states that “the task I had in mind was to someday analyze what learning experience is that people have when they learn democracy” (p.46). In addition, Mezirow’s doctoral thesis focuses on the development of democracy through the promotion of civic participation in educational programs at the local level (Mezirow, 1955). We also note that in a work he presented in 1991 at the AAACE Annual Conference, in which he reviewed developments in the field of adult education in the USA, he extensively details Dewey’s influence on the work of major adult theorists in the field of participatory democracy, noting characteristically: “Lindeman shared John Dewey’s vision of participatory democracy in schools, families, workplaces, communities, and the state” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 1).

Today, with populists rising in many democracies of the Western world, in a conference on “Making new spaces of possibility with community and practice” we decided to extend the above thoughts by starting from a relatively well-known controversy in the field of transformation theory, with, in our view, democracy at stake. Obviously, we are not going to exhaust this subject by presenting a few thoughts; in fact, we would be satisfied if we just opened it up.

As in Dewey’s and Mezirow’s view, democracy is first and foremost experienced through dialogue in education, it is the state to which the informed citizen tries to reach, and dialogue, equal participation and reflective thinking are the optimal means in this direction. However, the point at which we believe that all the above, but ultimately Mezirow’s position on democracy, dialogue and participation become more apparent is in the text of his response to Susan Collard & Michael Law, who criticize key points of transformative learning theory, focusing on the terms of transformative perspectives. This is an article published in 1989, in *Adult Education Quarterly*, to which Mezirow responds in the very next issue. Collard & Law’s critique can essentially be summed up in a phrase they use just before the conclusions of their article: “Mezirow’s theory of perspective transformation allows for a greater degree of political detachment (Collard & Law, 1989, p. 105). This is the criticism that Mezirow would later receive from other thinkers regarding the issue of value neutrality for the frames of reference. The core of this critique, in our view, focuses on the fact that the functionality of frames of reference and the processing of dysfunctional mental habits is not considered a sufficient goal for transformative learning - the ultimate goal should be the formation of a ‘specific’ type of frame of reference and a set of mental habits that are distinguished by ‘fitness’ for social change.

Mezirow’s response to Collard & Law is seen to be in the context of what we have said about Dewey’s ideas on democracy, participation, dialogue and collective action. He starts his response from the core of Collard & Law’s critique, stating that: “it is possible that my ideas reflect a ‘liberal democratic’ versus a ‘radical’ position, which my critics would find more congenial, .... That they are reading what I have written from a different meaning perspective or paradigm...” (Mezirow, 1989, p. 2). But what are the different assumptions or, better yet, the different paradigm to which Mezirow refers in his response? In our view, there is the possibility of testing or experimenting with assumptions that may prove to be sufficient or insufficient for the interpretation of experience. A consistent pragmatist cannot but follow here the principle of warranted assertability, a key concept of pragmatists, and therefore of Dewey and Mezirow, that

the meaning of a situation is feasible through the effects and the consequences that this situation creates. In such terms, there is no frame of reference that could be considered ultimate or superior; the choice remains always to people who judge their assumptions in the light of their meaning interpretation.

Thus, both during the pandemic of COVID-19 and in the post-pandemic period we are confronted with the problem that Dewey had already posed, namely that the formal characteristics of democracy (participation, vote, etc.) are not so important, stating that democracy “is more than a form of government, it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience (Dewey, 1916, p. 48) For example, the anti-vaccination movement or the various conspiracy theories for the origin of the coronavirus, were more reminiscent of times when the majority of people remained outside the formal education system, without access to scientific knowledge. But the experience of the pandemic has shown us that while the quantitative bet on education seems to have been won in most of the world, the qualitative bet, i.e. the possibility of rational interpretation of phenomena and our experience of them, is still a major challenge.

This brings to the surface one of the main theses we had put forward in our work in the aforementioned collective volume, namely that indeed Dewey did not prefer democracy for its formal characteristics but for the fact that it was the only constitution, the only mode of social organization that safely allowed experimentation for a better future. This question, in our view, is more open than ever today. The level of formal education of citizens throughout the world may have risen dramatically, but the possibility of rational interpretation of phenomena and experiences for a large percentage of people still remains at the level of conspiracy and empiricism. Therefore, we believe that today it makes sense to promote the ideas and apply the principles of transformation theory to truly transform democracy in the age of populism to a mode of conjoint communicated experience. Or, to put it differently, we believe that the “defense” for democracy is precisely those ideas of Dewey and Mezirow to which we have briefly referred.

### **Revealing Critical Reflection and Change: Interpreting Mezirow’s and Argyris’ Parallel Perspectives**

In a recent paper, there was an attempt to delve into the intersecting ideas of Chris Argyris and Jack Mezirow, two influential thinkers in the realms of adult learning and organizational psychology (Pavlakis, 2020). Born in the same year (1923) and residing in the eastern US for much of their lives, Mezirow and Argyris followed parallel trajectories while occupying roles at prestigious academic institutions. Despite their differing fields, both Argyris and Mezirow emphasize the significance of challenging established belief systems and emotions as integral to the learning process. Mezirow’s work centered on transformative learning, involving critical reflection and discourse to dismantle ingrained assumptions, while Argyris significantly contributed to organizational learning. Although Mezirow occasionally acknowledges Argyris’ impact on his ideas, evidence of reciprocity is limited, largely due to Argyris’ inclination towards practical applications rather than academic discourse. Argyris, seen more as an organizational coach, focused on inducing change within business environments. Despite this asymmetry, theorists such as Marsick (1990) and Watkins & Wilson (2001) have treated their works as complementary, highlighting the connections between transformative learning, organizational learning, and learning organizations. Moreover, despite their differing roles, both Argyris and Mezirow exhibit a shared commitment to critical reflection, respectful discourse, and the pursuit of truth as a means to facilitate change. This paper endeavors to

comparatively analyze both thinkers' work on critical reflection aiming at change, with a goal to uncover shared or divergent points between their philosophies, considering the contrasting contexts of adult education and business training.

The central focus for both thinkers, lies, in the notion of critical reflection aimed at instigating change. According to Mezirow (2000), this journey commences with the concept of a frame of reference, which serves as the lens through which assumptions and expectations shape the interpretation of experiences. Within this framework, habits of mind and perspectives (meaning schemes) are situated. Habits of mind are clusters of assumptions that aid in interpreting the significance of an experience, while perspectives encompass explicit beliefs, perceptions, emotions, and behaviors that influence a particular experience. The critical examination of habits of mind delves deep, aligning with Argyris' notion of double-loop learning, as articulated by Finger and Asun (2001, p. 58): If meaning schemes are changed through simple reflection, meaning perspectives are transformed with what he [Mezirow] calls "critical reflection," that is by questioning one's 'fundamental assumptions', 'guiding principles' or 'premises'- a process very similar to Kuhn's 'paradigm shift' and Argyris and Schön's double-loop learning.

