



# **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

© 2024



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

Proceedings of the XV Biennial International Transformative Learning  
Conference

September 11 – 13, 2024

University of Siena, Italy

Editors

Loretta Fabbri, Ph.D., University of Siena, Italy  
Monica Fedeli, Ph.D., University of Padova, Italy  
Pierre Faller, Ed.D., Teachers College, Columbia University, USA  
Dyan Holt, LL.B, LL.M, University of Georgia, USA  
Alessandra Romano, Ph.D., University of Siena, Italy

Copyright © 2024

The copyright for the abstracts and papers in these Proceedings is retained by the individual authors or group of authors. Unauthorized use is not permitted. Content, editing, and proofreading were the responsibility of each author or group of authors.

These proceedings are available online at [www.intertla.org](http://www.intertla.org).

# CONTENTS

GREETINGS .....	2
Welcome Letter for the Conference Co-Chairs XV International Transformative Learning Conference 2024 .....	2
Welcome Note from the President of International Transformative Learning Association (ITLA).....	3
Welcome Note from the Scientific Committee.....	7
Welcome Letter from Italian Transformative Learning Network.....	10
PROGRAM.....	12
PAPERS .....	40
Experiential.....	48
Paper .....	195
Pechakucha .....	798
Roundtable.....	838
Symposium .....	887
APPENDIX.....	i
Index of Authors .....	i
Call for Proposals.....	xvii



# 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, Sägesser, 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 Gianceselli	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
<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
	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>Rebecca 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

	<p>as a Means of Transforming Disaster Management in a Climate-changed World  Robin Cox, Michelle Hamilton-Page, Michelle Robichaud, Kate Jenkins-Pilgrim</p>	
	Symposium	
	<p><i>Jack Mezirow's thoughts: Roots and branches</i>  Thanassis Karalis, Natassa Raikou, Manos Pavlakis, Anna Tsiboukli</p>	Room 20
14.30 - 14.45	Break	
14.45 - 16.15	Concurrent Sessions #2	San Niccolò Complex– Ground Floor
	Experiential Sessions	
	<p><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</p>	Open Space #1
	<p><i>Transformative leadership: getting in good trouble as transformative learners</i>  ShaToya Williamson, Lynn Hoare, Alexandra Danino, Jocelyn Chapman</p>	Open Space #2
	<p><i>Transformational Power of Liberating Authentic Emotion: Re-examine embodied feelings with creative expression</i>  Lulu Guo</p>	Room 16
	<p><i>Mindfulness as a Path to Transformative Learning</i>  Marty Jacobs</p>	San Niccolò External Space
	Paper Sessions	
	<p>Paper Session 1</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>A radical enactive perspective on transformative learning: Implications of the agent-environment unity,</i> Peter Hochenauer</li> <li><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</li> </ol>	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><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><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><i>The Disorienting Dilemma of Unemployment: Transformative Learning, Life Design, and Community Strategies for navigating work transitions</i> Vanessa Bettin, Chiara Biasin</li> </ol>	
	Chair: Ruth Gotian	
	Paper Session 2	Room 13
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Transforming Education: Counter-hegemonic teaching</i> Daniela Lehner</li> <li><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**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Session title</b>	<b>Venue</b>
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>	

	<p>1. <i>Feminist 'good trouble': Reframing and (re)performing monumental points of view through photography in the public sphere</i> Darlene Clover, Sarah Williamson</p> <p>2. <i>Inviting Good Trouble Through Performing Justice</i> Lynn Hoare</p> <p>3. Museum and transformative learning: Empowering adult learning in the museum context Panagiotis Sarantidis, Georgios Papaioannou</p>	Auditorium–San Niccolò Complex
	Symposium	
	<p><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</p>	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	
	<p><i>Embracing Change</i> Toni Aspin</p>	Open Space #1
	<p><i>Renewing Vibrancy, Compassion, and Connection Within Ourselves and Beyond</i> Catherine Etmanski, M. Beth Page</p>	Open Space #2
	<p><i>Drawings and narratives of life crises as a transformational process</i> Charalampos Pouloupoulos, Anna Tsiboukli</p>	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
	<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
	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>	<p>San Niccolò  External Space</p>
	<p><i>Troubling Transformative Learning Theory in the Context of Liquid Modernity</i>  <b>Tanya Behrisch, Natalia Bussard</b></p>	<p>Room 20</p>
	<p>Paper Sessions</p>	
	<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>	<p>Room 8</p>
	<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>	<p>Room 13</p>
<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>	<p>Room 13</p>	

	<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	Auditorium - San Niccolò Complex
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
	<i>Transformative Identity Development in Early Childhood Educator Anti-Bias Efforts</i> <b>Thomas Burkett</b>	Open Space #2
	<i>A Symbolic Process to Evoke Emotion, Metaphor, and Transformative Learning</i> <b>Catherine Marienau, Kathleen Taylor</b>	Room 16
	<i>Expanding the Practices of Transformative Learning: A Collective Responsibility to Foster Spaces of Possibility through JEDI Dialogues</i> <b>Lynn Sitanimezi, Kathy Geller</b>	San Niccolò External Space
	Paper Sessions	
	Paper Session 1	Room 8
	1. <i>Disruptive seeds on digital ground: Exploring virtual exchange as a transformative space for sustainability</i> <b>Marianne Grace Araneta</b>	

	<p>2. <i>A sustainability-oriented university beyond the traditional lecture. Building a methodological framework for education to sustainable mindset in Higher Education</i> Sara Rossi, Milena Colazingari da Silva, Mariana Zuliani, Theodoro de Lima, Suelene Silva Piva</p> <p>3. <i>Unearthing Transformative Learning Experience: Reflecting on Professional Identity and Lifelong Learning Through Horse-Assisted Coaching: An Autoethnographic Approach</i> Yoshie Nakamura</p> <p>Chair: Yoshie Nakamura</p>	
	<p>Paper Session 2</p> <p>1. <i>"See the unseen". Is transformative learning an "inclusive" theory?</i> Alessandra Romano, Teresa Torres</p> <p>2. <i>Scaling up transformative learning through organizing reflection to create good trouble for sustainability</i> Janette Brunstein, Mark Walvoord, Alessandra Romano</p> <p>3. <i>Social-ecological Participatory Observatories as an Open Social Innovation Proposal for Drylands Sustainable Development</i> Elisabeth Huber-Sannwald, Natalia Martínez Tagüeña, Víctor Manuel Reyes Gómez, Ricardo Ismael Mata Páez, Sandra Daniela Hernández Valdéz, Ruperto Cazares Reyes, Ernesto Herrera, Cristino Villarreal Wislar</p> <p>Chair: Janette Brunstein</p>	Room 13
	<p>Paper Session 3</p> <p>1. <i>How white is our research? Whiteness as a distorted implicit in educational researchers' knowledge construction processes,</i> Martina Capaccioli, Saif Ur Rehman Raja</p>	Room 14
	<p>2. <i>The Impact of Cultural Factors on Transformative Learning: A Study of Chinese Business Entrepreneurs During Crisis</i> Ruohao Chen</p> <p>3. <i>An Autoethnographic Journey of an Art Educator's Transformative Experiences: Reimagining Critical Incident Moments and Transformative Learning</i> SoHee Koo</p> <p>Chair: Martina Capaccioli</p>	

	<p>Paper Session 4</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Transformative Learning through the Aesthetic Experience and beyond, Transformative Learning as an Aesthetic Experience. A "meeting" between Mezirow and Aristoteles.</i> Maria Karakou, Martha Logothetou, Maria Papadopoulou</li> <li>2. <i>The Cultural Evolution and Transformative Learning Perspective in K- pop: Mamamoo</i> Yang Hwan Choi</li> <li>3. <i>"Some witchcraft you've done in the past twelve months!": An exploration of the transformative value of learning through the arts in professional education.</i> Sarah Williamson</li> </ol> <p>Chair: Sarah Williamson</p>	Room 15
	<p>Paper Session 5</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Getting into good trouble through learning-based work</i> Victoria Marsick, Karen Watkins, Rachel Fichter</li> <li>2. <i>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</i> Kaori Mizukoshi</li> <li>3. <i>Making New Spaces of Possibility: Fostering Transformative Learning of Hungarian Senior Organizational Leaders</i> Maria Cseh, Imre Sivó</li> </ol> <p>Chair: Maria Cseh</p>	Auditorium–San Niccolò Complex
	<p>Paper Session 6</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Epistemologies of Transformative Learning</i> Chad Hoggan, Tetyana Hoggan-Kloubert</li> <li>2. <i>Transformative Learning Experiences of Internationally Educated Racialized Women English Professors in Canadian Higher Education &amp; Implications of Needs-Considered Teacher Support in Ontario Postsecondary Institutions</i> Justine Jun</li> <li>3. <i>The Sociological Imagination: A missing thread in transformation theory</i></li> </ol>	Room 18

	<p><b>Ted Fleming</b>  <i>4. We Spaces for Racial: Equity: Lessons From our Praxis</i>  <b>Steven Schapiro, Placida Gallegos</b></p> <p>Chair: <b>Tetyana Hoggan-Kloubert</b></p>	
12.45 - 13.30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Networking Lunch</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/1m_xlx_rxz3WzCdm_1Xo_ayyXy_RjPk71k78TU8B6Zzmgw/edit">https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1m_xlx_rxz3WzCdm_1Xo_ayyXy_RjPk71k78TU8B6Zzmgw/edit</a></li> </ul>	San Niccolò Complex– Ground Floor
13.30 - 15.00	Concurrent Session #8	San Niccolò Complex– Ground Floor & Santa Chiara Lab building
	Experiential Session	
	<i>Serious Play is Serious Work</i> <b>Shawn McCann</b>	Open Space #1
	<i>A Philosophers' Café: Stirring the Water underneath the Iceberg</i> <b>Larry Green, Laura Formenti</b>	Open Space #2
	<i>The Bridge Between Transformative Learning and Empowering Sustainability Change Agents in an Educational Sustainability Doctoral Program</i> <b>Catherine Scheder, Lynda Fernholz, Erin Redman, Yue Li</b>	Room 16
	<i>Wellness in Transition: Social Solidarity for Transformation</i> <b>Stacey Robbins, Marguerite Welch</b>	Room 20
	Symposium	
	<i>Dimensions of Disorientation and Transformation: How does transformative learning occur and manifest in cross-cultural contexts?</i> <b>Taiwo Isaac Olatunji, Sara Bano, Jasmin Dazer, Martina Capaccioli, Ruoyi Qiu</b>	Room 8

	<b>Roundtables Session</b>	
	1. <i>Evaluating Transformative Learning: The Beliefs, Events and Values Inventory (BEVI), Hoggan's Typology, and Emerging Educational Leaders</i> Renee Owen	Room 13
	2. <i>Redefining the Disorienting Dilemma as Continuum Between Peak and Trauma</i> Natalia Bussard, Suzy Ross, Jude Walker, Daniel Jordan	Room 13
	3. <i>New and unknown world is coming: Transformative learning for older adults</i> Younghyun Kim, Aliko Nicolaides	
	4. <i>A Practice of Freedom: The Good Trouble of Self-grading</i> Vicki Reitenauer	
15.00 - 15.15	Break	
15.15 - 16.45	Concurrent Session #9	San Niccolò Complex– Ground Floor & Santa Chiara Lab building
	Experiential Session	
	<i>Exploring Passageways into Transformation Through Storywork</i> Yabome Gilpin-Jackson, Marguerite Welch	Open Space #1
	<i>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</i> Tes Cotter Zakrzewski, Anne-Liisa Longmore, Laurie Anderson Sathe	Open Space #2
	<i>Engaging Interview Matrix to explore the Next Edge of Transformative Learning: An Experiential Approach</i> M. Beth Page, Catherine Etmanski	Room 16
16.45 - 17.00	Break	
17.00 - 17.30	Conference Closing	San Niccolò Complex– Ground Floor



# PAPERS

## Papers

EXPERIENTIAL.....	48
Embracing Change: Developing Greater Mental Complexity to Meet Societal Challenges ....	49
Exploring Transformative Learning Through the Lens of Dr. Seuss:.....	56
Leveraging the Iconic Classics to Reinforce Activity-Based-Play and Enhance Our Understanding of Transformative Learning Theory .....	56
Troubling Transformative Learning Theory in the Context of Liquid Modernity.....	64
Transformative Identity Development in Early Childhood Educator Anti-Bias Efforts .....	72
Troubling School Change: Using Arts-Integrated Professional Learning to Transform Education from Within.....	77
Using Narrative to Transform Community – From the Power of Me to the Power of Now ....	81
Allyship: How to Create a Space of Belonging?.....	84
Wade in the Water: Experience the Troubling of Transformative Learning .....	86
Renewing Vibrancy, Compassion, and Connection Within Ourselves and Beyond .....	89
Listening Through the Chaos: Toward Transforming Collective Trauma in We-Space .....	92
What Does Transformation Mean for You? Paint It in The Air .....	96
Embodied Transformations: Exploring Scars and Stories in Transformative Learning .....	105
Transformational Power of Liberating Authentic Emotion: Re-examine Embodied Feelings with Creative Expressions.....	116
Mindfulness as a Path to Transformative Learning .....	120
Seed Bombs for Transformation: Using Guerilla Gardening for Making Good Trouble in Academia.....	124
Good Trouble for the Long Hard Struggles: Protest Music as Catalyst for Transformative and Emancipatory Learning.....	132
Ecosophic Mapping: Why Intervene? Proposing a Cookbook for a Joyful Fuss.....	139
Troubling Broken Systems Through Caring Conversations .....	142
Serious Play is Serious Work, an Experiential Session .....	147
Discovering the heART of Transformative Learning: An Interactive Session Where Art and Transformative Learning Intersect .....	150
Engaging Interview Matrix to explore the Next Edge of Transformative Learning: An Experiential Approach.....	152
Embodied Approaches to Differentiating and Integrative Transformation .....	156
Wellness in Transition: Social Solidarity for Transformation .....	159
The Bridge Between Transformative Learning and Empowering Sustainability Change Agents in an Educational Sustainability Doctoral Program .....	162

Deep Time Walk as a Transformative Tool in Higher Education Institutions.....	166
Expanding the Practices of Transformative Learning: A Collective Responsibility to Foster Spaces of Possibility through JEDI Dialogues.....	170
Experience: Action Learning Conversation to Learn Knowledge, Creativity and Respect for Other People’s Position: Research Through an Experience at the University of Bergamo ....	174
Drawings and Narratives of Life Crises as a Transformational Process.....	177
Exploring Passageways into Transformation Through Storywork .....	184
Transformative Leadership: Getting in Good Trouble as Transformative Learners.....	188
Transformative Listening in Dyads: Creating a Space for Getting into Good Trouble Together .....	191
PAPER .....	195
Linking Transformative Learning and Collective Agency: A Participatory Research on Internship in Education .....	196
Disruptive Seeds on Digital Ground: Exploring Virtual Exchange as a Transformative Space for Sustainability .....	201
From Feelings to Actions: Exploring the Role of Emotions in Transformative Learning Experiences .....	205
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.....	212
Reoccurring Life Crisis and Potential for Transformative Learning: Making Sense of Natural Disasters in Bahamas .....	218
Quantum Leaps: Rethinking Transformative Learning Through Posthuman Theories.....	222
The Disorienting Dilemma of Unemployment: Transformative Learning, Life Design, and Community Strategies for Navigating Work Transitions .....	227
Exploring Transformative Learning Through Teacher Education Programs: Insights from a Case Study.....	234
The Transformative Learning Experience in National Team-based Competitions: A Study of Chinese College Students in Computer Science and Engineering.....	237
Nursing Students Among Transformative Learning, Professional Well-being, and Resilience. An Observational Study .....	241
The Posthuman Epistemology of Transformative Theories. The contribution of Posthuman Feminism.....	244
ADHD and Families: Transformative Learning and Parenting Support .....	251
Influences of Transformative Multiple Language Learning and Use on Changing the Ways of Seeing and Being in the World .....	256
How White is Our Research? Whiteness as a Distorted Implicit in Educational Researchers’ Knowledge Construction Processes .....	264

Embracing Transformative Learning in Teacher Education: The Challenge of Italian Teaching and Learning Centers .....	268
Exploring Addiction Recovery through Hoggan’s Metatheoretical Perspective of Transformative Theory: A Comparative Analysis .....	276
Cultural Factors Enhancing Transformative Learning: A Study of Chinese Business Entrepreneurs in a Time of Crisis .....	283
Navigating Change: A Longitudinal Study of How Future Self-Guides Shape International Students’ Motivations and Perceived Transformation at a Sino-Foreign Joint-Venture University .....	292
The Cultural Evolution and Transformative Learning Perspective in K-pop: Mamamoo.....	296
Exploring Transformative and Educational Practices Within Social Movements: A focus on the LGBTIQ+ Community .....	305
How Transformative Learning Can Create the Conditions for Perspective Transformation in a UK Defence Healthcare Setting .....	309
Making New Spaces of Possibility: Fostering Transformative Learning of Hungarian Organizational Leaders .....	318
Moving Between Perspectives: The Practice of Senso-Biographical Walk as a Way of Learning and Transformation.....	322
Transformative Learning for Students’ Aspirations: a Case Study of Student Experiences in Informal Higher Education Settings from the Capability Approach.....	325
Transforming Professional Understanding and Practice in Social Work with Children and Families Facing Vulnerability.....	334
Promoting Transformative Epistemologies in Teachers to Counter Youth Existential Distress at School. Reflections and Proposals .....	339
Embodied Praxis: Transforming Social Structures through Collective Somatic Engagement and Critical Reflection .....	343
Experienced Time in the Adult Learning Process: Between Turning Points and Long-term Reflexivity.....	348
Saving Lives: Transformative Experiences in the Emergency Industry .....	351
My Theory, My Tool, My Tribe: Unpacking Scholars’ Perspectives on Transformative Learning’s Evolution.....	354
Transforming Initial Teacher Education: Community Philosophical Dialogue to Develop an Intercultural and Social Justice Perspective .....	358
Getting Into Good Trouble Through Learning-Based Work .....	362
The Sociological Imagination and Transformation Theory: A Tribute to Oskar Negt.....	365
Power, Communication and Identity Building: A Duoethnography on Transforming Relationships in Academy.....	372
Transformative Learning within Cohort-Based Learning Programs: A Collaborative Inquiry of AEGIS XXVIII .....	379

<i>Through the Glass Training</i> inspired by Pasolini’s <i>Manifesto Theatre</i> : For a Transformative Performing Arts Education.....	386
Developing Inclusive Practices to Galvanize Retention of Diverse Physician Trainees and Junior Faculty .....	390
Blind Box: What is Reflection and Transformative Learning During 14-day Forced Isolation? .....	393
Co-holding And Co-navigating Collective Liminal Spaces for Transformative Learning Outside Educational Contexts .....	396
Coaching Practices for Facilitating Reflection Toward Transformative Insight: A Constructive-Developmental Perspective .....	404
A Radical Enactive Perspective on Transformative Learning: Implications of the Agent-Environment Unity .....	409
Epistemologies of Transformative Learning .....	413
Conceptualizing Transformative Learning through Lenses of Vulnerability and Leadership	416
Social-ecological Participatory Observatories: Co-creating Transformative Learning Environments to Achieve Drylands Stewardship and Sustainability: A Mexican Case Study	418
Shame as a Catalyst for Transformative Change in Men: Group Learning in Addictions Recovery.....	424
Building Resilience to Hate in Classrooms with Transformative Learning: Innovation in Practice and Pedagogy to Prevent Extremism and Violence in U.S. Schools .....	427
Transformations of Racialized Women Internationally Educated English Professors in Canadian Higher Education and Transformative Learning Theory .....	429
Bridging Transformative Learning in Programs to Livelihood by Designing Your Life .....	432
Encompassing Transformation: A Holistic Approach to Assessing Learning in Adult Basic Education.....	435
An Autoethnographic Journey of an Art Educator’s Transformative Experiences: Reimagining Critical Incident Moments and Transformative Learning .....	442
Perspective Transformation and Inclusive Education: A Literature Review .....	446
Bridge-building and Belonging Beyond the Classroom .....	458
Completing the Odyssey: Black and Latino Student Veterans Reflections on War and Homecoming .....	467
New Possibilities for Transformative Learning Praxis Through a Meta-Transformative Learning Theory .....	471
Conceptualizing Transformative Listening in the Workplace: A Theoretical and Practical Proposal.....	480
Beyond Gestural Solidarities: Exploring the Intricacies in Transforming Organizations for Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI).....	484
Troubling Transformation Through an Experiential Learning Apparatus .....	487

Bildung and Transformative Learning: Some “Traces” in the Self-Development of Two Female Figures in the Late 18 <sup>th</sup> Century, .....	491
Sophie and Gertrud.....	491
Information Resources as Tools of Transformation: An Interview Study .....	498
Cultural Heritage and Educational Communities. Transformative Learning and Professional Skills for a New Urban Welfare .....	506
Contextualizing and Transforming Child Rights Education - A Decolonizing, Participatory Project in Canada and Uganda .....	511
Transformative Overture(s) to the Caged Bird’s Song of Freedom. Educational Approaches “Intra Muros” .....	518
Individuation, Socialisation, and Transformation – The Three Dimensions of Education ....	527
Transformative Learning Through Artificial Intelligence Coaching: An Exploratory Study.	534
Facilitating Good Trouble: A Model for Engendering Perspective Transformation .....	537
Engaging a <i>Dark Side</i> Perspective: Integration of Second Wave Positive Psychology and Transformative Learning Theory .....	544
Cultural Preparedness of Adult Educators: A Changing Dynamic in Higher Education through Transformative Learning.....	547
Educating For a Sense of Community. Ex-Post Reflections from a Research Study .....	556
Collaborative Autoethnography as a Way to Negotiate, Survive, and Thrive in Academia...	559
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 .....	567
Decision Making Process: The Case of Judiciary .....	571
Digital Transformation: A Catalyst for Transformative Learning for Employees.....	575
Unearthing Transformative Learning Experience with Autoethnographic Approach: Reflecting on Professional Identity and Lifelong Learning Through Horse-Assisted Coaching .....	578
Portrayal of Personal Transformation in Indian Feature Films.....	582
Now I See the Colony: A Teacher Educator’s Transformative Learning Journey Through Self-Study.....	593
Transformative Learning and Teacher Agency: The Center Pull and the Outer End of the Same Ball of Twine?.....	600
Transformative Learning Through the Aesthetic Experience and Beyond, Transformative Learning as an Aesthetic Experience. A “Meeting” Between Mezirow and Aristoteles .....	603
New Spaces and Educational Communities for Citizens: The Case of <i>Viceversa</i> .....	611
Perspective Transformation through the Arts: Creating an Educational Method and Conducting an Extensive Application .....	618
Deliberate Phases of Transformative Learning Theory Applied to an Educational Sustainability Doctoral Program .....	625

Healing Our Hearts and Our Planet: The Role of Transformative Learning .....	628
“See the Unseen”. Is Transformative Learning an “Inclusive” Theory? Towards an Intersectional Antiracist Approach to Transformative Research .....	631
Narrating Change: Storytelling as a Transformative Practice in the Initial Training of Specialized Teachers .....	640
Aligning Transformative Learning and Action Research to Re-Evaluate Structures .....	643
A Sustainability-Oriented University Beyond the Traditional Lecture. ....	647
Building A Methodological Framework for Education to Sustainable Mindset in Higher Education.....	647
How to Provide Safe (Enough) Spaces for Transformative Learning to Support Courageous and Decolonial Practices Towards Climate Justice.....	664
Pre-service Teachers’ Transformative Learning During Placement in Underdeveloped Rural Areas of Indonesia: A Living Experience .....	672
We Spaces for Racial Equity: Lessons from Our Praxis.....	681
Reimagining Teaching and Learning: The Transformative Potential of Service Learning ....	687
Embodied Dialogic Spaces as Research Methodology for Students’ Post-Graduate Reflection on their Dance Learning.....	692
Exploring the Contribution of Transformative Learning (TL) to Developing Intercultural Competency in a North Greece Community Hosting Refugee and Immigrant Populations ..	696
Parkinson’s Care Innovation as Transformative Learning.....	705
Becoming a <i>Change Agent</i> : A Professional Transformative Path for Faculty at University of Padova .....	708
Toward Transformative Learning in Online Education: Testing a New Community Engagement Framework Model .....	712
Transformative Dilemmas in Modern Contexts.....	716
Performative Didactics as Transformative Didactics. Re-discovering the Self Through the Gaze of The Other .....	723
Adult Lifelong Learning Communities of Action to Enhance Environmental Literacy, .....	734
Through Transformative Learning.....	734
Navigating Cultural Transition & Uncertainty: An Autoethnographic Exploration of a Transformative Learning Journey as a Latina Voluntary Migrant.....	742
Scaling Up Transformative Learning through Organizing Reflection to Create Good Trouble for Sustainability .....	750
Do Japanese Business Leaders Experience Transformative Learning Through a Deliberately Developmental Organizational Culture Intervention? .....	758
A Developmental Perspective .....	758
Troubling Transformation: Research As Auto/Biographical Pilgrimage .....	762
The Disorienting Dilemmas of Wellbeing in Higher Education: An Educator’s Perspective	770

“Some Witchcraft You’ve Done in the Past Twelve Months!” An Exploration of the Transformative Value of Learning <i>Through</i> the Arts in Professional Education .....	773
Emotionally Informed Learning: Feelings Are Scattered Pins Across the Landscape of Learning, Turning on A Point of Possibility, It Has Always Been Me.....	779
The Transformative Power of Sustainable Learning: Facilitating Teacher Professional Development in Displacement, Refugee, and Crisis Settings.....	788
Introduction: Transformation, the Sustainable Learning Framework, and the Quality Holistic Learning Project.....	788
PECHAKUCHA.....	798
Collective Transformative Learning: Aligning Social Change Strategies with Cultural Context .....	799
A Feminist Collaborative Photographic Study of The Gendered Teachings of.....	804
Public Monuments and Sculptures.....	804
Inviting Good Trouble Through Performing Justice: Devising Original Theatre as An Opportunity for Constructive Disorientation .....	817
Submission Title: Fostering Transformative Learning: A Case Study of an Online Program for Nigerian Professionals.....	820
“Playing in the Dark”: Radical Speculative Play Within the Dark Side of Transformation... ..	827
Museum and Transformative Learning: Empowering Adult Learning in the Museum Context .....	829
My Year of Firsts: A Personal Story of Wandering Through an Altered Life.....	832
Japanese Spiritual Practices: A Path to Transformative Learning .....	835
ROUNDTABLE .....	838
Creative Discomfort: Brave Spaces for Transformative Learning.....	839
Representations that Hinder the Use of Informal Learning Iin Work Contexts.....	846
Redefining the Disorienting Dilemma as Existing on a Continuum Between Peak and Trauma .....	853
Adult Learners’ Transformative Learning Experience Through Theater-based Pedagogy: Flourish in Shifting Paradigms and Building Relationships with Others .....	857
Advocating for Transformative Learning: Preparing Teacher Candidates to Become Culturally Responsive Educators .....	861
Engaging with Power, Privilege and Social Justice as a Means of Transforming Disaster Management in a Climate-changed World.....	865
A New and Unknown World ss Coming: Transformative Learning for Older Adults.....	868
Disney Films as Disorienting Dilemmas. Exploring Race and Gender Though the Representation of Non-White Female Disney Main Characters.....	872
Transformative Learning and Psychological Contracts: The Impact of Perspective Transformation on Millennial and Gen Z Working Mothers’ Work Expectations.....	877



“Redeem the Soul of America”: Trauma-Informed Transformative Learning in Police Training .....	881
‘A Practice of Freedom’: The Good Trouble of Self-grading.....	884
SYMPOSIUM .....	887
Looking for Philosophical Resemblances with Transformation Theory: How Socrates, Peter Jarvis and Maxine Greene Relate to the Work of Jack Mezirow .....	888
Dimensions of Disorientation and Transformation: How Does Transformative Learning Occur and Manifest in Cross-Cultural Contexts? .....	895
Jack Mezirow’s Thought: Roots and Branches.....	899

## EXPERIENTIAL



## EXPERIENTIAL

Opportunities to engage interactively with others around a specific topic

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

Toni Aspin, PhD  
University of Washington Tacoma, USA

**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*

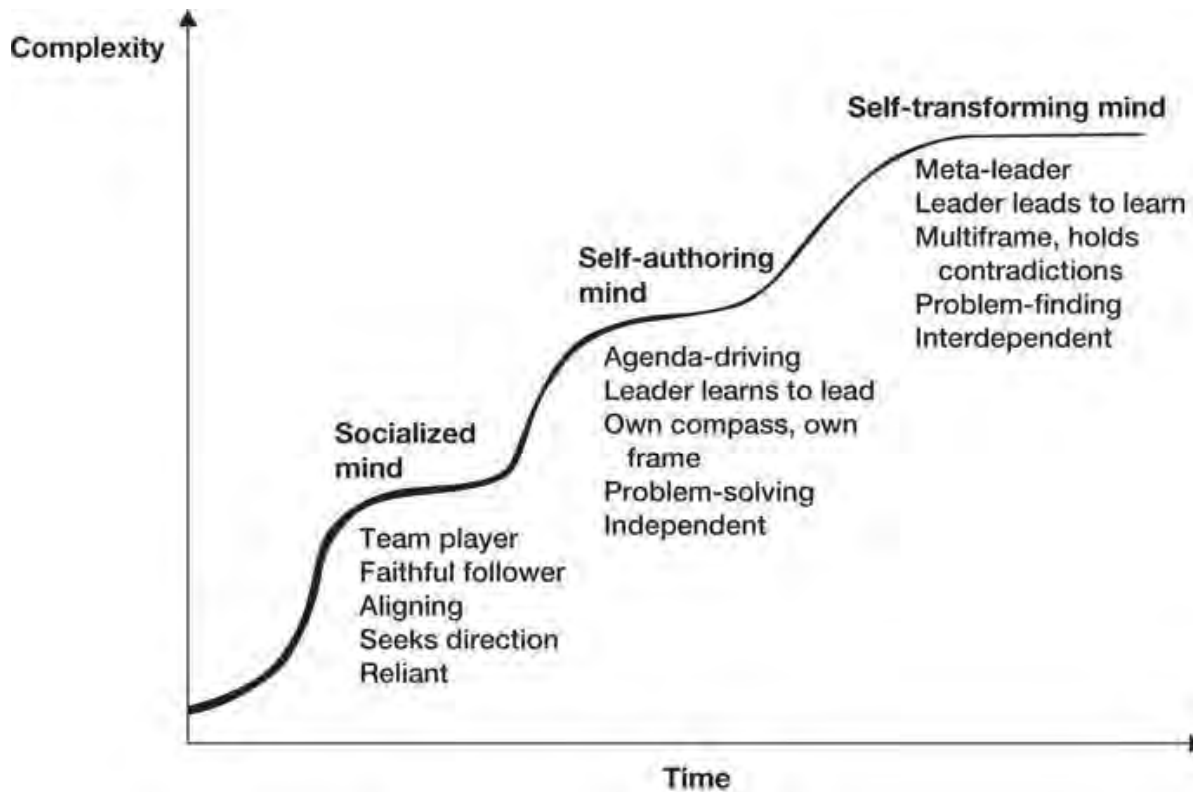
- We can step back from and reflect on the limits of our own ideology, see that it might be partial, become friendlier toward contradiction and opposites, appreciate multiple systems rather than projecting all but one onto the other.
- Our self coheres through its ability not to confuse internal consistency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

### **REFERENCES**

- Heifetz, R.A. (1995). *Leadership without easy answers*. Harvard University Press.
- Heifetz, R.A., Linsky, M. & Grashow, A. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and world*. Harvard Business Press
- Kegan, R. (2000). What form transforms? A constructive-developmental approach to transformative learning. In Jack Mezirow (Ed.) *Learning as Transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*. (pp. 3-33) John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Kegan, R. (1982). *The evolving self*. Harvard University Press.
- Kegan, R. (1994). *In over our heads*. Harvard University Press.
- Kegan, R., & Lahey, L. (2009) *Immunity to change: How to overcome it and unlock potential in yourself and your organization*. Harvard Business Press.
- Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning to think like an adult: Core concepts of transformation theory. In Jack Mezirow (Ed.) *Learning as Transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*. (pp.35-69) John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

## **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**

M. Donna Bailey, EdD Student in Leadership for Change  
Fielding Graduate University, Santa Barbara, CA, USA

**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.

## REFERENCES

- Arpin, R. (2021). *The effectiveness of digital escape room games to deliver leadership training: A mixed methods study* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. (28960423)
- Bergin, C., Cipriano, C., Wanless, S. B. & Barnes, T. N. (2023). Five key questions educators ask about SEL. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 104(7), 47-53. <https://doi-org.fgul.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/00317217231168263>
- Boston Consulting Group. (2017). *An interview with Jorgen Vig Knudstrop: At LEGO® growth and culture are not kid stuff*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m9WOG7RS6nc>
- Boxberger, K. S. (2023). *Incorporating play-based learning into early childhood education* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. (30419503)
- Carlson, S. (2017, October 29). Play inspires learning: But what is play, exactly? *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. [http://www.chronicle.com/article/Play-Inspires-Learning-But/241572cid=at&utm\\_source=at&utm\\_medium=en&elqTrackId=d71751fda2ff4e0786fc84491b1870b9&elq=3a84c08c9b7441858ea6e53e23479748&elqaid=16506&elqat=1&elqCampaignId=7146](http://www.chronicle.com/article/Play-Inspires-Learning-But/241572cid=at&utm_source=at&utm_medium=en&elqTrackId=d71751fda2ff4e0786fc84491b1870b9&elq=3a84c08c9b7441858ea6e53e23479748&elqaid=16506&elqat=1&elqCampaignId=7146)
- Celestine, N. A. & Yeo, G. (2020). Having some fun with it: A theoretical review and typology of activity-based play at work. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 42(2), 252-268. <https://10.1002/job2444>
- Chung, T. K. (2021). *Play to learn: A phenomenographic study of adult learning engagement in LEGO® serious play* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. (13808145)
- Cranton, P. C. (2016). *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide to Theory and Practice*. Routledge.
- Fink, L D. (2013). *Creating Significant Learning Experiences*. Random Jossey-Bass.
- Geisel, T. S. aka Dr. Seuss. (1954a). *Green Eggs and Ham*. Random House Books.
- Geisel, T. S. aka Dr. Seuss. (1954b). *Horton Hears a Who*. Random House Books.
- Geisel, T. S. aka Dr. Seuss. (1957). *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. Random House Books.
- Geisel, T. S. aka Dr. Seuss. (1971). *The Lorax*. Random House Books.
- Geisel, T. S. aka Dr. Seuss. (1961). *The Sneetches and Other Stories*. Random House Books.