Moreover, Mezirow's theoretical model, consisting of ten stages, outlines the process of perspective transformation. It commences with encountering a disorienting dilemma and progresses, via a profoundly critical reflective process, towards acquiring new skills by the individual who faced the dilemma. Their revised perception is firmly grounded in reality, shaped by their newly formed perspective. Another more straightforward yet equally relevant theoretical framework for change, as proposed by Argyris (1997), comprises five fundamental strategies, all emphasizing observation and critical data analysis. Although initially developed to enhance organizational performance, it is intriguing to note the similarity in Argyris and Mezirow's understanding of the transformation process. An attempt to associate the two approaches is presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**  
*Association between the Theoretical Models by Mezirow and Argyris*

<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Initiating Change in Performance (Argyris)</b>	<b>Transformation Theory (Mezirow)</b>	<b>Stages</b>
1	Produce (relatively) directly observable data of one's reasoning and actions	A disorienting dilemma	1
2	Encouraging people to examine inconsistencies and gaps in the reasoning on which they base their actions	Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame	2
		A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions	3
		Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change	4



3	Surface and make explicit the rules that <i>must</i> be in one's head if they maintain that there is a connection between their designs for actions and the actions that they produced	Exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions	5
		Planning a course of action	6
		Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan	7
4	View any resistance, bewilderment, or frustration that results as further directly observable data that can be used to test the validity of the new learning	Provision trying of new roles	8
5	Creation of opportunities to apply Model II in ways that will develop actions reducing counterproductive consequences	Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships	9
		A reintegration into one's life based on conditions dictated by one's perspective	10

Surface and make explicit the rules that must be in one's head if they maintain that there is a connection between their designs for actions and the actions that they produced

### **False Beliefs, Psychic Distortions and the Relationship between Jack Mezirow and Roger Gould**

Jack Mezirow met Roger Gould's in the mid 70's. Roger Gould was arguing that adult beliefs have their roots in early childhood traumatic experiences. Mezirow agreed with Gould that "*all our unexamined assumptions have psychological dimensions*" (Mezirow 1978a, pp. 104) and accepted that "*a clear understanding of the nature of the most common psychological problems of adulthood*" (Mezirow, 1998, pp. 194) is needed for understanding and facilitating transformation. Early childhood traumas, based on power relations, may be transformed into psychic distortions that hinder change in adulthood and thus, we argue that they might place obstacles in democratic decision making. As Mezirow (1978b, pp. 11) said "*for a perspective transformation to occur, a painful reappraisal of our current perspective must be thrust upon us*".

Promoting democracy may require a deep emotional processing of false assumptions and the critical reflection on experiences and dysfunctional ideas on a wide range of distortions and distorted habits of mind, including sociocultural, moral, ideological and political (Mezirow, 1991, 2000; Mezirow, 1978a, 1991; Fleming, Marsick, Kasl, & Rose, 2016). When speaking of psychic distortions that are based on power relations developed at early childhood between parents and children and pupils and teachers, the need to explore not just false assumptions but moreover the emotions they create, within a safe environment, is present.

Racism and hate speech are based on early childhood distortions of supremacy of one culture over another and are often followed by strong emotions that adult learning settings might

not be able to face as unconscious energies might emerge. Mezirow (1990, 1991) argued that adult educators do not necessarily have either the knowledge, or the skills to cope with the demands of deeper psychic distortions. Adult educators need to be taught how to make the distinctions between democratic dialogues and dealing with deep rooted dysfunctional assumptions where psychoeducational groups or even counseling may be needed (Mezirow, 1991, pp.204-205).

Mezirow (1991) was open to accept that properly trained adult educators may be able to provide counseling. However, such activity unquestionably requires psychological understanding and sensitivity (ibid. p.205). Adult educators have a role to play in psycho-educational training programs that address issues relevant to life changing situations and adult educators are “to foster critical reflection on psychic presuppositions that impede learning and adult development” (Mezirow, 1990, pp. xviii). However, the extent to which they can cope with deep rooted dysfunctional assumptions of such a nature is questionable and even more so if these are provided in setting when some adults may face or come across others with severe mental health issues (Jacobs, Christensen, Dolezal-Wood, Huber, Polterok, & Permanente, 2001). Adult educators on one hand need to be constantly aware of their role limits, the context where the training takes place, the educational contract with learners, as well as of their own background and abilities to handle edge emotions in an adult education setting. On the other, they have to explore their own psychic assumptions regarding democracy and power relations. Fixation is a risk for all adults when faced with these types of dysfunctional assumptions. Psychic distortions might therefore be one of the most important obstacles to change especially when power relations and need for more democracy are discussed.

### Conclusion

The present paper argues that democracy and participation to decision making requires changing dysfunctional psychic assumptions and distortions over power relations. Jack Mezirow and John Dewey talk about the need for democracy. Roger Gould discusses about fixation and psychic distortions and Chris Argyris stresses the need for participation in decision making. Democracy is at the core of change for all: society, organizations, and individuals. However, it is not a given but rather a goal that adults should always strive to achieve.

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Kaltoft	Gwendolyn	<b>Good Trouble for the Long Hard Struggles: Protest Music as Catalyst for Transformative and Emancipatory Learning</b>
Karakou	Maria	<b>Transformative Learning through the Aesthetic Experience and beyond, Transformative Learning as an Aesthetic Experience. A “meeting” between Mezirow and Aristoteles</b>
Karalis	Thanassis	<b>Jack Mezirow's thought: Roots and branches</b>

<b>Last</b>	<b>First</b>	<b>Title</b>
Kassab	SARA	<b>The Transformative Power of Sustainable Learning: Facilitating Teacher Professional Development in Displacement, Refugee, and Crisis Settings</b>
Kastner	Monika	<b>Encompassing Transformation: A Holistic Approach to Assessing Learning in Adult Basic Education</b>
Kedraka	Katerina	<b>Transformative Dilemmas in modern contexts</b>
Khupe	Constance	<b>Now I see the colony: A teacher educator's transformative learning journey through self-study</b>
Kim	Younghyun	<b>A new and unknown world is coming: Transformative learning for older adults</b>
Kokkos	Alexis	<b>Looking for philosophical resemblances with transformation theory: how Socrates, Peter Jarvis Maxine Greene relate to the work of Jack Mezirow</b>
Kokkos	Alexis	<b>Perspective Transformation Through the Arts: Insights from a long-term research</b>
Koksma	Jur	<b>Parkinson's care innovation as transformative learning</b>
Koo	SoHee	<b>An Autoethnographic Journey of an Art Educator's Transformative Experiences: Reimagining Critical Incident Moments and Transformative Learning</b>
Kostara	Efrosyni	<b>Looking for philosophical resemblances with transformation theory: how Socrates, Peter Jarvis Maxine Greene relate to the work of Jack Mezirow</b>
Kostara	Effrosyni	<b>Perspective transformation and inclusive education: a literature review</b>
Koulaouzides	George	<b>Looking for philosophical resemblances with transformation theory: how Socrates, Peter Jarvis Maxine Greene relate to the work of Jack Mezirow</b>
Koulaouzides	George	<b>Perspective transformation and inclusive education: a literature review</b>
Kramlich	Deborah	<b>Bridge-building and Belonging Beyond the Classroom</b>
Kramlich	Deborah	<b>Seed Bombs for Transformation: Using Guerilla Gardening for Making Good Trouble in Academia</b>
Kyle	Bryce	<b>Completing the Odyssey: Black and Latino Student Veterans Reflections on War and Homecoming</b>
Kyle	Eric	<b>New Possibilities for Transformative Learning Practice through an Integrated Learning Theory</b>
Laros	Anna	<b>Qualifying Swiss Mentor-Teachers - Forming and Transforming? First Results of a Longitudinal Qualitative Research Study</b>
Lawoyin	Simi	<b>Fostering Transformative Learning: A Case Study of an Online Program for Nigerian Professionals</b>
Lawrence	Randee	<b>Good Trouble for the Long Hard Struggles: Protest Music as Catalyst for Transformative and Emancipatory Learning</b>
Lemos	Vanessa	<b>Conceptualizing transformative listening in the workplace: a theoretical and practical proposal</b>
Leyva Aguilera	Juana Claudia	<b>Social-ecological Participatory Observatories: co-creating transformative learning environments to achieve drylands stewardship and sustainable development: A Mexican Case Study</b>
Li	Yunong	<b>Blind Box: What is Reflection and Transformative Learning During 14-day Forced Isolation?</b>
Li	Yue	<b>Deliberate Phases of Transformative Learning Theory applied to an Educational Sustainability Doctoral Program</b>