- Hathaway, M. (2022). Fostering reorienting connections via ecological practices. In A. Nicolaidis, S. Eschenbacher, P. T. Buergelt, Y. Gilpin-Jackson, M. Welch. and M. Misaw (Eds.), *The palgrave handbook of learning for transformation* (pp. 279-300). Springer International Publishing AG.
- Hogan, C. D. (2016). Transformative learning as a metatheory: Definition, criteria, and typology. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 66(1), 57-75.  
<https://doi.org.fgul.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0741713615611216>
- Jackson, C. (2018). Affective dimensions of learning. In Illeris, K. (Ed.), *Contemporary Theories of Learning* (pp. 139-152). Routledge.
- Jarvis, P. (2018). Learning to be a person in society: Learning to be me. In Illeris, K. (Ed.), *Contemporary Theories of Learning* (pp. 15-28). Routledge.
- Kark, R. (2011). Games managers play: Play as a form of leadership development. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 10(3), 507-527.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5465/amle.2010/0048>
- Kegan, R. (2018). What “form “ transforms? A constructive-developmental approach to transformative learning. In Illeris, K. (Ed.), *Contemporary Theories of Learning* (pp. 29-45). Routledge.
- Kegan, R. and Lahey, L. L. (2016). *An Everyone Culture: Becoming a Deliberately Developmental Organization*. Harvard Business Press.
- Kreber, C. (2012). Critical reflection and transformative learning. In E. W. Taylor & P. Cranton (Eds.), *The handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 323-341). John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.
- Kupers, W. (2017). Inter-play(ing) – embodied and relational possibilities of “serious play “ at work. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 30(7), 993-1014.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/jocm-12-2016>
- Kwon, C. (2022). A deliberately developmental organization: A new organizational space for inclusion. In A. Nicolaidis, S. Eschenbacher, P. T. Buergelt, Y. Gilpin-Jackson, M. Welch. and M. Misaw (Eds.), *The palgrave handbook of learning for transformation* (pp. 347-362). Springer International Publishing AG.
- Martin-Cruz, N., Martin-Gutierrez, A., & Rojo-Revenga, M. (2022). A LEGO® serious play activity to help teamwork skills development amongst business students. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 45(5), 479-494.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2021.1990881>
- Merchant, N. (2017). *The Power of Onlyness: Make Your Wild Ideas Mighty Enough to Dent the World*. Penguin.
- Merriam, S. B. (2018). Adult learning theory: Evolution and future directions. In Illeris, K. (Ed.), *Contemporary Theories of Learning* (pp. 83-96). Routledge.
- Meyer, P. (2010). *From Workplace to Playspace: Innovating, Learning, and Changing Through Dynamic Engagement*. Routledge.
- Meyer, P. (2012). Embodied learning at work: Making the mindset shift from workplace to playspace. *New Directors for Adult and Continuing Education Quarterly*, 134, 25-32.  
<https://10.1002/77/ace.20013>
- Mezirow, J. (2018). Transformative learning theory. In Illeris, K. (Ed.), *Contemporary Theories of Learning* (pp. 114-128). Routledge.
- Perez, L. M. (2020). *Teaching with the Heart in Mind: A Complete Educator's Guide to Social Emotional Learning*. Brisca Publishing.



- Rice, N. (2024, April 20). *Dogs' tails serve as orchestra conductors – Here's how they did (Hint: treats were involved!)* People. <https://people.com/how-dogs-tails-served-as-orchestra-conductors-with-use-of-treats-watch-8635620>
- Schapiro, S. A., Wasserman, I. L., and Gallegos, P. V. (2012). Group work and dialogue: Spaces and processes for transformative learning in relationships. In E. W. Taylor & P. Cranton (Eds.), *The handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 355-372). John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.
- Scharp, Y. S., Bakker, A. B., Breevaart, K., Kruup, K. and Uusberg, A. (2023). Playful work design: Conceptualization, measurement, and validity. *Human Relations*, 76(4), 509-550. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267211070996>
- Siemens, G. (2006). *Knowing Knowledge*. Creative Commons.
- Smith, R. (2012). Fostering transformative learning online. In E. W. Taylor & P. Cranton (Eds.), *The handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 408-420). John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.
- Sweet, S. F. (2023). Using guided critical reflection to discover deepened and transformative learning in leadership education. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 18(4), 600-621. <https://doi-org/10.1177/19427751221118951>
- Taylor, E.W. and Cranton, P. (2012). *The Handbook of Transformative Learning: Theory, Research and Practice*. John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.
- Taylor, K. and Marienau, C. (2016). *Facilitating Learning with the Adult Brain in Mind*. Random House Books.

# Troubling Transformative Learning Theory in the Context of Liquid Modernity

Tanya J. Behrisch, PhD  
Simon Fraser University, Canada  
Natalia Bussard, MSc., EdD candidate  
The University of British Columbia, Canada

**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 therefor 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.

### **REFERENCES**

- Bauman, Z. (2012). *Liquid modernity* / Zygmunt Bauman. Polity.  
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=604495>
- Behrisch, T. (2022). *Making friends with strangeness: Practices of mastery within an ontology of abundance* [Doctoral Thesis, Simon Fraser University]. <https://summit.sfu.ca/item/36133>
- Bussard, N. (2024). *Examining the influence of multiple language learning and use on the construction of self, other and the world*. [Doctoral Thesis still in progress]. University of British Columbia.
- Carter, P. L., & Nicolaides, A. (2023). Transformative learning: An emotional (r)evolution. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2023(177), 25–36.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.20476>



- Chapman, O., & Sawchuk, K. (2012). Research-creation: Intervention, analysis and “family resemblances.” *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 37(1), 5–26.  
<https://doi.org/10.22230/cjc.2012v37n1a2489>
- Chapman, O., & Sawchuk, K. (2015). Creation-as-research: Critical making in complex environments. *RACAR: Revue d’art Canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 40(1), 49–52.
- Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge University Press. [rm.coe.int/1680459f97](http://rm.coe.int/1680459f97)
- Council of Europe. (2018). *Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. Companion volume with new descriptors*. Council of Europe. [rm.coe.int/cefr-companion-volume-with-new-descriptors-2018/1680787989](http://rm.coe.int/cefr-companion-volume-with-new-descriptors-2018/1680787989)
- Fleener, M. J., & Barcinas, S. J. (2022). Democracy’s relationship with the future: Transforming society’s promise. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 20(3), 176–188.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/15413446221103174>
- Halberstam, J. (2011). *The queer art of failure*. Duke University Press.
- Knowles, J. G., & Luciani, T. C. (2007). The art of imagining the place of the visual arts in qualitative inquiry: An introduction. In J. G. Knowles, T. C. Luciani, A. L. Cole, & L. Neilsen (Eds.), *The art of visual inquiry* (Vol. 3, pp. ix–xvi). Backalong Books.
- Leavy, P. (2020). *Method meets art, third edition: Arts-based research practice*. Guilford Publications.
- Mälkki, K. (2010). Building on Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning: Theorizing the challenges to reflection. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 8(1), 42–62.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344611403315>
- Mälkki, K., & Green, L. (2018). Working with edge emotions as a means for uncovering problematic assumptions: Developing a practically sound theory. *Phronesis*, 7(3), 26–34.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1054406ar>
- Mälkki, K., & Raami, A. (2022). Transformative learning to solve the impossible. In E. Kostara, A. Gavrielatos, & D. Loads (Eds.), *Transformative Learning Theory and Praxis* (1st ed., pp. 76–91). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429450600-7>
- Mezirow, J. (1978). Perspective transformation. *Adult Education*, 28(2), 100–110.
- Richardson, L., & St. Pierre, E. A. (2018). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th edition, pp. 818–835). SAGE Publications.
- Sandilands, C. (1994). Lavender’s green? Some thoughts on queer(y)ing environmental politics. *UnderCurrents: Journal of Critical Environmental Studies*, 6, 20–25.
- Watts, A. W. (2011). *the wisdom of insecurity: A message for an age of anxiety* (2nd ed.). Vintage Books.

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

T.J. Burkett, Ed.D. Candidate  
Teachers College, Columbia University, USA

**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

## REFERENCES

- Barnes, C., & Mercer, G. (2010). *Exploring disability*. Polity.
- Brookfield, S.D. (2012). *Teaching for critical thinking: Tools and techniques to help students question their assumptions*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Brookfield, S. D. (2020). Using a pedagogy of narrative disclosure to uncover white supremacy. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2020(165), 9-19.
- Burkett, T. and Prasad, S. (2023). Discovery Debrief Recommendations. Internal Elevated Learning Solutions LLC. Report for Acelero Inc. Unpublished.
- Cranton, P. (2016). *Understanding and promoting transformative learning: A guide to theory and practice*. Routledge.
- Derman-Sparks, L., LeeKeenan, D., & Nimmo, J. (2015). *Leading anti-bias early childhood programs: A guide for change*. Teachers College Press.
- Derman-Sparks, L., & Edwards, J. O. (2010). Anti-Bias Education. *Antibias education for young children and ourselves*, 1-10.
- Dundes, L., & Harlow, R. (2005). Illustrating the Nature of Social Inequality with the Simulation Star Power. *Teaching Sociology*, 33(1), 32-43.
- Gooden, M. A., & O'Doherty, A. (2015). Do you see what I see? Fostering aspiring leaders' racial awareness. *Urban Education*, 50(2), 225-255.
- Harro, B. (2000). The cycle of liberation. *Readings for diversity and social justice*, 2, 52-58.
- Jost, M., Whitfield, E. L., & Jost, M. (2005). When the Rules Are Fair, but the Game Isn't. *Multicultural Education*, 13(1), 14.
- Kegan, R. (1998). *In over our heads: The mental demands of modern life*. Harvard University Press.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. Jossey-Bass, 350 Sansome Street, San Francisco, CA 94104-1310.
- Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning to think like an adult. *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*, 3-33.
- TeamSTEPPS® Paper Chain: Team Exercise* (2023). The University of Washington:

<https://collaborate.uw.edu/online-training-and-resources/faculty-development-ipe-training>

-toolkit/teamstepps-paper-chain/

Thiagarajan, S., & Thiagarajan, R. (2011). *Barnaga: A simulation game on cultural clashes*.  
Nicholas Brealey.

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

Kathryn Dawson, MFA  
University of Texas at Austin, USA  
Beth Link, PhD  
University of North Texas, United States

**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).

### **REFERENCES (Select)**

- Boal, A. (1974). *The theatre of the oppressed*. Theatre Communications Group.
- Dawson, K., Link, B., Cawthon, S., & L. Dossett (Eds.) (Under contract- Forthcoming, 2025). *Transformative professional learning through arts integration*. Intellect.
- Dawson, K., & Kiger Lee, B. (2018). *Drama-based pedagogy: Activating learning across the curriculum*. Intellect Ltd.
- Dewhurst, M. (2018). *Teachers bridging difference: Exploring identity with art*. Harvard Education Press.
- Fine, M. (2008). *Revolutionizing education: Youth participatory action research in motion*. Routledge.
- Guskey, T. (2002). Professional development and teacher change. *Teachers and Teaching*, 8, 381-391. 10.1080/135406002100000512.
- Kumashiro, K. K. (2000). Toward a theory of anti-oppressive education. *Review of Educational Research*, 70(1), 25–53.
- Lewis, T. (2018). Art education and whiteness as style. In A. M. Kraehe, R. Gaztambide-Fernández, & B. S. Carpenter II (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of race and the arts in education* (pp. 303-317). Palgrave MacMillan.
- Link, B. (2022). Art integration in teacher education: Aesthetic tools to foster critical reflection. *Texas Education Review*, 10(2), 36-48. <http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/41907>
- Mezirow, J. (2009). Transformative Learning Theory. In Mezirow, J., Taylor, E. W., and Associates (Eds.) *Transformative learning in practice: Insights from community, workplace, and higher education*. (18-3). Jossey-Bass.
- Nicholson, H. (2014). *Applied Drama: The Gift of Theatre*. Palgrave MacMillan.
- Podlozny, A. (2000) Strengthening verbal skills through the use of classroom drama: A clear link. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 34, 239-276.

Taylor, E. W. (2009). Fostering Transformative Learning. In Mezirow, J., Taylor, E. W., and Associates (Eds.) *Transformative learning in practice: Insights from community, workplace, and higher education*. (3-17). Jossey-Bass.

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

Lisa DeAngelis, PhD  
Dragonfly Coaching LLC, USA  
Deanna Yameen, PhD  
Lesley University, USA

**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.

## REFERENCES

- Cranton, P. (1994). *Understanding and promoting transformational learning* (1st ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- DeAngelis, L. (2019). *Teaching for transformation: Enabling the exploration of disorienting dilemma in the classroom*. University of Massachusetts Boston.
- Dirkx, J. M. (2006). Engaging Emotions in Adult Learning: A Jungian Perspective on Emotion and Transformative Learning. *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education*, 2006(109), 15-26. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.204>
- Dirkx, J. M., Mezirow, J., & Cranton, P. (2006). Musings and Reflections on the Meaning, Context, and Process of Transformative Learning: A Dialogue Between John M. Dirkx and Jack Mezirow. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 4(2), 123-139. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344606287503>
- Ganz, M. (2009). Why stories matter. *Sojourners*, 38(3), 16.
- Ganz, M. (2012). We can be actors, not just spectators. *New Statesman*, 141, 52-54.
- Ganz, M., Nohria, N., & Khurana, R. (2010). Leading change. *Handbook of Leadership Theory and Practice: a Harvard Business School Centennial Colloquium on Advancing Leadership*. Harvard Business Press.
- Mezirow, J. (1978). Perspective transformation. *Adult education*, 28(2), 100-110.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning* (1st ed ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Rokeach, M. (1973). *The Nature of Human Values*. The Free Press, a division of Macmillan Publishing Co.
- Scott, K. (2021). *Just Work*. St. Martin's Publishing.
- Yameen, D. L. (2014). *The developmental education policy debate in community colleges: student voices* [Dissertation (PhD), Brandeis University].

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

Odinakachukwu Ehie  
University of California San Francisco, USA  
Danielle McCullough  
Weill Cornell Medical Center, USA  
Ruth Gotian  
Weill Cornell Medical Center, USA

**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.

## REFERENCES

- Atcheson, S. (2018). Allyship—The Key To Unlocking The Power Of Diversity. *Forbes*, 4–9. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/shereeatcheson/2018/11/30/allyship-the-key-to-unlocking-the-power-of-diversity/>
- Chow, C. J., Case, G. A., & Matias, C. E. (2019). Tools for Discussing Identity and Privilege Among Medical Students, Trainees, and Faculty. *MedEdPORTAL: The Journal of Teaching and Learning Resources*.
- Delgado, R., Stefancic, J., & Harris, A. (2017). *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (Third). NYU Press.
- Djulus, G., Sheikhan, N. Y., Nawaz, E., Burley, J. F., Thomas-Jacques, T., Naik, H., Warsame, K., Jamil, M., & Banerjee, A. (2020). Advancing Allyship Through Antioppression Workshops for Public Health Students: A Mixed Methods Pilot Evaluation. *Pedagogy in Health Promotion*, 237337992096241. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2373379920962410>
- Ehie, O., Tang, J., Chen, R., Turnbull, J., & Hill, L. (2021). Implementation of a Pilot Diversity Curriculum to Anesthesia Trainees. *Journal of Clinical Research in Pain and Anaesthesia*, 3(1), 3–4.
- Kaufman, D. M. (2003). ABC of learning and teaching in medicine: Applying educational theory in practice. *BMJ*, 326(7382), 213–216. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.326.7382.213>
- Martinez, S., Araj, J., Reid, S., Rodriguez, J., Nguyen, M., Pinto, D. B., Young, P. Y., Ivey, A., Webber, A., & Mason, H. (2021). Allyship in Residency: An Introductory Module on Medical Allyship for Graduate Medical Trainees. *MedEdPORTAL*, 11200. [https://doi.org/10.15766/mep\\_2374-8265.11200](https://doi.org/10.15766/mep_2374-8265.11200)

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

Kari Eller, M.S.  
University of Georgia, USA  
Justin Eller, M.Div.  
University of Edinburgh, Scotland

**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.

## REFERENCES

- Automatism*. (2023). Tate. Retrieved August 26, 2023, from <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/automatism>
- Breton, A. (1972). *Manifestoes of surrealism*. (R. Seaver & H.R. Lane, Trans.) University of Michigan Press. (Original work published 1962). <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.7558>
- Cramer, C. & Grant, K. *Surrealist techniques: Automatism*. (2023). Khan Academy. <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-1010/dada-and-surrealism/xdc974a79:surrealism/a/surrealist-techniques-automatism>
- Hoggan, C. (2016a). A typology of transformation: Reviewing the transformative learning literature. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 48(1), 65-82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2016.1155849>
- Hoggan, C. D. (2016b). Transformative learning as a metatheory: Definition, criteria, and typology. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 66(1), 57-75. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713615611216>
- Mezirow, J. (1995). Transformation theory of adult learning. In M. R. Welton (Ed.), *In defense of the lifeworld* (pp. 39-70). State University of New York Press.
- Mezirow, J. (1996). Contemporary paradigms of learning. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 46(3), 158-172. <https://doi.org/10.1177/074171369604600303>
- Mezirow, J. (2000). *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*. Jossey-Bass.
- Preskill, S. & Brookfield, S. D. (2009). *Learning as a way of leading: Lessons from the struggle for social justice*. Jossey-Bass.
- Riddle Films. (2012, May 11). Sweet Honey in the Rock - Wade in the water [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/RRpzEnq14Hs?feature=shared>
- Taylor, E. W. (2005). Making meaning of the varied and contested perspectives of transformative learning theory. In D. Vlosak, G. Kielbaso, & J. Radford (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Transformative Learning* (pp. 459-464). East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University.
- Taylor, E. W. (2008). Transformative learning theory. In S.B. Merriam (Ed.), *Third update on adult learning theory*. *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education*, No. 19 (pp. 5-15). Jossey-Bass.

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

Catherine Etmanski, PhD  
School of Leadership Studies, Royal Roads University, Canada  
M. Beth Page, PhD  
School of Leadership Studies, Royal Roads University, Canada

**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.

## REFERENCES

- Clouston, T. J. (2018). Transforming learning: Teaching compassion and caring values in higher education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 42(7), 1015–1024.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2017.1332359>
- Cranton, P. (2006). *Understanding and promoting transformative learning*. (2nd ed). Jossey-Bass.
- Etmanski, C. (2018). Seeds and stories of transformation from the individual to the collective. *Journal of Transformative Education* 16(2), 151–167.  
[doi.org/10.1177/1541344617696973](https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344617696973)
- Freire, P. (2003). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Rev ed.). New York: Continuum. (Original work published 1970)
- Lawrence, R. L., & Cranton, P. (2015). *A novel idea: Researching transformative learning in fiction*. Sense.
- Lipmanowicz, H., & McCandless, K. (2014). The surprising power of liberating structures. Simple rules to unleash a culture of innovation. Liberating Structures Press.  
<https://www.liberatingstructures.com/8-troika-consulting/>
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *The transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Neff, K. (2023). *Self-compassion*. Dr. Kristin Neff. <https://self-compassion.org/>
- Neff, K. (2011). *Self-compassion: The proven power of being kind to yourself*. William Morrow.
- Neff, K. (2003) Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself. *Self and Identity*, 2(2), 85–101. doi: [10.1080/15298860309032](https://doi.org/10.1080/15298860309032)
- Pisters, S. R., Vihinenb, H., & Figueiredoc, E. (2019). Place based transformative learning: a framework to explore consciousness in sustainability initiatives. *Emotion, Space, and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2019.04.007>
- Stebnicki, M. A. (2008). *Empathy fatigue: Healing the mind, body, and spirit of professional counselors*. Springer.
- Stoewen D. L. (2021). Moving from compassion fatigue to compassion resilience Part 5: Building personal resilience. *The Canadian Veterinary Journal*, 62(11), 1229–1231.

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

Placida V. Gallegos, Ph.D  
Solfire Relational Institute, USA  
Steven A. Schapiro, EdD  
Solfire Relational Institute, USA

**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; Gunnlaugson & 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)

---

<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.

## **REFERENCES**

- Arao, B., & Clemens, K. (2013). From safe spaces to brave spaces: A new way to frame dialogue around diversity and social justice. In L. Landreman (Ed.), *The art of effective facilitation: Reflections from social justice educators*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Dirkx, (2012) Nurturing soul work: A Jungian approach to transformative learning. In E Taylor, P. Cranton & Associates, *The handbook of transformative learning*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass



- Gallegos, P. & Ferman, B. (2012) Latina and Latino ethnoracial identity orientations: A dynamic and developmental perspective. In C.L. Wijeyesinghe & B.W. Jackson (Eds.) *New perspectives on racial identity development (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)* New York University Press.
- Gallegos, P., Saunders, A., Schapiro, S. & Wishcamper, C. (2022) Integral we-spaces for racial equity: Loving fiercely across our differences. In *The Palgrave Handbook of Learning for Transformation*. Nicolaides et al (Eds). Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave McMillan.
- Gunnlaugsen, I. & Brabant, M. (Eds.) (2016) *Cohering the integral we-space: Engaging collective emergence, wisdom and healing in groups*. San Francisco: Integral Publishing House.
- Hardiman, R. & B. W. Jackson. (1997). Conceptual Foundations for Social Justice Courses. In M. Adams, M.,L.A. Bell, & P. Griffin, P (Eds.), *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*. New York: Routledge.
- Huckabay, M.A. (2014) An overview of the theory and practice of gestalt group process. In Nevis. E. (Ed.) *Gestalt therapy: Perspectives and applications*. Boca Raton: CRC Press.
- Menachim, R. (2017) *My grandmother's hands: Racialized trauma and the pathway to healing our minds and bodies*. Las Vegas, NV: Central Recovery Press.
- Mezirow, J. (1991) *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Schapiro, S., Wassserman, I. & Gallegos, P. (2012). Group work and dialogue: Spaces and processes for transformative learning in relationship. In E Taylor, P. Cranton & Associates, *The handbook of transformative learning*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Wilber, K. A. (2000) *A theory of everything*. Boston: Shambala.

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

Mario Giampaolo, PhD  
Caterina Garofano, PhD  
University of Siena

**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>
---	---	---	--	--

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*



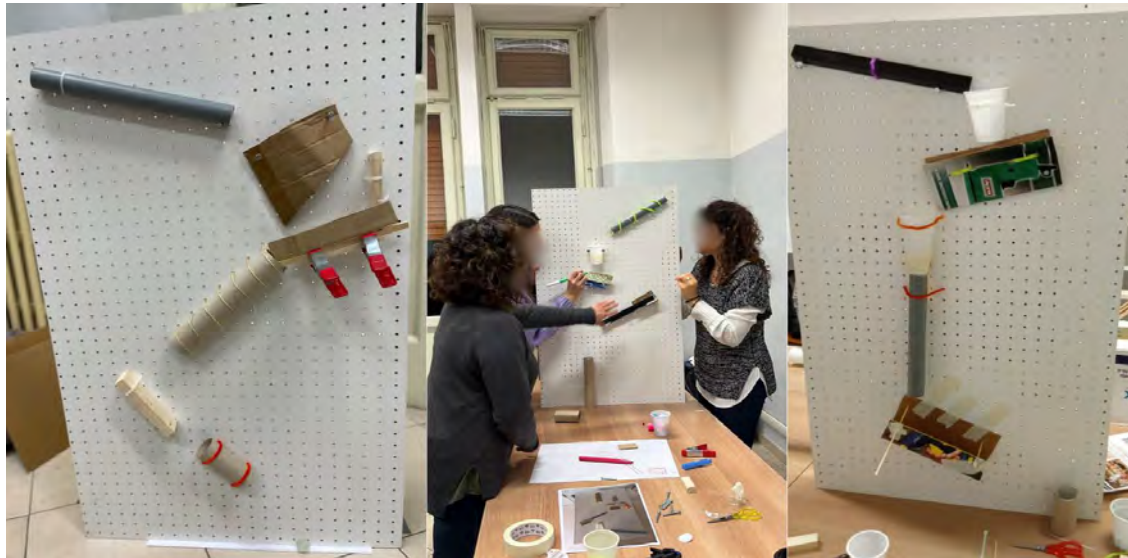
During the “chain reaction “ activity, facilitators provided examples that served as initial inspiration, some ideas that had worked well and seemed useful (Fig. 4). Facilitators taught to examples because there is no right way to build a chain reaction; you can start with the input and work towards 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.

## REFERENCES

- Bevan, B., Petrich, M., & Wilkinson, K. (2015). Tinkering Is Serious Play.. , 72(4), 28-33. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1047577>
- Fabbri, L. (2007). *Comunità di pratiche e apprendimento riflessivo. Per una formazione situata.* Roma: Carocci
- Fabbri, L., & Romano, A. (2017). *Metodi per l'apprendimento trasformativo : casi, modelli, teorie.* Roma : Carocci.
- García-Corretjer, M., Miralles, D., & Ros, R. (2020). A Theoretical Approach for a Novel Model to Realizing Empathy. Cornell University. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arxiv.2009.01229>
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (2006). *L'apprendimento situato. Dall'osservazione alla partecipazione attiva nei contesti sociali.* Edizioni Erickson.
- Melacarne, C. (2018). Riflessione, narrazione e apprendimento trasformativo in "EDUCATIONAL REFLECTIVE PRACTICES " 2/2018, pp 201-213.
- Mezirow, J. (1978). Perspective Transformation. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 28:100-110.
- Mezirow, J. (2003), *Apprendimento e trasformazione. Il significato dell'esperienza e il valore della riflessione nell'apprendimento degli adulti*, Raffaello Cortina Editore. Milano.
- Mezirow, J. (2016). *La teoria dell'apprendimento trasformativo. Imparare a pensare come un adulto.* Raffaello Cortina Editore. Milano.
- Marsick, V. J. (1998). Transformative Learning from Experience in the Knowledge Era. *Daedalus*, 127(4), 119–136.
- Kurkovsky, S., Ludi, S., & Clark, L E. (2019). Active Learning with LEGO for Software Requirements. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3287324.3287444>
- Papert, S. (1980). *Mindstorms: Children, Computers, and Powerful Ideas.* New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Parisi, S., Rognoli, V., & Sonneveld, M. (2017). Material Tinkering. An inspirational approach for experiential learning and envisioning in product design education, *The Design Journal*, 20:sup1, S1167-S1184,
- Resnick, M. & Rosenbaum, E. (2013). Designing for tinkerability. In M. Honey & D. Kanter (Eds.), *Design, make, play: Growing the next generation of STEM innovators* (pp. 163-181). New York: Routledge.
- Rognoli, V., Ayala, C., Parisi, S. (2016 a). The emotional value of Do-It-Yourself materials. In *proceedings of D&E'16, the 10th International Conference on Design and Emotion* (pp. 633-641).
- The Tinkering Studio (2017). <https://www.exploratorium.edu/tinkering>
- Vossoughi, S., & Bevan, B. (2014). Making and Tinkering: A Review of the Literature. National Research Council Committee on Out of School Time STEM, 57.
- Wilkinson, K., & Petrich, M. (2017). *The Art of tinkering: meet 150 makers working at the intersection of art, science & technology.* California: Weldon Owen

# Embodied Transformations: Exploring Scars and Stories in Transformative Learning

Giovanni Gottardo, PhD student  
University of Siena, Italy  
Janet Ferguson, PhD  
Independent Practitioner/Scholar, Bermuda

**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**

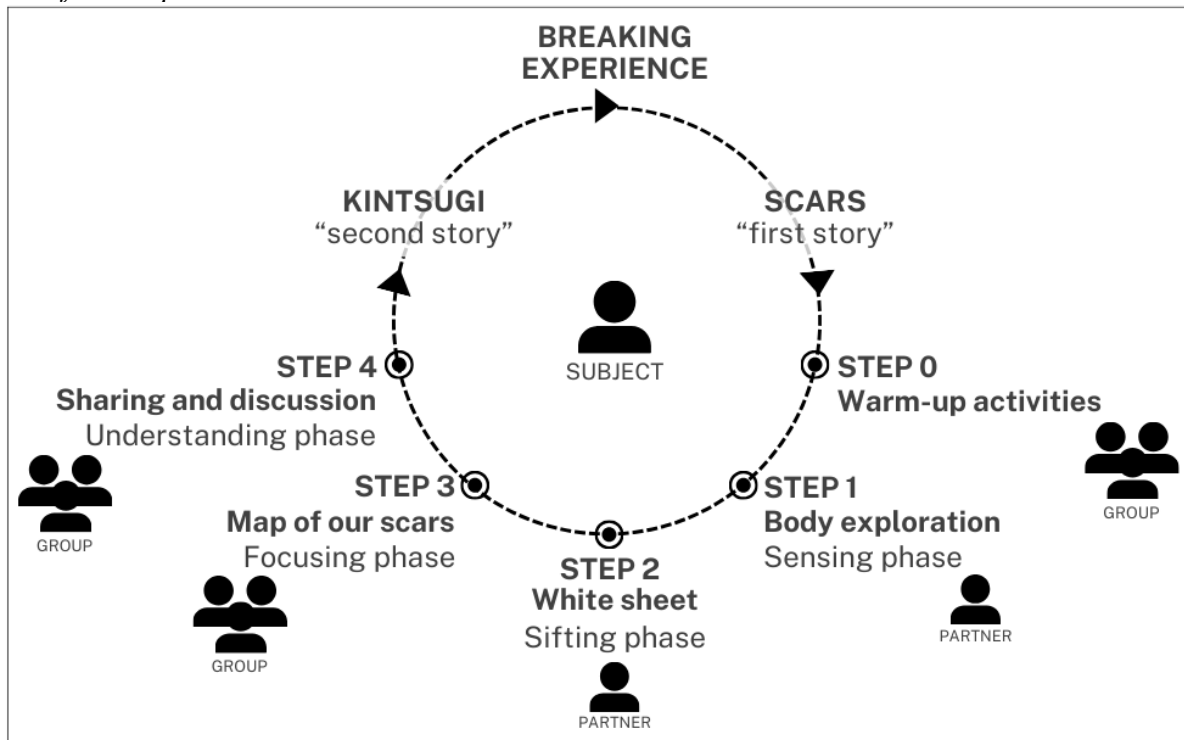
Every day, our lives are characterized by experiences and events, traversed by moods and emotions. While some of these are easily understood and accepted, some circumstances appear complex, uncategorizable, a source of changes and challenges, points of rupture and transformation from 'normality'.

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.

## REFERENCES

- Bishop, K. & Etmanski, C. (2016). Down the rabbit hole: using theatre-based methods to generate space for transformation. In A. Nicolaidis & D. Holt (Eds.), *Engaging at the Intersections*, 755-761. Tacoma, Washington: Pacific Lutheran University.
- Butterwick, S. & Lawrence, R.L. (2009). Creating Alternative Realities. Arts-Based Approaches to Transformative Learning. In J. Mezirow & E.W. Taylor (Eds.), *Transformative Learning in Practice*, 35-48. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Butterwick, S. & Lawrence, R.L. (2023). Stories of hope, imagination, and transformative learning: A dialogue. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 51-60.
- Carter, P.L. & Nicolaidis, A. (2023). Transformative learning: An emotional (r)evolution. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2023, 25-36.
- Davis-Manigaulte, J., Yorks, L. & Kals, E. (2006). Expressive Ways of Knowing and Transformative Learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 109,27-3.
- Den Elzen, K. & Lengelle, R. (2023). *Writing for Wellbeing. Theory, Research, and Practice*. New York: Routledge.
- Denzin, N.K. (2003). *Performance Ethnography: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Culture*. Sage Publications.
- Dewey (1934). *Art as Experience*. New York: Perigee Printing.
- Dirkx, J. (2000). Transformative Learning and the Journey of Individuation. *ERIC Digest*, 223.
- Dirkx, J. (2008). The Meaning and Role of Emotions in Adult Learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 120, 7-18.
- Fabbri, L. & Romano, A. (2017). *Metodi per l'apprendimento trasformativo*. Roma: Carocci.
- Finnegan, F. (2020). Editor's Notes: Exploring the Collective and Embodied Dimensions of Transformative Learning. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 18(2), 83-86.
- Gottardo, G. & Rossi, S. (2024). Performative Methodologies and Transformative Learning: A Systematic Review. In G. Koulaouzides & D. Soeiro (Eds.), *Reimagining transformative and emancipatory adult education for a world to come*, 125-135. Fylatos Publishing.
- Grant, D. (2017). Feeling for meaning: the making and understanding of Image Theatre. *Ride: the Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 2017, 1-16.
- Horsfall, D. & Titchen, A. (2009). Disrupting edges - opening spaces: pursuing democracy and human flourishing through creative methodologies. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 12(2),147-160.

- Koh, D. (2020). *The 4th Person Perspective: The Emergence of Collective Subjective*.  
<https://medium.com/@CelestialStudios/the-4th-person-perspective-the-emergence-of-the-collective-subjectives-5bb10302dd14>
- Kokkos, A. (2010). Transformative Learning Through Aesthetic Experience: Towards a Comprehensive Method. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 8(3), 155-177.
- Lawrence, R.L. (2008). Powerful Feelings: Exploring the Affective Domain of Informal and Art-Based Learning. *New directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 102, 65-77.
- Lawrence, R.L. (2012). Intuitive Knowing and Embodied Consciousness. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 134, 5-13.
- Marsick, V.J. & Maltbia, T.E. (2009). The transformative potential of action learning conversation: developing critically reflective practice skills. In J. Mezirow & E.W. Taylor (Eds.), *Transformative Learning in Practice*, 160-171. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2018). *Fenomenologia della percezione*. Firenze: Bompiani.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative Dimension of Adult Learning*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Nicolaides, A. (2023). *Generative Knowing: Principles, Methods, and Dispositions of an Emerging Adult Learning Theory*. Gorham: Myers Education Pr.
- Nicolaides, A., Lim, A., Herr, N. & Barefield, T. (2024). *Reimagining Adult Education as World Building*. Routledge.
- Santini, C. (2018). *Kintsugi. L'arte segreta di riparare la vita*. Milano: Mondadori.
- Schlattner, C. (1994). The body in transformative learning. *35th Annual AERC Proceedings*, 324-329.
- Schlattner, C. (2022). The Embodying of Transformative Learning. In A. Nicolaides, S. Eschenbacher, P. T. Buergelt, Y. Gilpin-Jackson, M. Welch & M. Misawa (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Learning for Transformation*, 831-846. Cham: Springer Nature.
- Snowber, C. (2016). *Embodied Inquiry*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Vacchelli, E. (2018). *Embodied Research in Migration Studies*. Bristoll: Policy Press.
- WHO. (1998). *Therapeutic patient education: continuing education programmes for health care providers in the field of prevention of chronic diseases*. Copenhagen.
- Yorks, L. & Kasl, E. (2002). Toward a Theory and Practice for Whole-Person Learning: Reconceptualizing Experience and the Role of Affect. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 52(3), 176-192.

## Radical Conversations: Uncovering New Ground

Larry Green, Ph.D.

Independent Scholar, formerly with Adler University, Vancouver, Canada

Laura Formenti, Ph.D.

Department of Human Sciences for Education, University of Milano Bicocca, Italy

**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 that 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?

## REFERENCES

- Bateson, G. (1972). *Steps to an ecology of mind*. Penguin.
- Bateson, G. (1977). Our own metaphor. Nine years after. Letter to Mary-Catherine Bateson [reprint in Bateson G. 1991. *A sacred unity. Further steps to an ecology of mind*. Harper Collins].
- Formenti, L. (2019). A Philosophical Embodied Practice: Meditation in the European–Italian Adult Education Context. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2019(161), 79-89.
- Formenti, L., & Hoggan-Kloubert, T. (2023). Transformative learning as societal learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* (177), 105-118.
- Formenti, L., & West, L. (2018). Transforming perspectives in lifelong learning and adult education: A dialogue. Springer.
- Gendlin, E. (1997). *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning*. Macmillan.
- Green, L. (2021). Agency: The Force and Compass of Transformation. *Journal of Transformative Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15413446211028522>
- Hadot, P., Davidson, A. I., & Chase, M. (1997). Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault. *Philosophical Quarterly*, 47(188).
- James, W. (1902). *The varieties of religious experience : a study in human nature*. Longmans, Green, and Co.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Rosa, H. (2019). *Resonance: A sociology of our relationship to the world*. Polity Press.