<b>Last</b>	<b>First</b>	<b>Title</b>
Li	Yue	<b>The Bridge Between Transformative Learning and Empowering Sustainability Change Agents in an Educational Sustainability Doctoral Program</b>
Lim	Ahreum	<b>Beyond Gestural Solidarities: Troubling the Intricacies in Transforming Organizations for Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI)</b>
Lim	Ahreum	<b>Ecosophic Mapping: Why Intervene? Proposing a Cookbook for a Joyful Fuss</b>
Lindell	Heather	<b>Troubling Transformation Through an Experiential Learning Apparatus</b>
Link	Beth	<b>Troubling School Change: Using Arts-Integrated Professional Learning to Transform Education from Within</b>
Lipson Lawrence	Randee	<b>Creative Discomfort: Brave Spaces for Transformative Learning</b>
Locatelli	Alice	<b>Bildung and Transformative Learning: Some “Traces” in the Self-Development of Two Female Figures in the Late 18th Century, Sophie and Gertrud</b>
Logothetou	Martha	<b>Transformative Learning through the Aesthetic Experience and beyond, Transformative Learning as an Aesthetic Experience. A “meeting” between Mezirow and Aristoteles</b>
Longmore	Anne-Liisa	<b>“Transformative Listening in Dyads: Creating a Space for Getting into Good Trouble Together” Pre-Conference Virtual Experiential Session with In-Person End of Conference Reflection</b>
Lowe	Carli	<b>Information Resources as Tools of Transformation: An Interview Study</b>
Lucatello	Simone	<b>Social-ecological Participatory Observatories: co-creating transformative learning environments to achieve drylands stewardship and sustainable development: A Mexican Case Study</b>
Lundgren	Henriette	<b>Transforming Creative Identity through Playful Collaboration</b>
Lundgren	Henriette	<b>Troubling Broken Systems through Caring Conversations</b>
Luraschi	Silvia	<b>Moving between perspectives: the practice of senso-biographical walk as a way of learning and transformation</b>
Lynam	Abigail	<b>Discovering the heART of Transformative Learning. An interactive session where Art and Transformative Learning intersect</b>
Lyons	Savanna	<b>Deep canvassing and transformative learning: exploring a methodology to fight prejudice</b>
Magni	Francesco	<b>Embracing Transformative Learning in Teacher Education: the challenge of Italian Teaching and Learning Centers</b>
Malafronte	Olivier	<b>Transformative learning through Artificial Intelligence Caching: An exploratory study</b>
Mancaniello	Maria Rita	<b>Cultural heritage and educational communities. Transformative learning and professional skills for a new urban welfare</b>
Manion	Kathleen	<b>Contextualizing and transforming child rights education - A decolonizing, participatory project in Canada and Uganda</b>
Männistö	Perttu	<b>Individuation, socialisation and transformation – the three dimensions of education</b>
Markou	Dimitra	<b>“Transformative overture(s) to the caged bird's song of freedom. Educational approaches "intra muros"”</b>
Marone	Francesca	<b>Cultural heritage and educational communities. Transformative learning and professional skills for a new urban welfare</b>

<b>Last</b>	<b>First</b>	<b>Title</b>
Marsick	Victoria	<b>Experience: Action Learning Conversation to learn knowledge, creativity and respect for other people's position: research through an experience at the University of Bergamo</b>
Marsick	Victoria	<b>Getting into good trouble through learning-based work</b>
Marsick	Victoria	<b>Good Trouble: Re-imagining Informal and Incidental Learning Theory Through Transcontextual Exploration and Action</b>
Martínez Reig	Cristina	<b>Disney films as disorienting dilemmas. Exploring race and gender through the representation of non-white female Disney main characters</b>
Martínez Tagüeña	Natalia	<b>Social-ecological Participatory Observatories: co-creating transformative learning environments to achieve drylands stewardship and sustainable development: A Mexican Case Study</b>
Mata Páez	Ricardo Ismael	<b>Social-ecological Participatory Observatories: co-creating transformative learning environments to achieve drylands stewardship and sustainable development: A Mexican Case Study</b>
Matikainen	Minni	<b>Individuation, socialisation and transformation – the three dimensions of education</b>
Mazeski	Jason	<b>“Redeem the Soul of America”: Trauma-Informed Transformative Learning in Police Training</b>
Mbokota	Gloria	<b>Transformative learning through Artificial Intelligence Caching: An exploratory study</b>
McCann	Shawn	<b>Facilitating Good Trouble: A Model for Engendering Perspective Transformation</b>
McCann	Shawn	<b>Serious Play is Serious Work</b>
McCathren	Hanna	<b>Transformative Learning and Psychological Contracts: The Impact of Perspective Transformation on Millennial and Gen Z Working Mothers' Work Expectations</b>
McClain	Adam	<b>Engaging a Dark Side Perspective: Integration of Second Wave Positive Psychology and Transformative Learning Theory</b>
McCullough	Danielle	<b>Allyship: How to Create a Space of Belonging?</b>
McCullough	Danielle	<b>Developing Inclusive Practices to Galvanize Retention of Diverse Physician Trainees and Junior Faculty: A Transformative Learning Approach</b>
McDonald	Maira	<b>Cultural Preparedness of Adult Educators: A Changing Dynamic in Higher Education through Transformative Learning</b>
Melacarne	Claudio	<b>Radicalization in everyday life. Cultivating informal learning practices</b>
Meneghel	Valentina	<b>Educating for a sense of community. Ex-post reflections from a research study</b>
Mensah	Isaac	<b>Recurrent Life Crises and Potential for Transformative Learning: Making Sense of Natural Disasters in Bahamas</b>
Metz	Lea	<b>Discovering the heART of Transformative Learning. An interactive session where Art and Transformative Learning intersect</b>
Misawa	Mitsunori	<b>Collaborative Autoethnography as a Way to Negotiate, Survive, and Thrive in Academia</b>
Mizukoshi	Kaori	<b>How Japanese Managers in the Information Technology Industry Experience Cultural Diversity in the Workplace: Host Culture Perceptions in Light of Constructive-Developmental Theory toward Transformation</b>
Monga	Chetna	<b>Portrayal of Personal Transformation in Indian Feature Films</b>