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

Yilu Guo

Teachers College, Columbia University, USA

**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.

## REFERENCES

- Blackburn Miller, J. (2020). Transformative learning and the arts: A literature review. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 18(4), 338–355. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344620932877>
- Carter, P. L., & Nicolaides, A. (2023). Transformative learning: An emotional (r)evolution. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2023 (177), 25-36. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/ace.20476>
- Dirkx, J.M. (2001), The Power of Feelings: Emotion, Imagination, and the Construction of Meaning in Adult Learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2001(89), 63-72. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.9>
- Fink, A. (2023, January 21). *Drawing together #45: Neuroethics*. Graphic Medicine. <https://www.graphicmedicine.org/drawing-together-45-neuroethics/>
- Harmon-Jones, E., Harmon-Jones, C., & Levy, N. (2015). An action-based model of cognitive-dissonance processes. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 24(3), 184--189. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721414566449>
- Haruyama, S. (1995). *A Great Revolution in the Brain World: Volume 1*. Sanmaku.
- Hoggan, C., Simpson, S., & Stuckey, H. (2009). *Creative expression in transformative learning: Tools and techniques for educators of adults*. Krieger Publishing Company.
- Kegan, R. (2001). *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development*. Harvard University Press.
- Lawrence, R. L. (2012). Awakening creativity in sacred landscapes: A transformative learning journey. In M. Schwartz, C. Lubell, R. Gall, & A. Omer (Eds.), *A future for earth: Re-imagining learning for a transforming world* (pp. 293–297). Meridian University.
- Mälkki, K. (2019). Coming to grips with edge-emotions: The gateway to critical reflection and transformative learning. In T. Fleming, A. Kokkos, & F. Finnegan (Eds.), *European perspectives on transformation theory* (pp.59–73). Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-19159-7\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-19159-7_5)
- Mezirow, J. (2009). An overview on transformative learning. In K. Illeris (Ed.), *Contemporary theories of learning: Learning theorists in their own words* (pp. 90–105). London: Routledge.
- Wilber, K., Patten, T., Leonard, A., & Morelli, M., (2008). The Shadow Module. In *Integral Life Practice: A 21st-century blueprint for physical health, emotional balance, mental clarity, and spiritual awakeing* (pp.58-81). Integral Books.

## Mindfulness as a Path to Transformative Learning

Marty Jacobs, PhD  
Social Impact Consulting

**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.

## REFERENCES

- Cameron, L., & Hafenbrack, A. (2022). When mindfulness does — and doesn't — help at work. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2022/12/research-when-mindfulness-does-and-doesnt-help-at-work>
- Dirkx, J. M., Mezirow, J., & Cranton, P. (2006). Musings and reflections on the meaning, context, and process of transformative learning. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 4(2), 123-139. doi:10.1177/1541344606287503
- Hyland, T. (2017). McDonaldizing spirituality: Mindfulness, education, and consumerism. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 15(4), 334-356.
- Kegan, R., & Lahey, L. L. (2009). *Immunity to change: How to overcome it and unlock potential in yourself and your organization*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning to think like an adult: Core concepts of transformation theory. In J. Mezirow & Associates (Eds.), *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 3-33). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Morris, A. (2023, January 23). Mindfulness exercises can be as effective as anxiety drugs, study shows. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wellness/2023/01/23/mindfulness-meditation-anxiety-medication/>
- Rahula, W. (1959/1974). *What the Buddha taught*. New York, NY: Grove Press.
- Sherman, G. L. (2021). Transformative learning and well-being for emerging adults in higher education. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 19(1), 29-49. doi:10.1177/1541344620935623
- Taylor, K., & Elias, D. (2012). Transformative learning: A developmental perspective. In E. W. Taylor & P. Cranton (Eds.), *The handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 147-161). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Varela, F. J., Rosch, E., & Thompson, E. (2000). *The embodied mind: Cognitive science and human experience*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Vu, M. C., & Burton, N. (2020). Mindful reflexivity: Unpacking the process of transformative learning in mindfulness and discernment. *Management Learning*, 51(2), 207-226. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1350507619888751>



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

Deborah Kramlich, PhD

Independent Scholar, Thailand

Dina Soeiro, MA

Polytechnic University of Coimbra, Portugal

Regina Ebner, MA

European Association for the Education of Adults, Belgium

**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?

### REFERENCES

- Adler, N. J., & Harzing, A.-W. (2009). When knowledge wins: Transcending the sense and nonsense of academic rankings. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 8, 72-95. <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMLE.2009.37012181>
- Aguinis, H., Cummings, C., Ramani, R. S., & Cummings, T. G. (2020). “An A is an A “: The new bottom line for valuing academic research. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 34(1), 135-154.
- Associated Press. (2020, July 18). From Rep. John Lewis, quotes in a long life of activism. *Washington Post*. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/from-rep-john-lewis-quotes-in-a-long-life-of-activism/2020/07/18/7ee684d8-c8b0-11ea-a825-8722004e4150\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/from-rep-john-lewis-quotes-in-a-long-life-of-activism/2020/07/18/7ee684d8-c8b0-11ea-a825-8722004e4150_story.html)
- Blackstock, C. (2009). The occasional evil of angels: Learning from the experiences of Aboriginal peoples and social work. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 4(1), 28-37.
- Blackstock, C. (2011). The emergence of the breath of life theory. *Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*, 8(1), 1-16.

- Bradbury, H. (2015). Introduction: How to situate and define action research. In H. Bradbury (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of action research* (3rd ed., pp. 1-9). Sage.
- Brass, N., & Macedo, D. P. (1985). Toward a pedagogy of the question: Conversations with Paulo Freire. *Journal of Education*, 167(2), 7-21.
- Bulajić, A., Nikolić, T., & Vieira, C. C. (2020). Navigating through the Contemporary World with Adult Education Research and Practice.
- Cann, C., & DeMeulenaere, E. (2020). *The activist academic: Engaged scholarship for resistance, hope and social change*. Myers Education Press.
- Flood, M., Martin, B., & Dreher, T. (2013). Combining academia and activism: Common obstacles and useful tools. *Australian Universities Review*, 55(1), 17-26.
- Fox, N. J. (2000). *Transgression as Methodology: Researching in a postmodern mood*. <https://doi.org/10.13140/2.1.3131.4726>
- Freire, P. (1979). Conscientização: teoria e prática da libertação: uma introdução ao pensamento de Paulo Freire. Cortez & Moraes.
- Freire, P. & Faundez, A (1989). *Learning to Question: A Pedagogy of Liberation*. WCC Publications.
- Guerilla Gardening: The Search for Nature in Urban Cities (n. d.). Gardenstead. Retrieved: 26 Oct 2023 from <https://www.gardenstead.com/guerilla-gardening-the-search-for-nature-in-urban-cities/>
- hooks, b. (1994). Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom. Routledge.
- Irish, A. (2021, August 3). *How to use service to bolster your academic career (opinion)*. Inside Higher Ed | Higher Education News, Events and Jobs. <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2021/08/03/how-use-service-bolster-your-academic-career-opinion>
- Lasco, G. (2023, June 18). *The trouble with university rankings (1) | Inquirer Opinion*. INQUIRER.net. <https://opinion.inquirer.net/164083/the-trouble-with-university-rankings-1>
- Mezirow, J. (1975). *Education for perspective transformation: Women's re-entry programs in community colleges*. Centre for Adult Education, Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*. Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (1997). "Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice." In P. Cranton (Ed.), *Transformative Learning in Action: Insights from Practice*. New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, no. 74. Jossey-Bass.
- Moutsios, S. (2024). Politics, knowledge, and education in Classical Athens. In *Research Handbook on Curriculum and Education* (pp. 38-48). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Open access works – 420 million citations show OA outputs are cited by more researchers from more places.* (2024, May 2). Impact of Social Sciences. [https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2024/01/30/open-access-works-420-million-citations-show-oa-outputs-are-cited-by-more-researchers-from-more-places/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAAR1guKpAdhKZWg9-P9s7FCmMrC3v1XoGadxOGWNlbOgnLJ4iU0gX9nTRTDY\\_aem\\_wC3C4EC0xjT03fg7IsQrCg](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2024/01/30/open-access-works-420-million-citations-show-oa-outputs-are-cited-by-more-researchers-from-more-places/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAAR1guKpAdhKZWg9-P9s7FCmMrC3v1XoGadxOGWNlbOgnLJ4iU0gX9nTRTDY_aem_wC3C4EC0xjT03fg7IsQrCg)
- Pantzar, M. (2023). Interview with Arjen Wals: A pedagogy of hope for a greener world. Elm Magazine. <https://elmmagazine.eu/sustainable-future/a-pedagogy-of-hope-for-a-greener-world/>

- Reynolds, R. (2014). *On guerrilla gardening: A handbook for gardening without boundaries*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Rynor, B. (2023, April 5). 'Don't just publish another paper. Let's do something,' says scholar-advocate Cindy Blackstock. *University Affairs*.  
<https://universityaffairs.ca/features/feature-article/dont-just-publish-another-paper-lets-do-something-says-scholar-advocate-cindy-blackstock/>
- Taylor, E. (2008). Transformative Learning Theory. In *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* (No. 119). Wiley Periodicals, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.301>
- Tracey, D. (2007). *Guerrilla gardening: a manifesto*. New Society Publishers.
- University of Zurich withdraws from international university ranking (2024, March 18). *SWI swissinfo.ch*. <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/education/university-of-zurich-quits-international-university-ranking/73693006>

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

Randee Lipson Lawrence, EdD  
Teachers College, Columbia University, USA  
Gwendolyn Kaltoft, EdD  
Independent Scholar USA

**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

---

<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.

### **REFERENCES**

- Berger, L. M. (2000). The emotional and intellectual aspects of protest music  
*Journal of Teaching in Social Work*. 20 (1-2) 57-76.
- Butterwick, S., & Lawrence, R. L. (2023). Stories of hope, imagination, and transformative learning: A dialogue. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2023, 51–60.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.20478>
- Chapman, T. (1988). *Fast Car*. Elektra <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIOAlaACuv4>
- Dirkx, J. (2012). Nurturing soul work: A Jungian approach to transformative learning. In E. W. Taylor, & P. Cranton, (Eds.). *The handbook of transformative learning*. 116-131. Jossey-Bass.
- Finnegan, F. (2023). A many-splendored thing? Transformative learning for social justice. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, no.177, 119–133. Wiley.
- Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the imagination*. Jossey-Bass.
- Haycock, J. (2015). Protest music as adult education and learning for social change: A theorisation of a public pedagogy of protest music. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*. 55(3), 423-442.
- Heron, J. (1992). *Feeling and personhood: Psychology in another key*. Sage.

- Highlander Center. (2022, July 20). *THERE'S a new world coming... Where you gon' be standin?* [Video]. Facebook). <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=721157955838870>
- Highlander Research and Education Center (n.d.). "Our mission ". Home: Our Mission. <https://highlandercenter.org/our-story/mission/>
- Horton, M. (1990). *The long haul*. Doubleday.
- Jung, C. G. (1973), *Letters*, Vol. I (1906-1950). Gerhard Adler and Aniela Jaffe, eds. (R. F. C.Hull, trans.) Bollingen Series CV. Princeton University Press.
- Kaltoft, G. (1990). *Music and emancipatory learning in three community education programs*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.
- Legend, J. (2014). *Glory*. Columbia Records. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUZOKvYcx\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUZOKvYcx_o)
- Lennon, J. & Ono, Y. (1971). *Imagine*. Apple Records. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOgFZfRVaww>
- Levitin, D. J. (2006). *This is your brain on music: The science of a human obsession*. Penguin.
- Magsamen, S. & Ross, I. (2023). *Your brain on art: How the arts transform us*. Random House.
- Malraux, A. (1974). *Picasso's mask*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. Jossey-Bass.
- Montanari, L. (2023). Songs and songwriting as transformative learning experiences: Three singer-songwriters reflect on their "soul work ". *Journal of Transformative Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15413446231181637>
- Olson, K. (2005). Music for community education and emancipatory learning. In R. L. Lawrence (Ed.). *Artistic Ways of Knowing*. New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, no. 107, 55-64. Jossey-Bass.
- Plastic Ono Band (1969). *Give Peace a Chance*. Apple Records. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gEX7Xxfr-qc>
- Skar, P. (2015). *Music and analysis: Contrapuntal reflections*. Retrieved April 18, 2024 from <https://www.patriciaskar.com/home/music-and-analysis>
- Tilly, M. (1956). The therapy of music, in *C.G. Jung Speaking* (1977), William McGuire and R. F. C. Hull, eds. Princeton University Press, 273-5.
- Tisdell, E. J. (2012). Themes and variations of transformational learning: Interdisciplinary perspectives on forms that transform. In E.W. Taylor, P. Cranton and Associates (Eds.) *The Handbook of Transformative Learning: Theory, Research and Practice*. Jossey-Bass.
- Yorks, L. & Kasl, E. (2002). Toward a theory and practice for whole-person learning: Reconceptualizing experience and the role of affect. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 52(3), 176-192.
- Yorks, L. & Kasl, E. (2006). I know more than I can say: A taxonomy for using expressive ways of knowing to foster transformative learning. *Journal of Transformative Education* 4(1), 43-63.

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

Ahreum Lim, PhD  
Arizona State University, USA  
Aliko Nicolaidis, EdD  
University of Georgia  
Trish Barefield, PhD  
University of Georgia  
Allie Cox, PhD  
University of Georgia  
Shannon Perry, PhD  
University of Georgia

**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.

## REFERENCES

- Adelman, H. S., & Taylor, L. (1994). *On understanding intervention in psychology and education*. Praeger.
- Biasin, C. (2018). Transformative Learning: Evolutions of the adult learning theory. *Phronesis*, 7(3), 5–17. <https://doi.org/10.3917/phron.073.0005>

- Faramelli, A., & Graham, J. (2020). From Distant Horizon to the ‘Uncoercive Rearrangement of Desire’: Institutional Pedagogy and Collaborative Learning in an Instance of Arts and Curatorial Education. *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 39(4), 841–854. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jade.12327>
- Freire, P. (1994). *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Continuum.
- Greenhalgh-Spencer, H. (2014). An Argument for Ecosophy: An Attention to Things and Place in Online Educational Spaces. *Philosophy of Education*, 70, 57–65. <https://doi.org/10.47925/2014.057>
- Guattari, F. (1995). *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm* (P. Bains & J. Pefanis Trans.). Power Institute. (Original work published 1992).
- Mannion, G. (2020). Re-assembling environmental and sustainability education: Orientations from New Materialism. *Environmental Education Research*, 26(9–10), 1353–1372. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2018.1536926>
- Mezirow, J. (2003). Transformative Learning as Discourse. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 1(1), 58–63. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344603252172>
- Nicolaides, A., & Eschenbacher, S. (2022). The Many Turns of Transformation Creating New Vocabularies for Transformative Learning. In A. Nicolaides, S. Eschenbacher, P. T. Buergelt, Y. Gilpin-Jackson, M. Welch, & M. Misawa (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Learning for Transformation* (pp. 1–22). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-84694-7\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-84694-7_1)
- Stengers, I., & Despret, V. (2021). *Women Who Make a Fuss: The Unfaithful Daughters of Virginia Woolf* (A. Knutson, Trans.). Univ Of Minnesota Press.

## Troubling Broken Systems Through Caring Conversations

Henriette Lundgren, PhD

Lifelong Education, Administration & Policy, University of Georgia, USA

DJ Ralston

Human and Organizational Learning, The George Washington University, USA

Kathrin Achenbach

WEAVE Community Inc, USA

**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.

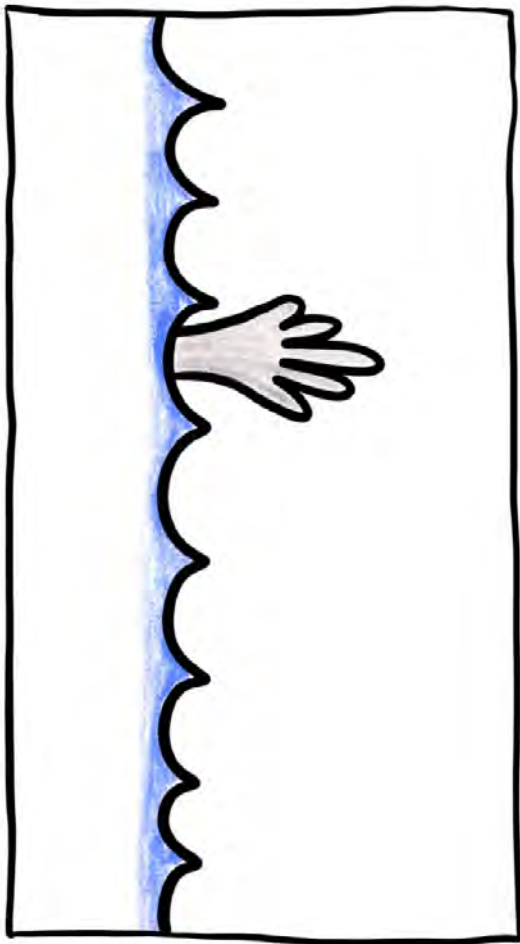










Caring conversations have transformative potential in both personal and political contexts. Communication and being with each other in our humanity is what will save this world. Care is important to our humanity. While caring conversations often occur in dyadic relationships, they can also be expanded 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).

## REFERENCES

- Brookfield, S. D. (2000). Transformative learning as ideology critique. In J. Mezirow (Ed.), *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 125–148). Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Chatzidakis, A., Hakim, J., Litter, J., & Rottenberg, C. (2020). *The care manifesto: The politics of interdependence*. Verso Books.
- Fisher, B., & Tronto, J. (1990). Toward a feminist theory of caring. In , Abel, E. K., & Nelson, M. (Eds.). *Circles of care* (pp. 35-62). SUNY Press.
- Heron, J. (1992). *Feeling and personhood: Psychology in another key*. Sage.
- Habermas, J. (1981/1987). *The theory of communicative action. Lifeworld and system: A critique of functionalist reason* (T. McCarthy, Trans.). Polity Press.
- Southern, N. L. (2007). Mentoring for Transformative Learning: The Importance of Relationship in Creating Learning Communities of Care. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 5(4), 329–338. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344607310576>
- Tronto, J. C. (1993). *Moral boundaries: A political argument for an ethic of care*. Psychology Press.
- Tronto, J. C. (1998). An ethic of care. *Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging*, 22(3), 15–20.
- Tronto, J. C. (2013). *Caring democracy: Markets, equality, and justice*. NYU Press.
- Vosman, F. (2009, October 16). *Joan Tronto* [Interview]. <https://ethicsofcare.org/joan-tronto/>
- Yorks, L., & Kasl, E. (2006). I Know More Than I Can Say: A Taxonomy for Using Expressive Ways of Knowing to Foster Transformative Learning. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 4(1), 43–64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344605283151>

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

Shawn McCann, EdD  
New Jersey, USA

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.