<b>Last</b>	<b>First</b>	<b>Title</b>
Mura	Antonello	<b>ADHD and families: transformative learning and parenting support</b>
Mura	Marina	<b>Decision making process: the case of judiciary</b>
Murray	Natalie	<b>Digital Transformation: a catalyst for transformative learning for employees</b>
Musaio	Marisa	<b>Cultural heritage and educational communities. Transformative learning and professional skills for a new urban welfare</b>
Muscarà	Marinella	<b>Narrating Change: Storytelling as a Transformative Practice in the Initial Training of Specialized Teachers</b>
Nakamura	Yoshie	<b>Adult Learners' Transformative Learning Experience Through Theater-based Pedagogy: Flourish in Shifting Paradigms and Building Relationships with Others</b>
Nakamura	Yoshie Tomozumi	<b>Transformative Learning and Psychological Contracts: The Impact of Perspective Transformation on Millennial and Gen Z Working Mothers' Work Expectations</b>
Nakamura	Yoshie	<b>Unearthing Transformative Learning Experience with Autoethnographic Approach: Reflecting on Professional Identity and Lifelong Learning Through Horse-Assisted Coaching</b>
Narvaez	Salvador	<b>Social-ecological Participatory Observatories: co-creating transformative learning environments to achieve drylands stewardship and sustainable development: A Mexican Case Study</b>
Negi	Tanuj	<b>Portrayal of Personal Transformation in Indian Feature Films</b>
Nicolaides	Aliki	<b>A new and unknown world is coming: Transformative learning for older adults</b>
Nicolaides	Aliki	<b>Beyond Gestural Solidarities: Troubling the Intricacies in Transforming Organizations for Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI)</b>
Nicolaides	Aliki	<b>Ecosophic Mapping: Why Intervene? Proposing a Cookbook for a Joyful Fuss</b>
Nicolaides	Aliki	<b>Good Trouble: Re-imagining Informal and Incidental Learning Theory Through Transcontextual Exploration and Action</b>
Njaka	Ijeoma	<b>“Playing in the Dark”: Radical Speculative Play within the Dark Side of Transformation</b>
Nyamupangedengu	Eunice	<b>Now I see the colony: A teacher educator's transformative learning journey through self-study</b>
Olatunji	Taiwo Isaac	<b>Dimensions of Disorientation and Transformation: How Does Transformative Learning Occur and Manifest in Cross-Cultural Contexts?</b>
Olatunji	Taiwo Isaac	<b>My Theory, my Tool, my Tribe: X-raying Scholars' Perspectives on the Evolution of Transformative Learning</b>
Pace	Erika Marie	<b>Transformative learning and teacher agency: The centre pull and the outer end of the same ball of twine?</b>
Page	M. Beth	<b>Engaging Interview Matrix to explore the Next Edge of Transformative Learning: An Experiential Approach</b>
Page	M. Beth	<b>Renewing Vibrancy, Compassion, and Connection Within Ourselves and Beyond</b>
Papadopoulou	Maria	<b>Transformative Learning through the Aesthetic Experience and beyond, Transformative Learning as an Aesthetic Experience. A “meeting” between Mezirow and Aristoteles</b>
Papaioannou	Georgios	<b>Museum and Transformative Learning: Empowering Adult Learning in the Museum Context</b>

<b>Last</b>	<b>First</b>	<b>Title</b>
Papanagnou	Dimitrios	<b>Good Trouble: Re-imagining Informal and Incidental Learning Theory Through Transcontextual Exploration and Action</b>
Pavlakis	Manos	<b>Jack Mezirow's thought: Roots and branches</b>
Pemberton	Jennifer	<b>“Redeem the Soul of America”: Trauma-Informed Transformative Learning in Police Training</b>
Perry	Shannon	<b>Ecosophic Mapping: Why Intervene? Proposing a Cookbook for a Joyful Fuss</b>
Pescarmona	Isabella	<b>Transforming Initial Teacher Education: Community Philosophical Dialogue to Develop an Intercultural and Social Justice Perspective</b>
Piazza	Roberta	<b>"Exploring Addiction Recovery through Hoggan’s Metatheoretical Perspective of Transformative Theory: A Comparative Analysis"</b>
Pope	Susan	<b>"How transformative learning can create the conditions for perspective transformation in a UK Defence Healthcare setting"</b>
Potestio	Andrea	<b>Bildung and Transformative Learning: Some “Traces” in the Self-Development of Two Female Figures in the Late 18th Century, Sophie and Gertrud</b>
Poulopoulos	Charalampos	<b>Drawings and narratives of life crises as a transformational process</b>
Pozzobon	Tammy	<b>Engaging Interview Matrix to explore the Next Edge of Transformative Learning:An Experiential Approach</b>
Qiu	Ruoyi	<b>Dimensions of Disorientation and Transformation: How Does Transformative Learning Occur and Manifest in Cross-Cultural Contexts?</b>
Radd	Sharon	<b>Embodied Approaches to Differentiating and Integrative Transformation</b>
Radice	Camilla	<b>New spaces and educational communities for citizens: the case of Viceversa</b>
Raikou	Natassa	<b>Jack Mezirow's thought: Roots and branches</b>
Raikou	Natassa	<b>Perspective Transformation Through the Arts: Insights from a long-term research</b>
Raimondo	Enza Manila	<b>Narrating Change: Storytelling as a Transformative Practice in the Initial Training of Specialized Teachers</b>
Raja	Saif Ur Rehman	<b>How White is Our Research? Whiteness as a Distorted Implicit in Educational Researchers' Knowledge Construction Processes</b>
Ralston	DJ	<b>Good Trouble: Re-imagining Informal and Incidental Learning Theory Through Transcontextual Exploration and Action</b>
Ralston	DJ	<b>Troubling Broken Systems through Caring Conversations</b>
Redman	Erin	<b>Deliberate Phases of Transformative Learning Theory applied to an Educational Sustainability Doctoral Program</b>
Redman	Erin	<b>The Bridge Between Transformative Learning and Empowering Sustainability Change Agents in an Educational Sustainability Doctoral Program</b>
Reitenauer	Vicki	<b>‘A Practice of Freedom’: The Good Trouble of Self-grading</b>
Reyes Gómez	Víctor Manuel	<b>Social-ecological Participatory Observatories: co-creating transformative learning environments to achieve drylands stewardship and sustainable development: A Mexican Case Study</b>
Rigoni	Paola	<b>Nursing Students among transformative learning, professional well-being, and resilience. An observational quantitative study</b>
Ritter	Luea	<b>Co-holding And Co-navigating Collective Liminal Spaces For Transformative Learning Outside Educational Contexts</b>
Robbins	Stacey	<b>Wellness in Transition: Social Solidarity for Transformation</b>