## REFERENCES

- Ashby, F. G., Isen, A. M., & Turken, A. U. (1999). A neuropsychological theory of positive affect and its influence on cognition. *Psychological Review*, 106(3), 529-550.  
doi:10.1037//0033-295x.106.3.529
- Brookfield, S. (2009). The concept of critical reflection: Promises and contradictions. *European journal of social work*, 12(3), 293-304.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Deshler, D. (1990). Metaphor analysis: Exorcising social ghosts. *Fostering critical reflection in adulthood: A guide to transformative and emancipatory learning*, 296-313.
- James, A. R. (2013). Lego Serious Play: a three-dimensional approach to learning development. *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*, (6).
- Lawrence, R. L. (2012). Transformative learning through artistic expression: Getting out of our heads. *The handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice*, 471-485.
- Lyons, D. (2018). *Lab rats: how Silicon Valley made work miserable for the rest of us*. Hachette Books.
- Mezirow, J. (1990). How critical reflection triggers transformative learning. *Fostering critical reflection in adulthood*, 1, 20.
- Papert, S., & Harel, I. (1991). Situating constructionism. *Constructionism*, 36(2), 1-11.

- Toda, A. M., Valle, P. H., & Isotani, S. (2017). The dark side of gamification: An overview of negative effects of gamification in education. In *Researcher links workshop: higher education for all* (pp. 143-156). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Tyler, J. A., & Swartz, A. L. (2012). Storytelling and transformative learning. *The handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice*, 455-470.

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

Lea R. Metz, Doctoral Student  
Fielding Graduate University, USA  
Abigail Lynam, PhD  
Fielding Graduate University, USA

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.

### REFERENCES

- Bradford, W. C., (2011, September 1). Reaching the visual learner: Teaching property through art *The Law Teacher* Vol. 11, 2004. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=587201>
- Cranton, P. (2016). *Understanding and promoting transformative learning: A guide to theory and practice*. Routledge.



- Lawrence, R. L. (2012). Transformative learning through artistic expression. In E. W. Taylor & P. Cranton and Associates (Eds.), *The handbook of transformative learning*. (pp. 471 – 485). Jossey-Bass.
- Mohr, J., & Hoover, K. F. (2020). Pedagogy: Developing learner identities through countering othering. In *Transformative leadership in action: Allyship, advocacy & activism* (pp. 73–89). Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Scharmer, O. (2018). *The essentials of Theory U: Core principles and applications*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

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

M. Beth Page, PhD

School of Leadership Studies, Royal Roads University, Canada

Catherine Etmanski, PhD

School of Leadership Studies, Royal Roads University, Canada

Tammy Pozzobon, M.O.M., EdD

School of Leadership Studies, Royal Roads University, Canada

**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. According to 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.

## REFERENCES

- Agger-Gupta, N. & Etmanski, C. (2014). The paradox of transformative learning among mid-career professionals. *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology* 5(1), 35–47.
- Boyd, R. D. (1989). Facilitating personal transformations in small groups I. *Small Group Behavior*, 20(4), 459–474. doi: 10.1177/104649648902000406
- Cranton, P. (2011). A transformative perspective on the scholarship of teaching and learning. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 30(1), 75–86. doi: 10.1080/07294360.2011.536974
- Daloz, L. (2012). *Mentor: Guiding the journey of adult learners*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. (Original work published 1986)
- Dirkx, J. M. (1998). Transformative learning theory in the practice of adult education: An overview. *PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning*, 7, 1–14.
- Etmanski, C. (2018). Seeds and stories of transformation from the individual to the collective. *Journal of Transformative Education* 16(2), 151–167. DOI doi.org/10.1177/1541344617696973
- Freire, P. (2003). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Rev ed.). New York: Continuum. (Original work published 1970)
- Kucukaydin, I., & Cranton, P. (2012). Critically questioning the discourse of transformative learning theory. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 63(1) 43–56. doi: 10.1177/0741713612439090

- Mezirow, J. (1978). Perspective transformation. *Adult Education*, 28(2), 100–110. doi: 10.1177/074171367802800202
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *The transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- O’Sullivan, T. L., Corneil, W., Kuziemy, C. E., & Toal-Sullivan, D. (2015). Use of the structured interview matrix to enhance community resilience through collaboration and inclusive engagement. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*, 32(6), 616–628. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1002/sres.2250>
- Page, M. B., & Bishop, K. (2023). Using an Interview Matrix as an Action-Oriented Dialogue and Research Method. (Chapter 18). BC Campus Pressbooks. Royal Roads University. <https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/activelearningforrealworldinquiry/chapter/using-an-interview-matrix-as-an-action-oriented-dialogue-and-research-method/>
- Stevens-Long, J., Schapiro, S. A., & McClintock, C. (2012). Passionate scholars: Transformative learning in doctoral education. *Adult Education Quarterly* 62(2) 180–198. doi: 10.1177/0741713611402046

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

Sharon I. Radd, EdD  
St. Catherine University, St. Paul, MN  
Stacy M. Husebo, MSW  
St. Catherine University, St. Paul, MN

**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.

## REFERENCES

- International Transformative Learning Conference. (2023). Getting transformation into good trouble: Making new spaces of possibility with community and in practice. 2024 Conference Call for Proposals. Available at <https://itlc2024.intertla.org/call-for-proposals>.
- Menakem, R. (2021). *My grandmother’s hands: Racialized trauma and the pathway to mending our hearts and bodies*. Central Recovery Press.
- Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning to think like an adult: Core concepts of Transformation Theory. In Mezirow & Associates (Eds). *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*. (pp. 3 - 33). Jossey Bass.
- Van der Kolk, B. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. Penguin Books.



## Wellness in Transition: Social Solidarity for Transformation

Stacey Robbins, EdD  
Saint Mary's College of CA, USA  
Marguerite Welch, PhD  
Saint Mary's College of CA, USA

**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)

### **SELECTED REFERENCES**

- Goss, H., Cuddihy, T., & Tomson, M. (2010) Wellness in higher education : a transformative framework for health related disciplines. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Health, Physical Education and Recreation*, 1(2), pp. 29-36.
- Heron, J. (1996). *Co-operative inquiry; Research into the human condition*. Sage.
- King, K. P. (2012). The Mind-Body-Spirit Learning Model: Transformative Learning Connections to Holistic Perspectives: Seizing Control of Your Healthcare - The Relationship among Self-Agency, Transformative Learning, and Wellness. *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology [IJAVET]*, 3(3).
- Lakshmin, P. (2023). *Real self-care: A transformative program for redefining wellness*. Penguin Random House.
- Senge, P., Scharmer, O., & Winslow, D. (2013). 30 Years of Building Learning Communities: A Dialogue with Peter Senge, Otto Scharmer and Darcy Winslow, Part I. *Reflections* 12(4)

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

Catherine Scheder, EdD  
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, USA  
Lynda Fernholz, PhD  
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, USA  
Erin Redman, PhD  
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, USA  
Yue Li, PhD  
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, USA

**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.

## REFERENCES

- Dirkx, J.M. (1998). Transformative Learning Theory in the Practice of Adult Education: An Overview. *PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning*, 7, 1-14.
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential Learning: Experience as a source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliff, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Mezirow, J. (1995). Transformation theory in adult education. In M.R. Welton (Ed.), *In defense of the lifeworld: Critical perspectives on adult learning*. (pp. 39-70). Albany, NY: SUNY.
- Oakeshott, M. (1990). *The voice of liberal learning: Michael Oakeshott on Education*. Yale University Press.
- Papastamatis, A., & Panitsides, E. A. (2014). *Transformative learning: Advocating for a holistic approach*. *Review of European Studies*, 6(4), 74–81. <https://doi.org/10.5539/res.v6n4p74>
- Taylor, E. W. (1997). Building upon the theoretical debate: A critical review of the empirical studies of Mezirow's transformative learning theory. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48, 34-59.
- Taylor, E. W., & Cranton, P. (2012). *The handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice*. John Wiley & Sons
- Tisdell, E. J. (1999). The spiritual dimension of adult development. In M.C. Clark & R.S. Caffarella (Eds.), *An update on adult development theory: New ways of thinking about the life course*.(87-96). *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, No. 84. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

VanWynsberghe, R. (2022, May). Education for Sustainability, Transformational Learning Time and the Individual Collective Dialectic. In *Frontiers in Education* (Vol. 7, p. 838388). Frontiers.

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

Carolina de Mello Silva, PhD candidate

NOVA University Lisbon, Portugal

Antje Disterheft, PhD

NOVA University Lisbon, Portugal

Matthias Barth, PhD

Leuphana University of Lüneburg &

Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development, Germany

**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

## REFERENCES

- Boström, M., Andersson, E., Berg, M., Gustafsson, K., Gustavsson, E., Hysing, E., Lidskog, R., Löfmarck, E., Ojala, M., Olsson, J., Singleton, B.E., Svenberg, S., Ugglä, Y. & Öhman, J. (2018). Conditions for transformative learning for sustainable development: A theoretical review and approach. *Sustainability*, 10(12), 4479. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10124479>
- Dirkx, J. M. (1998). Transformative learning theory in the practice of adult education: An overview. *PAACE journal of lifelong learning*, 7, 1-14.
- Harding & Woodford (2024). The Deep Time Walk: How Effective Is It? *Journal of Sustainability Education*, 29.
- Hoggan, C. D. (2016). Transformative learning as a metatheory: Definition, criteria, and typology. *Adult education quarterly*, 66(1), 57-75. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713615611216>
- Lange, E. A. (2018). Transforming transformative education through ontologies of relationality. *Journal of transformative education*, 16(4), 280-301. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344618786452>
- Lotz-Sisitka, H., Wals, A. E., Kronlid, D., & McGarry, D. (2015). Transformative, transgressive social learning: Rethinking higher education pedagogy in times of systemic global dysfunction. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 16, 73-80. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2015.07.018>
- Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative learning: Theory to practice. *New directions for adult and continuing education*, 1997(74), 5-12, doi: 10.1002/ace.7401.
- Munro, M. (2018). Principles for embodied learning approaches. *SATJ: South African Theatre Journal*, 31(1), 5-14. <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC-dc9a285d1>
- Naess, A. (1973, Spring). The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movements: A summary. *Inquiry*, 16, 95-100.
- Nathan, M. J. (2022). *Foundations of Embodied Learning: A Paradigm for Education*. Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/Foundations-of-Embodied-Learning-A-Paradigm-for-Education/Nathan/p/book/9780367349769>
- Rodríguez Aboytes, J. G., & Barth, M. (2020). Transformative learning in the field of sustainability: A systematic literature review (1999-2019). *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 21(5), 993–1013. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSHE-05-2019-0168>
- Sterling, S. (2021). Educating for the Future We Want. In *Opening Essay for GTI Discussion Forum The Pedagogy of Transition*. Boston, MA: Great Transition Initiative (GTI).

- Vettraino, E., & Linds, W. (2018). Living the experience of learning: embodied reflexivity as pedagogical process. *SATJ: South African Theatre Journal*, 31(1), 15-35. DOI: 10.1080/10137548.2017.1414630
- Walsh, Z., Böhme, J., Lavelle, B. D., & Wamsler, C. (2020). Transformative education: Towards a relational, justice-oriented approach to sustainability. *International journal of sustainability in higher education*, 21(7), 1587-1606. doi 10.1108/IJSHE-05-2020-0176
- Wamsler, C. (2020). Education for sustainability: Fostering a more conscious society and transformation towards sustainability. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 21(1), 112-130.
- Wals, A. E. J. (2011). Learning Our Way to Sustainability. *Journal of Education for Sustainable Development*, 5(2), 177–186. <https://doi.org/10.1177/097340821100500208>
- Winnicott, D. W. (2019). *Playing and reality*. Ubu Editor.

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

Lynn Letsêla Sitanimezi, MA  
Fielding Graduate University, USA  
Kathy Dee Geller, PhD  
Fielding Graduate University, USA

**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

## **REFERENCES**

- Brannon, T.N., Carter, E.R., Murdock-Perriera, L.A., & Higginbotham, G.D. (2018). From backlash to inclusion for all: Instituting diversity efforts to maximize benefits across group lines. *Social Issues and Policy Review*, 12, pp. 57–90.
- Brookfield, S. (1987). *Developing critical thinkers*. Jossey-Bass.
- Brown, J. & Issacs, D. (2005). *The World Cafe book: Shaping our future through onversations that matter*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Buber, M. (1947). *I and thou*. Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Dewey, J. (1910). *How we think*. D C Heath.
- Flood, M., Dragiewicz, M., & Pease, B. (2021). Resistance and backlash to gender equality. *The Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 52, 593-408.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Geller, K. D. (2005). *A model of relational leadership development for multinational corporations in the 21st century*. (Publication No. 3158283) [Doctoral dissertation, Fielding Graduate University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Geller, K.D., Phillips, J.C., Lewis Grant, K.S. (2023). On becoming a qualitative researcher. In P. Kumar & J. Eisenberg (2023). *Synchronous and asynchronous approaches to teaching: Higher education lessons for post-pandemic times*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hofstede, G. H. (1997). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. McGraw Hill.

- hooks, b. (2010). *Teaching critical thinking: Practical wisdom*. Routledge.
- Mezirow, J. (2000). *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*. Jossey-Bass.
- McKinsey. (2020). Diversity wins: How inclusion matters. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters>
- Schon, D. A. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner*. Jossey-Bass.
- Williams, J.B. (2023). Beyond the business case: Moving from transactional to transformational inclusion. *Seattle University Law Review*, 46(2), 229 – 261.

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

Stefano Spennati  
Visiting Professor, University of Bergamo  
Victoria J. Marsick PhD  
Professor, Teachers College Columbia University

**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.

## REFERENCES

- O'Neil, J., Marsick, V.J. (2007) *Understanding Action Learning*, New York: AMACOM
- Mezirow, J. Taylor, E.W. (Eds) (2011) *Transformative Learning: theory to practice. Insight from community, workplace and higher education*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass

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

Charalampos Pouloupoulos, PhD  
University of West Attica, Greece, USA

Anna Tsiboukli, PhD  
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

**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.

## REFERENCES

- Anders, M. & Christiansen, H. (2016). Unaccompanied refugee minors: a systematic review of psychological interventions. *Kindheit Entwicklung: Z Klin Kinderpsychologie*, 25, 216–30 <https://doi.org/10.1026/0942-5403/a000201>
- Ager, A., Strang, A. (2008). Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 21(2), 166–191 <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fen016>
- Ahearn Jr, F. L. (2000). *The Psychosocial Wellness of refugees. Issues in Qualitative and Quantitative Research*. Berghahn Books. <https://doi.org/10.3167/9781571812049>
- Almqvist, K. & Broberg, A. G. (1999). Mental Health and Social Adjustment in Young Refugee Children y 3½ Years After Their Arrival in Sweden. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 38(6), 723-730 <https://doi.org/10.1097/00004583-199906000-00020>
- Bauman, S. (2016). *Strangers at Our Door*. Polity. <https://doi.org/10.32422/mv.1538>
- Barton, J.L. (1930). *Story of Near East Relief (1915-1930): An Interpretation*. McMillan. [https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.\\$b744679](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.$b744679)
- Bean, T., Eurelings-Bontekoe, E., & Spinhoven, P. (2007b). Course and predictors of mental health of unaccompanied refugee minors in the Netherlands: One year follow-up. *Social Science & Medicine*, 64(6), 1204–1215 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2006.11.010>
- Blackmore, R., Gray, K.M., Boyle, J.A., Fazel, M., Ranasinha, S., Fitzgerald, G., Misso, M., Gibson-Helm, M. (2020). Systematic Review and Meta-analysis: The Prevalence of Mental Illness in Child and Adolescent Refugees and Asylum Seekers. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 59(6), 705-714 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2019.11.011>
- Björkenstam, E., Helgesson, M., Norredam, M., Sijbrandij, M., De Montgomery, C.J. & Mittendorfer-Rutz, E. (2020). Common mental disorders among young refugees in Sweden: The role of education and duration of residency. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 266, 563-571 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2020.02.015/>
- Carlsson, J.M., Olsen, D.R., Mortensen, E.L., Kastrup, M. (2006). Mental health and health-related quality of life: a 10-year follow-up of tortured refugees. *J Nerv Ment Dis*, 194, 725–31 <https://doi.org/10.1097/01.nmd.0000243079.52138.b7>
- Ellis, B., MacDonald, H.Z., Lincoln, A.K., Cabral, H.J. (2008). Mental health of Somali adolescent refugees: the role of trauma, stress, and perceived discrimination. *J Consult Clin Psychol*, 76, 184–93 DOI: [10.1037/0022-006X.76.2.184](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.76.2.184)
- Ezard, N. (2012). Substance use among populations displaced by conflict: a literature review. *Disasters*, 36, 533–57 DOI: [10.1111/j.1467-7717.2011.01261.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7717.2011.01261.x)
- Fazel, M., Reed, R.V., Panter-Brick, C., Stein, A. (2012). Mental health of displaced and refugee children resettled in high-income countries: risk and protective factors, *Lancet*, 379, 266–82 [10.1016/S0140-6736\(11\)60051-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(11)60051-2)
- Fazel, M. & Betancourt, T.S. (2018). Preventive mental health interventions for refugee children and adolescents in high-income settings, *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, 2 (2), 121-132 [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642\(17\)30147-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(17)30147-5)
- Freud, S. (1919). *The Uncanny*. Penguin. ISBN: 9780141182377