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Robichaud	Michelle	<b>Engaging with Power, Privilege and Social Justice as a Means of Transforming Disaster Management in a Climate-changed World</b>
Rogers	Katrina	<b>Healing our hearts and our planet: The role of transformative learning</b>
Romano	Alessandra	<b>“See the unseen”. Is transformative learning an “inclusive” theory?</b>
Romano	Alessandro	<b>Narrating Change: Storytelling as a Transformative Practice in the Initial Training of Specialized Teachers</b>
Romano	Alessandra	<b>Scaling Up Transformative Learning through Organizing Reflection to Create Good Trouble for Sustainability</b>
Rosner	Tammy	<b>Aligning Transformative Learning and Action Research to Re-Evaluate Structures</b>
Ross	Suzy	<b>Redefining the Disorienting Dilemma as Continuum Between Peak and Trauma</b>
Rossi	Sara	<b>A sustainability-oriented university beyond the traditional lecture. Building a methodological framework for education to sustainable mindset in Higher Education</b>
Sabic-El-Rayess	Amra	<b>Building Resilience to Hate in Classrooms with Transformative Learning: Innovation in Practice and Pedagogy to Prevent Extremism and Violence in U.S. Schools</b>
Sabino	Giampaolo	<b>Education on the environment: transformative learning for ecological consciousness, between climate change and sustainable development</b>
Sägesser	Anaïs	<b>Co-holding And Co-navigating Collective Liminal Spaces For Transformative Learning Outside Educational Contexts</b>
Sägesser	Anaïs	<b>How to Provide Safe (Enough) Spaces for Transformative Learning to Support Courageous and Decolonial Practices towards Climate Justice</b>
Sarantidis	Panagiotis	<b>Museum and Transformative Learning: Empowering Adult Learning in the Museum Context</b>
Sari	Lufi Kartika	<b>Pre-service teachers’ transformative learning during placement in underdeveloped rural areas: a living experience</b>
Saunders	Fredricka	<b>Recurrent Life Crises and Potential for Transformative Learning: Making Sense of Natural Disasters in Bahamas</b>
Schapiro	Steven	<b>Listening Through the Chaos: Toward Transforming Collective Trauma in We-Space</b>
Schapiro	Steven	<b>We Spaces for Racial: Equity: Lessons From Our Praxis</b>
Scheder	Cathy	<b>Deliberate Phases of Transformative Learning Theory applied to an Educational Sustainability Doctoral Program</b>
Scheder	Catherine	<b>The Bridge Between Transformative Learning and Empowering Sustainability Change Agents in an Educational Sustainability Doctoral Program</b>
Scully-Russ	Ellen	<b>Beyond Gestural Solidarities: Troubling the Intricacies in Transforming Organizations for Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI)</b>
Scully-Russ	Ellen	<b>Good Trouble: Re-imagining Informal and Incidental Learning Theory Through Transcontextual Exploration and Action</b>
Scully-Russ	Ellen	<b>My Year of Firsts: A personal story of wandering through an altered life</b>
Seingier	Georges	<b>Social-ecological Participatory Observatories: co-creating transformative learning environments to achieve drylands stewardship and sustainable development: A Mexican Case Study</b>



<b>Last</b>	<b>First</b>	<b>Title</b>
Serrelli	Emanuele	<b>Reimagining Teaching and Learning: the Transformative Potential of Service Learning</b>
Sharma	Umesh	<b>Transformative learning and teacher agency: The centre pull and the outer end of the same ball of twine?</b>
Shen	Juming	<b>The Transformative Learning Experience in National Team-based Competitions: A Study of Chinese College Students in Computer Science and Engineering</b>
Siddiq	Sarah	<b>Fostering Transformative Learning in Adult ESOL Classrooms:A Participatory Action Research Study</b>
Silva	Carolina	<b>Deep Time Walk as a transformative tool in Higher Education Institutions</b>
Silva Piva	Suelene	<b>A sustainability-oriented university beyond the traditional lecture. Building a methodological framework for education to sustainable mindset in Higher Education</b>
Simeone	Domenico	<b>Reimagining Teaching and Learning: the Transformative Potential of Service Learning</b>
Singer-Brodowski	Mandy	<b>How to Provide Safe (Enough) Spaces for Transformative Learning to Support Courageous and Decolonial Practices towards Climate Justice</b>
Sità	Chiara	<b>Internship as a collective learning journey: a participatory research involving students, faculties, professionals.</b>
Sità	Chiara	<b>Transforming professional understanding and practice in social work with children and families facing vulnerability</b>
Sitanimezi	Lynn	<b>Expanding the Practices of Transformative Learning: A Collective Responsibility to Foster Spaces of Possibility through JEDI Dialogues</b>
Sivó	Imre	<b>Making New Spaces of Possibility: Fostering Transformative Learning of Hungarian Organizational Leaders</b>
Soeiro	Dina	<b>Seed Bombs for Transformation: Using Guerilla Gardening for Making Good Trouble in Academia</b>
Spain	Dagmar	<b>Creative Discomfort: Brave Spaces for Transformative Learning</b>
Spain	Dagmar	<b>Embodied Dialogic Spaces as Research Methodology for Students' Post-Graduate Reflection on their Dance Learning</b>
Spennati	Stefano	<b>Experience: Action Learning Conversation to learn knowledge, creativity and respect for other people's position: research through an experience at the University of Bergamo</b>
SPYROPOULOU	MARIA	<b>Exploring the contribution of Transformative Learning (TL) to developing intercultural competency in a North Greece community hosting refugee and immigrant populations</b>
Stap	Thieme	<b>Parkinson's care innovation as transformative learning</b>
Tabora	Cary	<b>Transformative Learning in Cohort-Based Programs: Exploring the Impact of Diversity on Group Transformation</b>
Taylor	Edward	<b>Becoming a Change Agent: A professional transformative path for faculty at University of Padua</b>
Tino	Concetta	<b>Becoming a Change Agent: A professional transformative path for faculty at University of Padua</b>
Tisdell	Elizabeth	<b>Troubling transformation: research as auto/biographical pilgrimage</b>

<b>Last</b>	<b>First</b>	<b>Title</b>
Toka	Katerina	<b>“Transformative overture(s) to the caged bird's song of freedom. Educational approaches "intra muros"”</b>
Toma	Roxana	<b>Toward Transformative Learning in Online Education: Testing a New Community Engagement Framework Model</b>
Torres	Teresa	<b>“See the unseen”. Is transformative learning an “inclusive” theory?</b>
Torri	Aurora	<b>Reimagining Teaching and Learning: the Transformative Potential of Service Learning</b>
Tsiboukli	Anna	<b>Drawings and narratives of life crises as a transformational process</b>
Tsiboukli	Anna	<b>Jack Mezirow's thought: Roots and branches</b>
Tsiboukli	Anna	<b>Transformative Dilemmas in modern contexts</b>
Tsolakidou	Savvatou	<b>Adult Lifelong Learning Communities of Action to Enhance Environmental Literacy, Through Transformative Learning</b>
Vadalà	Valeria	<b>Performative Didactics as Transformative Didactics. Re-discovering the self through the gaze of the other</b>
Vallianatou-Voutsina	Eleni	<b>Adult Lifelong Learning Communities of Action to Enhance Environmental Literacy, Through Transformative Learning</b>
Velazco	Mitzy	<b>Navigating Cultural Transition &amp; Uncertainty: An Autoethnographic Exploration of a Transformative Learning Journey as a Latina Voluntary Migrant</b>
Villarreal Wislar	Cristino	<b>Social-ecological Participatory Observatories: co-creating transformative learning environments to achieve drylands stewardship and sustainable development: A Mexican Case Study</b>
Walker	Jude	<b>Redefining the Disorienting Dilemma as Continuum Between Peak and Trauma</b>
Walker	Jude	<b>Shame as a Catalyst for Transformative Change in Men: Group Learning in Addictions Recovery</b>
Walkes	Skyller	<b>How to Provide Safe (Enough) Spaces for Transformative Learning to Support Courageous and Decolonial Practices towards Climate Justice</b>
Walvoord	Mark	<b>New Possibilities for Transformative Learning Practice through an Integrated Learning Theory</b>
Walvoord	Mark	<b>Scaling Up Transformative Learning through Organizing Reflection to Create Good Trouble for Sustainability</b>
Wang	Qian	<b>The Transformative Learning Experience in National Team-based Competitions: A Study of Chinese College Students in Computer Science and Engineering</b>
Watanabe	Risako	<b>Do Japanese business leaders experience transformative learning through a deliberately developmental organizational culture intervention? A developmental perspective</b>
Watanabe	Ryosuke	<b>Do Japanese business leaders experience transformative learning through a deliberately developmental organizational culture intervention? A developmental perspective</b>
Watanabe	Ryosuke	<b>Japanese Spiritual Practices: A Path to Transformative Learning</b>
Watanabe	Risako	<b>Japanese Spiritual Practices: A Path to Transformative Learning</b>
Watkins	Karen	<b>Getting into good trouble through learning-based work</b>
Watkins	Karen	<b>Good Trouble: Re-imagining Informal and Incidental Learning Theory Through Transcontextual Exploration and Action</b>

<b>Last</b>	<b>First</b>	<b>Title</b>
Welch	Marguerite	<b>Exploring Passageways into Transformation Through Storywork</b>
Welch	Marguerite	<b>Wellness in Transition: Social Solidarity for Transformation</b>
Wen	Biyang	<b>The Transformative Learning Experience in National Team-based Competitions: A Study of Chinese College Students in Computer Science and Engineering</b>
West	Linden	<b>Troubling transformation: research as auto/biographical pilgrimage</b>
WILBRAHAM	Susan	<b>"How transformative learning can create the conditions for perspective transformation in a UK Defence Healthcare setting"</b>
Wilbraham	Susan	<b>The disorienting dilemmas of wellbeing in higher education: An educator's perspective</b>
Wildflower	Leni	<b>Healing our hearts and our planet: The role of transformative learning</b>
Williamson	Sarah	<b>"Some witchcraft you've done in the past twelve months!": An exploration of the transformative value of learning through the arts in professional education</b>
Williamson	Sarah	<b>Feminist 'good trouble': Reframing and (re)performing monumental points of view through photography in the public sphere</b>
Williamson	ShaToya	<b>Transformative leadership: getting in good trouble as transformative learners</b>
Wilson	Fiona	<b>Emotionally Informed Transformative Learning: Feelings are scattered pins across the landscape of learning, turning on a point of possibility, it has always been me</b>
Woolis	Diana	<b>The Transformative Power of Sustainable Learning: Facilitating Teacher Professional Development in Displacement, Refugee, and Crisis Settings</b>
Yameen	Dr. Deanna	<b>Using Narrative to Transform Community – from the power of me to the power of now</b>
Yu	Junyi	<b>Ethical Troubles in Machine Learning: A Transformative Learning Perspective on Bias and Fairness</b>
Zakrzewski	Tes Cotter	<b>"Transformative Listening in Dyads: Creating a Space for Getting into Good Trouble Together" Pre-Conference Virtual Experiential Session with In-Person End of Conference Reflection</b>
Zhang	Xin	<b>Navigating Change: A longitudinal study of how Future Self-Guides Shape International Students' Motivations and Perceived Transformation at a Sino-Foreign Joint-Venture University</b>
Zuliani Theodoro de Lima	Mariana	<b>A sustainability-oriented university beyond the traditional lecture. Building a methodological framework for education to sustainable mindset in Higher Education</b>

# CALL FOR PROPOSALS



# INTERNATIONAL TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING CONFERENCE 2024

UNIVERSITY OF SIENA (ITALY)  
11TH - 13TH SEPTEMBER 2024

**Getting Transformation into Good Trouble:  
Making new spaces of possibility  
with community and in practice**



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## Our invitation to you...

We invite you to submit proposals, and join us, for the co-hosted XV Biennial International Transformative Learning Conference (ITLC) to be held at the **University of Siena, Tuscany, Italy, September 11th - 13th 2024.**

## Conference Title

*Getting Transformation into Good Trouble:  
Making new spaces of possibility with community and in practice.*

*Fostering liberating conditions for making more autonomous and informed choices and developing a sense of self-empowerment is the cardinal goal of adult education... adult educators create protected learning environments in which the conditions for social democracy necessary for transformative learning are fostered (Mezirow, 2000: 26, 31).*

The University of Siena is honored to host the 2024 ITLC after a pandemic experience that has limited the possibility to learn with other people, having a holistic experience in contact with nature, the cultural heritage and the Eco life diversity.

## Submission

We invite proposals for paper presentations, experiential sessions, symposia, roundtables, and Pecha Kucha performances. Submissions will be done electronically through the International Transformative Learning Conference (ITLC) website - <https://itlc2024.intertla.org/> - details to follow.

**October 31, 2023**

**Proposal due**

**January 15, 2024**

**Proposal acceptance notification**

**March 15, 2024**

**Final Papers submitted**

We look forward to welcoming you to Siena (Italy) next fall!

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## Conference Topic

In the 2024 International Transformative Learning Conference we want to restore, revive, and reimagine the ITLC Community after experiencing more than two years of a pandemic. We invite you to join us in reimagining and co-creating our community.

We ask you to join our quest for understanding transformation and transformative learning through getting transformation into good trouble! American Civil Rights Activist John Lewis suggests we shall not be afraid to get into good trouble, necessary trouble. Coming together as a community of scholars, scholar-practitioners, and practitioners, we want to envision transformation and transformative learning anew through putting our (self-)understanding of transformation at risk. Regaining a new sense of direction as a community intertwined with getting our (self-)understanding into good trouble. Some questions to consider:

- How could we trouble transformative learning and transformation?
- How do we want to reimagine what it means to transform and to learn transformatively?
- How can we radically question our (own) (self-)understanding of what it means to transform ourselves, the communities we live in and society as a whole? This might include but is not limited to asking what is beneath the tip of the iceberg of the theory and research on transformative learning?
- How can we as educators and researchers' "trouble" our language for naming the phenomenon of transformation and transformative learning?
- What are aspects we have not researched yet?
- How can we step outside our comfort zone as researchers and become learners with questions that get us into good trouble?
- How can we tackle our blind-spots, chase our curiosity, explore our uncertainty and not-knowing, shed some light on the dark side of transformation, and engage with ambiguity, being out-of-control, and the dangerous, risky, and existential dimensions of transformation. This implies owning a sense of loss and new, unknown ways of being and living our lives in the aftermath of transformation.