- Gould, R. L. (1978). *Transformations: Growth and Change in Adult Life*. Simon & Schuster.  
<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1979-28170-000>
- Iversen, V.C., Sveaass, N., Morken, G. (2014). The role of trauma and psychological distress on motivation for foreign language acquisition among refugees. *Int J Culture Mental Health*, 7, 59–67 <https://doi.org/10.1080/17542863.2012.695384>
- Maioli, S.C., Bhabha, J., Wickramage, K., Wood, L.C.N., Erragne, E., Ortega García, O., Burgess, R., Digidiki, D., Aldridge, R.W., Devakumar, D. (2021). International migration of unaccompanied minors: trends, health risks, and legal protection, *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, 5(12) [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642\(21\)00194-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(21)00194-2)
- Mezirow, J. (1978b). *Education for Perspective Transformation: Women's Re-entry Programs in Community Colleges*. U.S. Dept. of Health, Education & Welfare, National Institute of Education, Educational Resources Information Center.
- Piwowarczyk, L., Bishop, H., Yusuf, A., Mudymba, F., & Raj, A. (2014). Congolese and Somali beliefs about mental health services. *The Journal of nervous and mental disease*, 202 (3), 209-216. DOI: [10.1097/NMD.0000000000000087](https://doi.org/10.1097/NMD.0000000000000087)
- Radjack, R., Molino, L., Ogrizek, A., Ngameni, E.G., & Moro, M.R. (2022). How Do We Address and Treat the Trauma of a 16-Year-Old Girl, Unaccompanied Minor, and Her Rape-Born Son? A Case Report. *Healthcare*, 10 (10), 2036 <https://doi.org/10.339.10102036>
- Save the Children (2016). *Annual Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.savethechildren.org/content/dam/usa/reports/annual-report/annual-report/sc-2016-annualreport.pdf>
- Sack WH, Clarke GN, Seeley J.(1995). Posttraumatic stress disorder across two generations of Cambodian refugees. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry*, 34, 1160–66. DOI: [10.1097/00004583-199509000-00013](https://doi.org/10.1097/00004583-199509000-00013)
- Strauss K, Dapp U, Anders J, von Renteln-Kruse W, Schmidt S. (2011). Range and specificity of war-related trauma to posttraumatic stress; depression and general health perception: displaced former World War II children in late life. *J Affecti Dissord*, 128, 267–76 DOI: [10.1016/j.jad.2010.07.009](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2010.07.009)
- Stoltz, S., Van Londen, M., & Deković, M. (2015). Effects of parent and child characteristics on participation and outcome of an individualized booster parent intervention for children with externalizing behaviour. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 12(4), 395-411 <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2015.1018172>
- Trentacosta, C. J., McLearn, C. M., Ziadni, M. S., Lumley, M. A., & Arfken, C. L. (2016). Potentially traumatic events and mental health problems among children of Iraqi refugees: The roles of relationships with parents and feelings about school. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 86 (4), 384 <https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000186>
- Tsiboukli, A. (2020). Mezirow and Gould: Their relationship and distinct routes. In A. Kokkos (Ed.). *Expanding Transformation Theory: Affinities between Jack Mezirow and Emancipatory Educationalists* (pp. 32-45). Routledge.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781138489226>
- Ulrich, HS., Kohler, E., & Spallek, J. (2022). Explaining psychosocial care among unaccompanied minor refugees: a realist review. *Eur Child Adolesc Psychiatry*, 31, 1857–1870 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-021-01762-1>
- UNHCR, (2017). *Global Trends. Forced displacement in 2016*. The UN Refugee Agency. Retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/5943e8a34/global-trends-forced-displacement-2016.html>



- Walsh, S. D., De Clercq, B., Molcho, M., Harel-Fisch, Y., Davison, C. M., Rich Madsen, K., & Stevens, G. W. (2016). The relationship between immigrant school composition, classmate support and involvement in physical fighting and bullying among adolescent immigrants and non-immigrants in 11 countries, *Journal of youth and adolescence*, *45*, 1-16. DOI: [10.1007/s10964-015-0367-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-015-0367-0)
- Weine, S.M., Ware, N., Hakizimana, L. (2014). Fostering resilience: protective agents, resources, and mechanisms for adolescent refugees' psychosocial well-being. *Adolesc Psychiatry*, *4*, 164–76. DOI: [10.2174/221067660403140912162410](https://doi.org/10.2174/221067660403140912162410)

## Exploring Passageways into Transformation Through Storywork

Marguerite A. Welch, PhD  
Saint Mary's College of California, USA  
Yabome Gilpin-Jackson, PhD  
Simon Fraser University, Canada

**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.

### **REFERENCES**

- Atkinson, R. (2002). The life story interview. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 103–140). SAGE.
- Denzin, N. (2018). *Performance autoethnography; Critical pedagogy and the politics of culture*. Routledge.
- Gilpin-Jackson, Y., & Welch, M. (2022). Conclusion chapter: Propositions at the threshold of transformation. In A. Nicolaidis, S. Eschenbacher, P. Buergelt, Y. Gilpin-Jackson, M. Welch, & M. Misawa (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Learning for Transformation*. Palgrave Macmillan/Springer Nature.

- Nicolaides, A., Eschenbacher, S., Buergelt, P., Gilpin-Jackson, Y., Welch, M., & Misawa, M. (Eds.). (2022). *The Palgrave Handbook of Learning for Transformation*. Palgrave Macmillan/Springer Nature.
- Taylor, E. W., & Cranton, P. (2013). A theory in progress?: Issues in transformative learning theory. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, 4(1), 35–47. <https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.rela5000>
- Welch, M. A., Saunders, A. A. P., Buergelt, P. T., Gilpin-Jackson, Y., Ferguson, J., & Marsick, V. J. (2020). Your story, our story: the transformative power of life narratives. *Reflective Practice*, 21(6), 861-876. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2020.1821633>

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

Joceylyn Chapman, PhD  
California Institute for Integral Studies, USA  
Alexandra Danino, MA  
California Institute for Integral Studies, USA  
Lynn Hoare, MA  
California Institute for Integral Studies, USA  
Sha'Toya Williamson, MA  
California Institute for Integral Studies, USA

**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.

## REFERENCES

- Anello, E., Hernandez, J., & Khadem, M. (2014). Transformative leadership: Developing the hidden dimension. Harmony Equity Press.
- Ison R. L. (2017). Systems practice: how to act: in situations of uncertainty and complexity in a climate-change world (Second). Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4471-7351-9>
- Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning to Think like an Adult. Core Concepts of Transformation Theory. In J. Mezirow, & Associates (Eds.), Learning as Transformation. Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress (pp. 3-33). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Montuori A. (2010). Transformative leadership for the 21st century: reflections on the design of a graduate leadership curriculum. *Revision* 4–14. <https://doi.org/10.4298/REVN.30.3.4.4-14>
- Montuori, A., & Donnelly, G. (2017). Transformative leadership. *Handbook of personal and organizational transformation*, 1-33.
- Nicolaides, A., & McCallum, D. C. (2013). Inquiry in action for leadership in turbulent times: Exploring the connections between transformative learning and adaptive leadership. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 11(4), 246-260.
- Wergin, J. F. (2019). *Deep learning in a disorienting world*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108647786>



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

Tes Cotter Zakrzewski, [tescotterzak@comcast.net](mailto:tescotterzak@comcast.net)  
Columbia University alumni, USA

Laurie Anderson Sathe, [landersonsathe@stkate.edu](mailto:landersonsathe@stkate.edu)  
St. Catherine University, USA

Anne-Liisa Longmore, [anne-liisa.longmore@georgiancollege.ca](mailto:anne-liisa.longmore@georgiancollege.ca)  
Georgian College, Canada

**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.

## **REFERENCES**

- Anand, T.S., Anand, S.V., Welch, M., Marsick, V.J., & Langer, A. (2020) Overview of transformative learning I: real-world applications. *Reflective Practice*, 21(6), 732-743.
- Anderson Sathe, L., et al (2021). *Listening for Transformation: Discovering Third Space and Connection Using a Listening Protocol in The Palgrave Handbook on Learning for Transformation*. Palgrave.
- Flint, M. A., & Toledo, W. (2022). Making Good Trouble: Becoming-With Critical Inquiry. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 14(4), 728–749.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/19408447211012649>
- Kluger, A., et al. (2019). Dyadic Level analyses in organizational behavior: The utility of the social relations model. *Proceedings of the Academy of Management Annual Meeting*, Boston, MA, 2019(1), 1.
- Kluger, A.N., Mallov, T.E., Pery, S., Itzhakov, G., Castro, D.R., Lipetz, L., Sela, Y., Turjeman-Levi, Y., Lehmann, M., New, M., Borut, L. (2021). Dyadic Listening in Teams: Social Relations Model. *Applied Psychology: an International Review*, 70 (3), 1045 - 1099.
- Lipari, L. (2014). (Ed.). *Listening, thinking, being: Toward an ethic of attunement*. The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Pery, S., Doytch, G., & Kluger, A. N. (2020). Management and Leadership. In D. L. Worthington & G. D. Bodie (Eds.), *The Handbook of Listening* (pp. 163–180). Wiley & Sons.

Romano, A. et al. (2024, April 12). Practicing Cultural Humility and Transformative Listening in Dyads: Creating Educational Possibilities for Belonging and Equity in *Adult Education Research Association Annual Meeting Philadelphia, PA*. <http://tinyurl.com/yljyglx3>

## PAPER



## PAPER

Presentations from  
multiple authors around  
a common theme

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

Maria Livia Alga, University of Verona  
Chira Sità, University of Verona

**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.

---



## REFERENCES

- Engeström, Y. (1987), *Learning by Expanding: an activity-theoretical approach to developmental research*. Helsinki, Orienta-Konsultit
- Engeström, Y. (2001), *Expansive Learning at Work: toward an activity theoretical reconceptualization*, *Journal of Education and Work*, Vol 14, N° 1, pp. 133 - 156.

- Engeström, Y., Sannino, A. (2010), Studies of expansive learning: Foundations, findings and future challenges. *Educational Research Review*, Vol 5, N° 1, pp. 1-24.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2009.12.002>
- Formenti, L., Hoggan-Kloubert, T. (2023), Transformative learning as societal learning, *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, Spring, Issue 177, pp. 105-118  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.20482>
- Friedman J. (2022), How a New Learning Theory Can Benefit Transformative Learning Research: Empirical Hypotheses, *Frontiers*, 7, pp. 1-15
- Mezirow, J. (2016), *La teoria dell'apprendimento trasformativo*. Cortina, Milano.
- Nikolaides, Eschenbacher et al. (2022) (a cura di). *The Palgrave handbook of Learning for Transformation*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Shardlow, S.M., Doel, M. (2002) (a cura di). *Learning to Practise Social Work. International Approaches*. London: Kingsley Publisher
- Virkkunen J., Shelley Newnham D. (2013), *The Change Laboratory. A Tool for Collaborative Development of Work and Education*. Sense, Rotterdam.

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

Marianne Grace Araneta  
University of Padua, Italy

**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.

## REFERENCES

- Bakhtin, M. M., & Holquist, M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays*. University of Texas Press. <http://archive.org/details/dialogicimagnat0000bakh>
- Danermark, B., Ekström, M., Jakobsen, L., & Karlsson, J. (2002). *Explaining Society: Critical Realism in Social Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351017831>
- De Souza, D. E. (2018). Educational change in Singapore and its ‘tinkering’ around the edges: A critical realist perspective. *Journal of Educational Change*, 19(1), 19–49. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-017-9314-z>
- Lange, E. A. (2019). Transformative Learning for Sustainability. In W. Leal Filho (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Sustainability in Higher Education* (pp. 1954–1966). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11352-0\\_104](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11352-0_104)
- McCowan, T. (2023). The climate crisis as a driver for pedagogical renewal in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 28(5), 933–952. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2023.2197113>
- Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning to think like an adult. *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*, 3–33.
- Mezirow, J. (2006). An overview on transformative learning. In *Lifelong Learning*. Routledge.
- O’Dowd, R. (2022). Internationalising Higher Education and the Role of Virtual Exchange (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315393704>
- Pereira, L., Frantzeskaki, N., Hebinck, A., Charli-Joseph, L., Drimie, S., Dyer, M., Eakin, H., Galafassi, D., Karpouzoglou, T., Marshall, F., Moore, M.-L., Olsson, P., Siqueiros-García, J. M., van Zwanenberg, P., & Vervoort, J. M. (2020). Transformative spaces in the making: Key lessons from nine cases in the Global South. *Sustainability Science*, 15(1), 161–178. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-019-00749-x>
- Sipos, Y., Battisti, B., & Grimm, K. (2008). Achieving transformative sustainability learning: Engaging head, hands and heart. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 9(1), 68–86. <https://doi.org/10.1108/14676370810842193>

- Stein, S. (2020). Pluralizing possibilities for global learning in western higher education. In D. Bourn (Ed.), *The Bloomsbury handbook of global education and learning* (pp. 63-75). Available at: [www.bloomsbury.com/uk/the-bloomsbury-handbook-of-global-education-and-learning-9781350108738/](http://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/the-bloomsbury-handbook-of-global-education-and-learning-9781350108738/)
- Sterling, S. (2011). Transformative Learning and Sustainability: Sketching the Conceptual Ground. *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*, 5.
- Wals, A. E. J. (2011). Learning Our Way to Sustainability. *Journal of Education for Sustainable Development*, 5(2), 177–186. <https://doi.org/10.1177/097340821100500208>

# From Feelings to Actions: Exploring the Role of Emotions in Transformative Learning Experiences

Zehra Bahadir Kurus, PhD  
Bogazici University, Turkey

**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.

## REFERENCES

- Boyd, R. D. (1989). Facilitating Personal Transformations in Small Groups: Part I. *Small Group Behavior*, 4, 459-474.
- Boyd, R.D., and Myers, J. G. (1988). Transformative Education. *International Journal of Lifelong Learning*, 4: 261-284.
- Boyd, R. D. (1991). *Personal transformations in small groups: A Jungian perspective*. Tavistock/Routledge.
- Cranton, P. (2006) *Understanding and promoting transformative learning: A guide for educators of adults*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cranton, P. (1994). *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*. San Francisco Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Cunningham, P. M. (1998). The social dimension of transformative learning. *Journal of Lifelong Learning*, 7, 15-28.
- Daloz, L. A. (1999). *Mentor: Guiding the journey of adult learners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Dirkx, J. M. (1998). Transformative Learning Theory in the Practice of Adult Education: An Overview. *Journal of Lifelong Learning*, Vol. 7, pp. 1-14.

- Dirkx J. M. (2001). The power of feeling: Emotion, imagination, and the construction of meaning in adult learning. In Merriam S. B. (Ed.), *The New Update on Adult Learning Theory*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Dirkx, J. M. (2006). Engaging Emotions in Adult Learning: A Jungain Perspective on Emotion and Transformative Learning: *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, no. 109, pp. 15-26.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Hoggan, C. (2016a). Transformative Learning as a Metatheory: Definition, Criteria, and Typology, *Adult Education Quarterly*, Vol. 66(1), 57-75.
- Holford, J. (1995). Why social movements matter. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 45, 95-101.
- McEwen, C. (2004). *Transformative Learning: A Personal Journey*, Royal Roads University.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass
- Mezirow, J. (1996). Contemporary paradigms of learning. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 46(3), 158-172.
- Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative learning: theory to practice. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, Summer 1997(74), 5-12.
- Merriam, S., Baumgartner, L., & Caffarella, R. (2007). *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Piórkowska, M. & Wrobel, M.. (2017). Basic Emotions. 10.1007/978-3-319-28099-8\_495-1.
- Rogers, A. (1992). *Adults learning for development*. London: Cassell.
- Taylor, E. W. (1998). The theory and practice of transformative learning: A critical review. *Information Series No. 374*. ERIC Publications.
- Taylor, E. W. (2001). Transformative Learning Theory: a neurobiological perspective of the role of emotions and unconscious ways of knowing. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, Vol. 20(3): 218-236.
- Tough, A. (1999). Reflections on the Study of Adult Education. *NALL Working Paper 08*. Retrieved from <http://www.nall.ca>.
- Wasserman, I. (2004). *Discursive Processes That Foster Dialogic Moments: Transformation in the Engagement of Social Identity Group Differences in Dialogue*. Santa Barbara CA, Fielding Graduate Institute.
- Wilson, L. (2004). *A Shared Inquiry into Transitional and Transformative Learning*. Antigonish NS, Saint Francis Xavier University.

# **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**

Magali Balayn Lelong, PhD  
Knowles Johnson Institute of Graduate Studies, USA  
Oliver S. Crocco, EdD  
Louisiana State University, USA

**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.

### **REFERENCES**

- Balayn Lelong, M. (2018, June 28- July 1). *From disorienting dilemmas to emancipatory lifelong learning experiences: a study of autoformation kaïros*. Contemporary dilemmas and learning for transformation, Milan, Italy.
- Balayn Lelong M. (2021). *Les processus d'émancipation et d'autorisation au cœur des Kaïros d'autoformation existentielle* (dissertation). Université de Tours.
- Balayn Lelong, M., & Crocco, O. S. (2024, February 22–24). *Using our experience to teach us about global mindset: A professional development workshop using the Kairos method*. Academy of Human Resource Development 31<sup>st</sup> International Research Conference in the Americas, Arlington, VA, United States.
- Cranton, P. (2006). *Understanding and promoting transformative learning: A guide for educators of adults* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Jossey-Bass
- Dastur, F. (2016). Phénoménologie de la surprise: Horizon, projection et événement. *Alter. Revue de phénoménologie*, 24, 31–46.
- Dewey J. (1938). *Logic: The theory of inquiry*. H. Holt and Company.
- Galvani, P. (2006). *Pour une phénoménologie herméneutique des moments d'autoformation. Une démarche transdisciplinaire de formation-recherche action [Habilitation à Diriger des Recherches]*. Université François-Rabelais, Tours.
- Galvani, P. (2016) Conscientiser l'intelligence de l'agir: les *kaïros* de l'autoformation pratique. In P. Galvani (Ed.), *Démarches de recherche réflexive en étude des pratiques* (pp. 145–172).
- Galvani, P. (2020). *Autoformation et connaissance de soi*. Chronique Sociale.