In the 2024 International Transformative Learning Conference, it is our goal to offer a space where we can "disentangle ourselves" (Oakeshott, 1989) – as researchers, practitioners and members of a community – for some time, from the urgencies of today's world (catastrophe, crisis, pandemic, war, climate change, etc.) to join the inquiry in which we seek a new understanding of transformation and transformative learning, troubling our explicit and implicit assumptions.

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What are possible ways to get into good trouble? How do we separate different strands (Dirkx, 1998) and lenses (Taylor, 1998) of transformative learning and how can we rethink and reimagine them together and in conversation with each other? In order to join this quest for regaining a sense of direction and seeking to understand transformative learning and the phenomenon of transformation anew, we need to be aware of where we are coming from, our position(ality), not necessarily knowing where we will end up and what our new understanding will be like. From our various positions and perspectives, each proposal should find its own way to re-frame transformation and transformative learning not as an output to be accounted for, but as a process for troubling, re/search/ing, re-inventing and re-imagining, and re-living.

## **Types of Submissions**

### **Paper Presentations**

Papers must address transformative learning. Please be clear about how you define and apply this concept. Papers should be based either on:

- Research (e.g., quantitative or qualitative research, mixed-methods research, action-research, case study, meta-analysis, etc.)
- Theory (e.g., conceptual study, model or theory development, positioning paper, etc.)
- Specific practice (applications in a real-world environment that tests or challenges existing theory, proposes new actions, or extends the practice beyond formal settings)
- Transformation-in-action (e.g. individuals or organizations outside of the scholarship of transformative learning engaging in the same philosophy and practices as transformative learning and education)

### **Experiential Sessions**

Experiential sessions demonstrate new and innovative practices in transformative learning through creative, interactive formats. These sessions will illustrate theoretical, practical, and experiential integration. We invite and encourage using, e.g., video, dramatizations, graphic arts, poetry, movement, and other symbolic forms. When designing your session keep in mind that participants should be substantively and actively engaged throughout.

Proposals for experiential sessions should include both the theoretical perspective, which frames the session, a plan for the flow of the workshop and the list of equipment or requirements. Maximum duration of experiential session is 90 min.

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## Symposia

Proposals should include a group of three to five authors discussing contradictory or complementary points of view related to a shared topic. We welcome international collaboration.

## Roundtables

The roundtable is an informal and relaxed context for researchers, including graduate students, to discuss work in progress. Roundtable proposals should describe the questions, issues, or topics author/s would like to explore.

## PechaKucha

Originally a Japanese type of storytelling, in this session presenters will have 20 slides that are shown for 20 seconds each (6 minutes and 40 seconds total). The presenter must coordinate their presentation with the automatic movement of the slides. These sessions are open to any topic, perspective, or practice within the larger domain of transformative learning theory and research.

## Instruction for submission

### Rule of Two

Rule of 2: No more than two submissions for each author. Just one proposal for each person as the first Author.

### Length of Submissions by Type

Session type	Length of proposal	Length of Paper
Paper session	800-1200 words including references and other supporting material	Up to 3500 words, including references and other supporting material



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Experiential session	800-1200 words including references and other supporting material	Up to 3500 words, including references and other supporting material
Roundtable session	800-1200 words including references and other supporting material	Up to 3500 words, including references and other supporting material
PechaKucha	800-1200 words including references and other supporting material	Up to 3500 words, including references and other supporting material
Symposium	800-1200 words including references and other supporting material	Up to 3500 words, including references and other supporting material

Given concerns about self-plagiarism policies that have been instituted by some academic journals (Callahan, 2014), you may choose not to submit a full paper if your proposal is selected. (We suggest that you contact target journals to inquire about their policies.) However, we strongly encourage you to submit a full paper to be included in the proceedings. Please note that only full papers will be considered for the Jack Mezirow Award.

### **Submission Guidelines**

Keep in the mind the following when submitting your proposal using the online system:

- All author information (name, email and affiliation) must be provided at the time of submission.
- Abstract of no more than 200 words will be submitted separately from the proposal and is NOT included in the word count.
- Proposal should not include any identifying information; author information will be collected separately and should not appear in your proposal.
- You will be required to electronically sign a warrant statement when submitting your proposal.

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- All proof-reading is your responsibility and must be carried out prior to submitting your proposal. The editors reserve the right not to include any paper that, in their opinion, will reduce the quality of the proceedings.

### **Proposal Formatting**

- Proposals should be single-spaced and be 800-1200 words, including references and any other supporting materials.
- Use US letter paper format, one-inch (2.54 cm) margins, 12 pt. font, Times New Roman.
- Use APA Version 7 to format your manuscript.
- Label your file as: ITLC2024\_Proposal.
- Submit proposals as a Microsoft Word attachment in .doc or .docx format only.

### **Proposal Body**

- Title of presentation
- Type of presentation (paper presentation, experiential session, PechaKucha, symposium or roundtable)
- Proposal summary that includes appropriate citations and list of references
- Include keywords (list no more than five)
- Do not include your name(s) or any identifying information anywhere in your proposal

### **Criteria That Will Be Used to Evaluate Your Proposals**

For all proposals:

1. Connection of topic to transformative learning explained clearly
2. Theoretical basis for conceptualizing transformative learning explained clearly
3. Quality of writing: well-crafted sentences, clear explanations and logic, accessible language

*For paper sessions:*

- Makes significant contribution to discourse about theory, practice, and/or research

*For experiential sessions:*

- Contributes to participants\* ideas related to theory, practice, and/or research.  
\*Please include an explicit description of the experiential activity and a summary of how the session will be structured.

For roundtable sessions:

- Potential significance of contribution to discourse about theory, practice and/or research. \*Please include a clear description of the strategy you will use to help participants engage with a topic, questions, or issues that the roundtable author wants

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to explore

*For PechaKucha:*

- Makes strong connections to transformative learning and/or transformative education.  
\*Please include a clear description of the presentation topic, perspective, or practice.

*For symposia:*

- Makes a significant contribution to discourse about theory, practice, and/or research through complementary or contradictory points of view.

More about meeting expectations for the first two criteria:

1. *Connection of topic to transformative learning explained clearly.*

In explaining the relationship of your topic to transformative learning, be mindful that the field of transformative learning includes theorists and practitioners from various disciplines and sites of practice. Do not assume shared knowledge or points of view. Explicitly describe your perspective on how the content and/or process of transformative learning relates to your topic.

2. *Theoretical basis for conceptualizing transformative learning explained clearly*

Explain the key concepts that inform your perceptions about transformative learning and situate those concepts in the theory or theories that influence your conceptualization. Although your conceptualization of transformative learning can be related to any theoretical point of view, it is essential that you explicitly identify the theory that informs your perspective. Your work may draw on other theories that relate to your topic, but identification of these theories does not meet this criterion.