- Gupta, A. K., & Govindarajan, V. (2002). Cultivating a global mindset. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 16(1), 116–126. <https://doi.org/10.5465/ame.2002.6640211>
- Husserl, E. (1989). *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy: Second book studies in the phenomenology of constitution* (Vol. 3). Springer Science & Business Media.
- Maturana, H. R., & Varela, F. J. (1991). *Autopoiesis and cognition: The realization of the living* (Vol. 42). Springer Science & Business Media.
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Time. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Accessed May 1, 2024 from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/kairos>
- Mezirow, J. (1978). Perspective transformation. *Adult education*, 28(2), 100-110.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning* (1st ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Piaget J. (1974). *Réussir et comprendre*. Presses Universitaires de France.
- Pineau, G. (1983). *Produire sa vie: Autoformation et autobiographie*. Édilig.
- Schön D. A. (1991). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action* (Paperback). Ashgate.
- Tremblay, N. A. (2003). *L'autoformation: Pour apprendre autrement*. Presses de l'Université de Montréal.
- Vermersch, P. (1996). *L'entretien d'explicitation*. ESF.
- Willis, P. (2012). An existential approach to transformative learning. In E. W. Taylor, & P. Cranton (Eds.), *The handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 212–227). John Wiley & Sons.

## **Reoccurring Life Crisis and Potential for Transformative Learning: Making Sense of Natural Disasters in Bahamas**

Sara Bano, PhD

Michigan State University, USA

Frederika Saunders, MA

North Dakota State University, USA

Isaac Mensah, PhD

North Dakota State University, USA

Amjad Barayan, MA

North Dakota State University, USA

Frank Antwi-Boasiakoh, MA

North Dakota State University, USA

**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.

### **REFERENCES**

- Dahl, K. K., & Millora, C. M. (2016). Lifelong learning from natural disasters: Transformative group-based learning at Philippine universities. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 35(6), 648-663. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2016.120958>
- Grossoehme, D.H. (2014). Overview of Qualitative Research. *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy*, 20(3), 09–122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08854726.2014.925660>
- Hoggan, C. (2016). A typology of transformation: Reviewing the transformative learning literature. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 48(1), 65-82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2016.1155849>

- Mezirow, J. (1978). Perspective transformation. *Adult Education*. 28(2), 100-110.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/074171367802800202>
- Mezirow, J. (1991). Transformation theory and cultural context: A reply to Clark and Wilson. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 41(3), 188-192.
- Nicolaides, A., Eschenbacher, S. (2022). The many truths of transformation creating new vocabularies for transformative learning. In Nicolaides, A., Eschenbacher, S., Buergelt, P. T., Gilpin-Jackson, Y., Welch, M., & Misawa, M. (Eds.). *The Palgrave handbook of learning for transformation*. (pp.1-21). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Piryonesi, S. M., & El-Diraby, T. (2021). Climate change impact on infrastructure: A machine learning solution for predicting pavement condition index. *Construction and Building Materials*, 306, 124905. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.conbuildmat.2021.124905>
- Røddesnes, S., Faber, H. C., & Jensen, M. R. (2019). NVivo courses in the library: Working to create the library services of tomorrow. Nord J Inform Lit in High Educ. *Nordic Journal of Information Literacy in Higher Education*, 11(1), 27-38.  
<https://doi.org/10.15845/noril.v11i1.2762>
- Thomas, V. (2017). *Climate change and natural disasters: Transforming economies and policies. for a sustainable future*. Taylor & Francis: Routledge.

## Quantum Leaps: Rethinking Transformative Learning Through Posthuman Theories

Trisha Barefield, PhD  
University of Georgia

**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.

## REFERENCES

- Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the universe halfway*. Duke University Press.
- Bennett, J. (2010). *Vibrant matter: A political ecology of things*. Duke University Press.
- Braidotti, R. (2013) *The posthuman*. Polity Press.
- Dirkx, J. M. (2012a). Nurturing soul work: A Jungian approach to transformative learning. In E. Taylor & Cranton, P. (Eds.) *The handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice*, 116-130. John Wiley & Sons.

- Dirkx, J. M. (2012b). Self-formation and transformative learning: A response to “Calling transformative learning into question: Some mutinous thoughts,” by Michael Newman. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 62(4), 399-405. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713612456420>
- Haraway, D. (1997). *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium.FemaleMan\_Meets\_OncoMouse*. Routledge.
- Hoggan, C. D. (2016). Transformative learning as a metatheory: Definition, criteria, and typology. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 66(1), 57-75. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713615611216>
- Kegan, R. (2018). What “form “ transforms?: A constructive-developmental approach to transformative learning. In *Contemporary theories of learning* (pp. 29-45). Routledge.
- Kropotkin, P. (1902). *Mutual aid: A factor of evolution*. McClure, Philips, & Company.
- Kuhn, T. S. (1962/2012). *The structure of scientific revolutions*. University of Chicago Press.
- Mälkki, K. (2010). Building on Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning: Theorizing the challenges to reflection. *Journal of transformative education*, 8(1), 42-62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344611403315>
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. Jossey-Bass.
- Nicolaides, A. (2022). *Generative knowing: Principles, methods, and dispositions of an emerging adult learning theory*. Myers Education Press.
- Nicolaides, A., Lim, A., Herr, N., & Barefield, T. (2024). *Reimagining adult education as worldbuilding: Creating learning ecologies for transformation*. Routledge.
- Perry, S. A. (2021). Participatory Feeling: Re-Visioning Transformative Learning Theory Through Heron’s Whole Person Perspective. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 71(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/07417136211016779>
- Plauborg, H. (2018). Towards an agential realist concept of learning. *Subjectivity*, 11, 322-338. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41286-018-0059-9>
- Tisdell, E. J. (2020). Re-searching spirituality and culture: Transformative pilgrimage learning and living answers into Big Questions. *Journal for the Study of Spirituality*, 10(1), 84-94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20440243.2020.1726055>

# The Disorienting Dilemma of Unemployment: Transformative Learning, Life Design, and Community Strategies for Navigating Work Transitions

Vanessa Bettin, PhD Student  
University of Padua, Italy  
Chiara Biasin, Full Professor  
University of Padua, Italy

**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.

## REFERENCES

- Akkermans, J., Seibert, S. E., Mol, S. T. (2018). Tales of the unexpected: Integrating career shocks in the contemporary careers literature. *Sa Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 44. [10.4102/sajip.v44i0.1503](https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v44i0.1503).
- Alhadeff-Jones M., Kokkos A. (2011). *Transformative learning in time of crisis: Individual and collective challenges*, 80-88. Teachers College Columbia University.
- Atkinson, R. (2002). *Narrative Interview: Telling One and Own Story in Educational, Organizational, and Social Research*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina.
- Bandura, A. (1995), *Self-Efficacy in Changing Societies*. Cambridge: University Press, Cambridge.
- Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Beck, U. (2000). *The Brave New World of Work*. Malden: Blackwell.
- Bergold, J., Thomas, S. (2012). Participatory Research Methods: A Methodological Approach in Motion. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-13.1.1801>.
- Bruner, J. (1997). *A narrative model of self-costruction*. In J.G.Snodgrass, R.L.Thompson (eds.), *The Self Across psychology: self-recognition, self-awareness, and self-concept*, 145-161. New York: Academic of Sciences.
- Burns, D., Howard, J., Ospina, S. M. (2021). *The SAGE Handbook of Participatory Research and Inquiry*. New York: SAGE Publishing.
- Freire, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M. B. Ramos, Trans.). Continuum International Publishing Group. (Original work published 1970).
- Gone, J. P. (2021). Decolonization as methodological innovation in counseling psychology: Method, power, and process in reclaiming American Indian therapeutic traditions. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 68(3), 259–270. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000500>.
- Guichard, J. (2016). Reflexivity in life design interventions: Comments on life and career design dialogues. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 97, 78-83. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2016.08.001>.
- Harper, D. (2010). Talking about pictures: a case for photo elicitation. *Visual Studies*, 17(1), 13-26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725860220137345>
- Hartung, P. J., Santilli, S. (2018). My Career Story: Description and Initial Validity Evidence. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 26(2), 308-321. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072717692980>.

- Hoggan C., Finnegan, F. (2023). Transformative Learning Theory: Where we are after 45 years. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*. (177), 5-11. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.20474>.
- Hoggan, C. (2023). Themes of Transformation. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 21(19), 3-8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344622114064>.
- Klammer, H. (2000). *Working Woman in the Age of Flexibility: New Diversities, New Needs for Social Protection*, paper presented at the *Conference Social Policy: Available Provision and Policy Deficits, Paris*.
- Kohli, M. (1989). Le cours de vie comme institution sociale. *Enquête. Cahier du Cercom*. 5 (Biographie et cycle de vie). <https://doi.org/10.4000/enquete.78>.
- Kyololo, O. M., Stevens, B. J., Songok, J. (2023). Photo-Elicitation Technique: Utility and Challenges in Clinical Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231165714>.
- LaPointe, K. (2010). Narrating career, positioning identity: Career identity as a narrative practice. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 77, 19. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2010.04.003>.
- Latack, J. C., Kinicki, A. J., Prussia, G. E. (1995). An integrative process model of coping with job loss. *Academy of Management Review*, 20, 311–342. <https://doi.org/10.2307/258849>.
- Marmora, P., Ritter, M. (2015). Unemployment and the retirement decisions of older workers. *J. Labor Res.* 36(3), 274–290. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12122-015-9207-y>.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. Jossey-Bass.
- Savickas, M. L. (2005). The theory and Practice of Career Construction, in S.D. Brown, R.W. Lent (eds.) *Career Development and Counseling: Putting Theory and Research to Work*, 47-70. Hoboken (NY): John Wiley & Sons.
- Savickas, M. L., Nota, L., Rossier, J., Dauwalder, J-P., Duarte, M. E., Guichard, J. et al. (2009). Life designing: A paradigm for career construction in the 21st century. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 75, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2009.04.004>.
- Solove, E., Gwenith, G. F., Kraiher, F. (2015). Coping with Job Loss and Reemployment: A Two-Wave Study. *J Bus Psychol*, 30, 529-541. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-014-9380-7>.
- Taylor, E.W. (1997). *The Theory and Practice of Transformative Learning: A Critical Review*. Center on Education and Training for Employment. OH: Columbus.
- Thomsen, R. (2012). *Career guidance in communities*. Aarhus University Press.
- Van Eersel, J. H. W; Taris, T. W.; Boelen, P. A. (2022) Job loss-related complicated grief symptoms: A cognitive-behavioral framework. *Front. Psychiatry*, 13, 933-995. [10.3389/fpsy.2022.933995](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2022.933995)

## **Exploring Transformative Learning Through Teacher Education Programs: Insights from a Case Study**

Giuseppe Carci, PhD, Associate Professor

Faculty of Society and Communication Sciences, Universitas Mercatorum, Italy,

Cecilia Bibbo', PhD

Department of Educational Policy and Leadership, University at Albany, State University of New York (SUNY), USA

**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.

## REFERENCES

- Baumgartner, L. M. (2001). An Update on Transformational Learning. *New directions for adult and continuing education*, 89, 15–24.
- Cranton, P. A. (2006). Fostering authentic relationship in the transformative classroom. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2006(109), 5–13.
- DeSapio, J. (2017). Transformational Learning: A literature review of recent criticism. *Journal of Transformative Learning*, (4)2, 56-63.
- Dewey, J. (1938) *Experience and Education*. Collier Books.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Ramos, Myra Bergman, translator. Herder & Herder.
- General Teaching Council for Scotland. (2020). *Accreditation of Programmes leading to Professional Recognition Guidance for Providers*.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (1996). Contemporary Paradigms of Learning. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 46(3), 158–172.
- Robertson, D. (1996). Facilitating Transformative Learning: Attending to the Dynamics of the Helping Relationship. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 47(1), 41–53.
- Taylor, E. W. (2008). Transformative learning theory. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 119, 5–15.
- UNESCO (2021). *New Social Contract for Education*.
- UNESCO (2022). *Transforming Education: An urgent political imperative for our collective future*. Transformative Education Summit.

# The Transformative Learning Experience in National Team-based Competitions: A Study of Chinese College Students in Computer Science and Engineering

Biyang Wen

Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, China; University of Liverpool, UK

Qian Wang\*

Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, China

Floriana Grasso

University of Liverpool, UK

Qing Chen

University of Liverpool, UK

Juming Shen

Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, China

**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

---

\* Corresponding Author: Qian Wang, qian.wang@xjtlu.edu.cn

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.

## REFERENCES

- Carron, A. V., Colman, M. M., Wheeler, J., & Stevens, D. (2002). Cohesion and performance in sport: A meta analysis. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 24(2), 168-188. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsep.24.2.168>
- Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*. SAGE.
- Crawley, E., Malmqvist, J., Ostlund, S., Brodeur, D., & Edstrom, K. (2007). Rethinking engineering education. *The CDIO approach*, 302(2), 60-62.
- de-Juan, A., Fernandez del Rincon, A., Iglesias, M., Garcia, P., Diez-Ibarbia, A., & Viadero, F. (2016). Enhancement of Mechanical Engineering Degree through student design competition as added value. Considerations and viability. *Journal of Engineering Design*, 27(8), 568-589. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09544828.2016.1185514>
- Demir, M., McNeese, N. J., Cooke, N. J., Ball, J. T., Myers, C., & Frieman, M. (2015). Synthetic teammate communication and coordination with humans. *Proceedings of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society Annual Meeting*, 59(1), 951-955. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541931215591275>
- Gadola, M., & Chindamo, D. (2019). Experiential learning in engineering education: The role of student design competitions and a case study. *International Journal of Mechanical Engineering Education*, 47(1), 3-22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306419017749580>
- Hirsch, P. L., & McKenna, A. F. (2008). Using reflection to promote teamwork understanding in engineering design education. *International Journal of Engineering Education*, 24(2), 377.
- Lingard, L. (2012). Rethinking competence in the context of teamwork. *The question of competence: Reconsidering medical education in the twenty-first century*, 42-69.
- Margalef García, L., & Pareja Roblin, N. (2008). Innovation, research and professional development in higher education: Learning from our own experience. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24(1), 104-116. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2007.03.007>

- Taylor, E. W., & Snyder, M. J. (2012). A critical review of research on transformative learning theory, 2006-2010. *The handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice*, 37-55.
- Wengraf, T. (2001). *Qualitative Research Interviewing*. SAGE Publications, Ltd.
- West, M. A., & Hirst, G. (2005). Cooperation and teamwork for innovation. *The essentials of team working. International perspectives*, 257-279.
- Zahedi, L., Batten, J., Ross, M., Potvin, G., Damas, S., Clarke, P., & Davis, D. (2021). Gamification in education: a mixed-methods study of gender on computer science students' academic performance and identity development. *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*, 33(2), 441-474. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12528-021-09271-5>

## Nursing Students Among Transformative Learning, Professional Well-being, and Resilience. An Observational Study

Natascia Bobbo  
Università di Padova  
Paola Rigoni  
Università di Padova

**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).

## REFERENCES

- Adedeji, W. A. (2016). The treasure called antibiotics. *Annals of Ibadan postgraduate medicine*, 14(2), 56.
- Connor, K. M., & Davidson, J. R. (2003). Development of a new resilience scale: The Connor-Davidson resilience scale (CD-RISC). *Depression and anxiety*, 18(2), 76-82.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2012). *Self-determination theory. Handbook of theories of social psychology*, 1(20), 416-436.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2023). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. Sage.
- Illich, I. (1976). *Limits to medicine-Medical Nemesis: the expropriation of health*. Maryon Boyards Publisher.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. Jossey-Bass.
- Stamm, B. H. (2013). *Measuring compassion satisfaction as well as fatigue: Developmental history of the compassion satisfaction and fatigue test*. In *Treating compassion fatigue* (pp. 107-119). Routledge.
- Thomasma, D. C., Weisstub, D. N., & Hervé, C. (Eds.). (2013). *Personhood and health care* (Vol. 7). Springer Science & Business Media.
- Tulchinsky, T. H., & Varavikova, E. A. (2014). Measuring, monitoring, and evaluating the health of a population. *The new public health*, 91.

# The Posthuman Epistemology of Transformative Theories. The contribution of Posthuman Feminism

Francesca Bracci, PhD  
University of Florence, Italy  
Nicolina Bosco, PhD  
University of Siena, Italy

**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; Dirks, 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

---

<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

---

<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.

### **REFERENCES**

- Boyd R. (1989), *Personal transformations in small groups: A Jungian perspective*, Routledge, New York.
- Bracci, F., Romano, A., Marsick, V., & Melacarne, C. (2021). Toward a shared repertoire of methods and practices of fostering transformative learning: initial reflections. «NUOVA SECONDARIA», p. 286-306.
- Braidotti, R. (2013). *The Posthuman*. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Braidotti, R. (2019), *Posthuman knowledge*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Braidotti, R. (2022), *Posthuman feminism*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Brookfield, S. (2003), Racializing the discourse of adult education, «*Harvard Educational Review*», 73, 4, p. 497-523.
- Brookfield, S. (2014). Teaching our own racism: Incorporating personal narratives of whiteness into anti-racist practice. «*Adult Learning*», 25(3), 89-95.
- Brookfield, S. (2005). *The power of critical theory: Liberating adult learning and teaching*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- Brookfield, S. Hess, M. (2021), *Becoming a White Antiracist: A Practical Guide for Educators, Leaders, and Activists*, Stylus Publishing, Sterling.
- Clarke, A., & Haraway, D. J. (2018). *Making kin not population*. Chicago University Press, Chicago.
- Cozza, M., & Gherardi, S. (Eds.). (2023). *The posthumanist epistemology of practice theory: Re-imagining method in organization studies and beyond*. Springer, Berlin.
- Cranton, P. (2000). Individual differences and transformative learning. In J. Mezirow & Associates (Eds.). *Learning as transformation* (p. 181-204), Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- Cranton P. (2006), *Understanding and promoting transformative learning: A guide for educators of adults*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- Crenshaw, K. (2017), *On intersectionality: essential writings*, The New Press, New York.
- Daloz A. (1988), The story of Gladys who refused to grow: a morality tale for mentors, «*Lifelong Learning: An Omnibus of Practice and Research*», 11 (4), p. 4-7.
- Daloz A. (2000), Transformative learning for the common good, in Mezirow J. & Associates, *Learning as Transformation: critical perspective on a theory in progress* (p. 103-124), Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.