### **Information and contact**

We will post information about the submission process on the [ITLC website](#). Questions?

Please write to us at: [conference@intertla.org](mailto:conference@intertla.org)

### **Sign up as a reviewer**

If you are interested to sign up as a potential reviewer, you can register your details on the reviewer [form](#) by **October 14, 2023**.

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# JACK MEZIOROW LIVING THEORY OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING AWARD

The Jack Mezirow Living Theory of Transformative Learning Award is inspired by Jack Mezirow's efforts to engage the field of adult education in thinking theoretically about adult learning. To promote reflection about what he called "a theory in progress," Mezirow founded the International Transformative Learning Conference in 1998. In prior decades he had developed his own vision about the transformative dimensions of adult learning, generating lively discourse in the field of adult education as scholars and practitioners expanded, applied, and critiqued his ideas.

Mezirow (2012) defined transformative learning as "the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience as a guide to future action" (p. 74). Transformed frames of reference are "more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective" (p. 76).

The recipient of the Jack Mezirow Award contributes to living theory by addressing frames of reference about transformative learning, providing scholars and practitioners with a more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective theoretical and practical perspective that is dynamic in its possibilities for growth and change.

The Jack Mezirow Living Theory of Transformative Learning Award is given at the International Transformative Learning Conference, held every two years. The award was established in 2014 and was awarded for the first time at the conference that year.

## Eligibility

- All papers, experiential sessions, and symposia accepted for inclusion at the conference are eligible for the award, except those with an author who is a member of the selection committee.
- Single or jointly authored papers are considered for the award.
- The paper should extend theory, research, and/or practice in a way that reflects a vision of living theory in progress, as described above.

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- The award can be given for promising new perspectives as well as more established or researched perspectives.

#### Evaluation Criteria

- The theoretical perspective of transformative learning theory is clear and well-articulated.
- Rationale for the paper is persuasive.
- The paper is original and creative.
- The paper is clearly written and engaging.
- The methodology and results are clearly described.
- The paper makes a significant contribution to theory, practice, and/or research.

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# PATRICIA CRANTON DISTINGUISHED DISSERTATION AWARD

The International Transformative Learning Association recognizes emerging scholars by conferring the Patricia Cranton Distinguished Dissertation Award. This award commends a distinguished doctoral dissertation for its exemplary scholarship and contribution to the transdisciplinary field of transformative learning.

## **Purpose of Award**

This Award has three aims:

- To recognize and honor emerging scholars who extend and inform a living theory of transformative learning.
- To acknowledge originality and quality of inquiry.
- To invite and showcase contributions from diverse perspectives on transformative learning theory and/or praxis.

In order to be eligible for this award, a dissertation must have been accepted for degree conferral between January 2022 and May 2024. Please submit an application for consideration by March 1, 2024 according to the following guidelines.

**Award winners should plan to attend the 2024 Conference at University of Siena  
September 11 - 13.**

The submission should include:

- A cover page that identifies:  
Dissertation title; Author; Author's current affiliation; Author's current email address; Author's current telephone number; Program, Degree earned; Degree granting institution; Date of defense and graduation date; Dissertation Chair.
- A recommendation letter and verification of defense date from the candidate's dissertation committee chair (if chair is unavailable the letter can come from another committee member), to be sent in a separate email to the following address:  
[ITLADissertationAward@intertla.org](mailto:ITLADissertationAward@intertla.org)

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- Chapter 1 of the dissertation. OR If Chapter 1 does not include the following—problem statement, rationale, purpose, theoretical framework, research questions and significance of the study—send a supplemental description of this content.
  - An essay of 1000–1500 words (3–5 pages, double spaced, Times New Roman 12–point font) that responds to the following question: In what ways does this dissertation extend and inform a living theory of transformative learning? As you respond to this question in your short essay, consider theoretical framework, methodology, research findings and implications for practice.
  - All submissions must adhere to APA VII formatting guidelines and demonstrate quality of scholarly writing.
  - Submissions must be in English. A small group of applicants will be selected as finalists and asked to submit their full dissertations, written in English, at a later date.

### **Submission Deadlines**

- Applicant's Materials Due March 1, 2024

Questions can be directed via email to: [ITLADissertationAward@intertla.org](mailto:ITLADissertationAward@intertla.org).

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# INTERNATIONAL TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING ASSOCIATION COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AWARD

The ITLA Community Leadership Award recognizes sustained leadership in fostering and nurturing the International Transformative Learning Conference (ITLC) and the community association (ITLA).

The award recognizes sustained leadership in three areas:

1. Making significant, innovative and developmental contributions to the long term success of the conference (ITLC).
2. Advancing the work of the International Transformative Learning Association (ITLA).
3. Working toward broadening global participation and inclusion in the ITLC and/or ITLA.

Process of Nomination: Note to potential nominators:

Consider nominating a colleague for this prestigious award. Nominators should write a brief letter (no more than 500 words) describing why the candidate merits this award, addressing one or more of the three leadership areas listed above. Below is a list of activities that the nominator might consider:

- Serving on or chairing conference planning committees, such as proposal evaluation, planning and design of conferences, stewardship of ITLC philosophy and practice, publicity, coordination of proceedings, etc.
- Serving in the ITLA leadership circle or ad hoc committees
- Leadership during conference, such as facilitating activities, moderating panels, keynote speaker
- Actively promoting activities of ITLA and/or ITLC in diverse geographic locations
- Recruiting and mentoring new scholars
- Presenting research
- Consistent presence at ITLC

Nominations are due on or before April 1, 2024 and should be sent to [awardse@intertla.org](mailto:awardse@intertla.org).

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### **The University of Siena (Tuscany, Italy)**

The University of Siena (Tuscany, Italy) is one of the oldest and first publicly funded universities in Italy. Originally called Studium Senese, the institution was founded in 1240. Its organizational identity is strongly rooted in the artistic, cultural, and historical context of the city of Siena, but with a look forward toward internationalization, and sustainable and digital innovation. It is the host of the Italian Transformative Learning Network.

### **Mary Frances Early College of Education University of Georgia Program in Learning, Leadership, & Organization Development**

We develop leaders and scholars with deep knowledge of learning and change so they can transform their worlds. To the LLOD faculty, this is more than an abstract mission that we hang on the wall or put on our website. It's the reason we do the work we do and why we're excited to be educators. We specialize in our areas of expertise so that we can further this mission through our students and in the "worlds" we seek to influence.

### **The International Transformative Learning Association**

The purpose of the Association shall be to promote critical scholarship, research, teaching, application, and praxis of the social, scientific, artistic, and humanistic principles of transformative learning theories and praxis.

### **The Italian Transformative Learning Network**

The Italian Transformative Learning Network is a community of scholars, researchers, and practitioners who recognize a common theoretical and methodological framework in the transformative learning theory. Founded in 2016, the purpose of the Network is to promote knowledge sharing about the topic of adult learning, active learning methodologies and informal learning processes in an international setting.